

Macedonian singer whose songs were wildly popular across the former Yugoslavia and beyond



Tose Proeski was the most popular singer throughout the Balkans, bridging the gaps between the various cultures torn apart by wars in the former Yugoslavia through most of his young life.

The news of his death was greeted in the region with the kind of grief that followed the deaths of Elvis Presley and John Lennon. The Macedonian parliament suspended its sessions for the day, radio stations played his tracks continuously and thousands of fans flocked to the main square in Skopje, the Macedonian capital, or to churches, to light candles, to lay out flowers or toys and to sing his best-known songs such as *Angel Si Ti* (You're an Angel). The day of his funeral (on October 17) was declared a day of national mourning and all flags were flown at half-mast.

Starting as a teenage pop idol in his native Macedonia at 15, Proeski took classical singing lessons — one of his teachers was an opera tutor in New York — and learnt Serbo-Croat and English to broaden his lyrical output and his fan base.

At the time of his death he was a final-year student at the Skopje Music Academy. Such was his popularity over the past few years as a symbol of the peace and new hope returning to the Balkans that he was named a Unicef ambassador to the region in 2004, and his song *This World* became a popular Unicef anthem. In that same year he represented Macedonia in the Eurovision Song Contest in Istanbul; he impressed listeners with his vocal power but came only 14th in competition — the discouraging result was attributed by his fans to the weakness of the English lyrics to his song *Life*, which was much stronger in its Macedonian original, *Angel Si Ti*.

Proeski's last concert, on October 5, packed the national football stadium in Skopje, with 30,000 fans making the pilgrimage from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece to hear his songs and his famous catchphrase, "Ve sakam site" (I love you all). He had organised the concert as part of his Unicef role, to raise funds to build schools in Macedonia for orphans and disabled children.

Todor "Tose" Proeski was born in Prilep, near Krusevo, in Macedonia (then part of Yugoslavia) in 1981. He won first prize in his first singing contest in Prilep, in 1996 and won again the following year with his song Pusti Me (Let Me Go) which would be one of his biggest hits.

His first album, Nekade vo Nokta (Somewhere in the Night), was released, in the Macedonian language, in 1999. After the Belgrade-based studio BK Sound bought the rights to his second album, Sinot Bozji (The Son of God) in 2000, Proeski became a regionwide star and was awarded the so-called Oscar of Popularity by music writers from all the nations of the former Yugoslavia.

In order to reach a wider audience, he recorded his third album in Athens in 2002, making two separate versions, one in Macedonian, the other in Serbo-Croat. His seventh album, Igri Bez Granici (Games without Borders) was released this year, again in two versions. The most successful hit single of his career, and his signature song, was Cija Si (Whose Girl are You?), which topped every pop chart in the Balkans.

Proeski died in a car crash near Nova Gradiska, on the main Zagreb-Belgrade highway.

Tose Proeski, singer-songwriter, was born on January 25, 1981. He died on October 16, 2007, aged 26

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