

**London: Her last show**

# Rock's 'Mama'

## will be missed

By WALT TROTT  
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THE DREAM is over. Mama Cass Elliot, whose greatest solo hit was "Dream a Little Dream of Me," now joins the growing roster of rock stars who have died at the peak of their fame.

The 33-year-old vocalist was in London for an engagement at the Palladium, when she died Monday.

HER LUSTY lead vocals for The Mamas and The Papas during the mid-1960s helped earn that group nine gold records and a Grammy.

Following their split in 1968, she found success as a single via TV guest shots, a nightclub act and records.

Her untimely ending recalls the early passing of such famous rockers as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Jim Croce and Duane Allman.

(Joplin "accidentally" OD'd on heroin; Hendrix, died after an overdose of pills; hard-drinking Morrison died of a heart attack at 27; Croce went to his death in a plane crash, while Allman was killed in a motorcycle accident.)

Born Ellen Cohen, on Feb. 19, 1941, in

Arlington, Va., the flaxen-haired Cass was the girl-next-door who struggled for fame and fortune just long enough to get lucky.

She had had her share of hard times and had, as Kris Kristofferson would say, "paid her dues" before reaching the top.

**CASS FIRST** tried to make her way as a singer in Greenwich Village, New York in the early 1960s. There in 1961 she also met her first husband, musician-composer James Hendricks.

Following a hapless stint with a rock group called The Big Three, she and Hendricks left the city in 1964 for the Virgin Islands. Hendricks had lined up a few gigs with a band playing the resort clubs, while Cass temporarily toiled as a waitress.

At St. Thomas Island, Cass again crossed paths with an old pal, Dennis Doherty, late of the musical group The Mugwumps. Doherty, along with newlyweds John and Michelle Phillips, was spending the summer camping on the beaches.

John, who had recently canceled out of the Journeymen group, had some great music he wanted to try out. So the four lively beachcombers conceived the format of The Mamas and The Papas.

Finally, after the island government

asked them to leave St. Thomas because they weren't contributing to the economy, they returned to New York.

By now John had written "California Dreams." But instead of dreaming, The Mamas and The Papas decided to try their luck on the West Coast. In Hollywood, they lived and sang together hand-to-mouth for many months.

**IN 1965**, a meeting with record producer Lou Adler — who now handles such stars as Carole King and Cheech and Chong — changed their luck. Impressed with their "... Dreams," Adler advanced the quartet \$5,000 and signed them to a contract.

"California Dreams" had provided them with their first hit record. It was quickly followed by such monster hits as "Monday, Monday" and "Creeque Alley."

The fans and critics loved them. Cass' vocals played no small part in this success. The blending of a slightly hard-toned lead and beautifully soft harmony support gave a bittersweet texture to several of the group's greatest hits.

"Standing room only" was the message wherever they appeared in concert. Billboard and Cashbox magazines named them best group of the year. They received a Grammy award in 1967 for "Monday, Monday," the top single of the year.

Then suddenly, after only a few years of super stardom, Mama Cass told the world The Mamas and The Papas were splitting.

"We've been together a long time and we seem to be repeating ourselves," she said, during a 1968 London visit, "It is quite possible we may never sing again as a group."

**HOWEVER**, the foursome held a brief reunion in 1972, when they honored their contract with Adler to record "one more time together."

"We will always be together as friends," Cass declared.

But now the break was permanent. Cass was a star in her own right. John and Michelle were divorcing.

In 1969, Cass had also ended her eight-year, topsy-turvy marriage to Hendricks, testifying that he was "jealous of her fame." Mama Cass retained custody of her daughter, Owen Vanessa, now 7.

In 1972, Cass also reworked a 1930s love song, giving it her own inimitable styling, which took "Dream a Little Dream of Me" straight to the top of the charts. Her



Daughter Owen was included on Mama Cass's first solo LP cover.

"Mama Cass" LP also became a brisk seller.

Strangely enough, Cass declined to accept movie and TV roles that would help promote her new career. Instead she first wanted to whittle off some weight so she would present a more svelt appearance.



She laughed at her detractors.

Finally, a frustrated Cass seemed to give up the battle of the bulge and adopted an "I don't care" attitude toward her weight.

She guest-starred on such top shows as Johnny Carson's Tonight Show, Sonny and Cher's Comedy Hour, and the Carol Burnett Show, publicly joking about her full-bodied appearance.

Cass even smiled when confronted with the fact that Mr. Blackwell had cited her as one of the 10 worst-dressed women in the world. The fashion designer had ungallantly described the robust singer as "Little Orphan Annie in gowns by Oscar Mayer."

Her intimates, however, have said that she privately suffered the indignity of being everybody's "fat friend," and never gave up the hope that she would someday win her war against the pounds.

In 1971, Cass briefly wed and divorced German writer Donald von Wiedenman, who was reputed to be a Bavarian baron.

Her greatest joy was her daughter and her work. Cass had just completed a new LP entitled, "Don't Call Me Mama Anymore," indicating she was still searching for that new image.



The Mamas & The Papas at the height of their fame in '67.