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June Pointer -- youngest sister in famed Oakland singing group

Simone Sebastian, Chronicle Staff Writer

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June Pointer, the youngest original member of the Grammy-winning group the Pointer Sisters, who started as a gospel singers in Oakland and reached pop music stardom in the 1970s, died Tuesday. She was 52.

Ms. Pointer died at UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica from cancer that spread to her pancreas, liver and lungs, said her brother Fritz Pointer. She had been admitted to the hospital in February after suffering a stroke. She is the first member of the musical group to die.

With her sisters, Ruth, Anita and Bonnie, the quartet topped pop and R&B charts through the 1970s with hits including "Yes We Can, Can" and "How Long (Betcha Got a Chick on the Side)." The group formed a trio when Bonnie Pointer left to begin a solo career in 1977.

Ms. Pointer and her siblings honed their singing talents as children at the West Oakland Church of God, where their parents were ministers.

In school, she played basketball and ran track, displaying a natural athleticism that transferred into energetic dance performances with the Pointer Sisters.

At 15 years of age, June dropped out of Castlemont High School in Oakland to form the duo "Pointers-A Pair" with her sister Bonnie, performing in Bay Area clubs. At about that time, she was raped in an East Oakland neighborhood, became pregnant, and had an abortion, according to Fritz Pointer, sparking what would become a lifelong struggle with drug addiction for Ms. Pointer.

With their first album, "The Pointer Sisters," released in 1973, the four sisters won fans with an upbeat style, flashy costumes and eclectic sounds, drawing on soul, rock 'n' roll and jazz roots.

In 1974, they won their first of three Grammy awards, for the song "Fairytale," which was named best country vocal performance by a group.

"June started performing at 16, and she brought a lot of energy to the group," Fritz Pointer said. "She had an incredible sense of humor and an ability to make people laugh. She loved life."

Ms. Pointer's high-pitched vocals brought vibrance to the group's songs, and her youthful enthusiasm added life to their performances. Even off stage, Ms. Pointer was the energy of her family, her brother said, playing practical jokes and enlivening family celebrations with flamboyant costumes -- Halloween was her favorite occasion -- and expensive gifts.

"It was nothing for her to hand someone \$100 or \$150," Fritz Pointer said. "I don't think money meant anything to her. It was more what she could do with it for other people."

Ms. Pointer's appearances with the group, however, soon became sporadic. Several years ago, she admitted that she had struggled with drug addictions since the group's early years.

As a trio, the Pointer Sisters reached the height of their success in 1984, when they won Grammys for the songs "Automatic" and "Jump (For My Love)."

There were reports of infighting in the group, but Ms. Pointer publicly dismissed them as unfounded.

"Like any sisters, we get mad at each other or hurt each other," she told *The Chronicle* in 1985. "But we always come back and apologize. That's what our dad, the late Rev. Elton Pointer, taught us."

The next year, the sisters' hometown honored them with Pointer Sisters Day, featuring a limousine procession around Lake Merritt, speeches and musical acts at the Edoff Memorial Bandstand.

"God, I love it," Ms. Pointer said. "Oakland is our home."

Ms. Pointer also released two solo albums -- "Baby Sister" in 1983 and a self-titled album in 1989. Both had singles on the R&B charts, but neither won her the success she achieved as a member of the Pointer Sisters.

Ms. Pointer later left the group because of her drug problem. In 2004, she was charged with felony cocaine possession and misdemeanor possession of a smoking device.

Ms. Pointer was working on resurrecting her solo career and had last performed in December at the Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas with Bonnie Pointer, with whom she had been living a Los Angeles apartment, according to Fritz Pointer.

The Pointer Sisters, which currently includes Ruth Pointer-Sayles' daughter, Issa, canceled a concert last week in Florida to "rush to the side of their gravely ill sister," according to group representatives.

In addition to Fritz Pointer, she is survived by her brother Aaron of Tacoma, Wash.; sisters, Bonnie of Los Angeles, Ruth Pointer-Sayles of Needham, Mass., and Anita of Beverley Hills; 15 nieces; and 10 nephews.

Family members said memorial services will be held in Los Angeles and San Rafael, but the times have not been arranged.

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