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Arts and Media



Mercy Sr. Janet Mead of Australia, who topped the 1974 pop charts with a rock version of the Our Father, died Jan. 26, 2022, in Adelaide, Australia, at age 84. (CNS screenshot/YouTube, ABC News Australia)

by Catholic News Service

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Mercy Sr. Janet Mead, who earned gold records for her 1974 hit version of the Our Father, died Jan. 26, 2022, in her native Adelaide. She was 84 and had been battling cancer.

In 1974, "The Lord's Prayer," set to an uptempo rock beat, scaled up the charts, peaking at No. 4 in the United States and No. 3 in Australia, earning her gold records for the single.

Mead was an unlikely pop star. The only other nun in U.S. history to crack the top 10 in the United States was Soeur Sourire, better known as "The Singing Nun," for her lively folk ode to St. Dominic, 1963's French-language "Dominique." Mead also was the first Australian to have a gold record in the United States.

The single was distributed to 31 countries, according to ABC, Australia's government-subsidized broadcaster, selling, by various accounts, 1.5 million, 2 million or 3 million copies worldwide.

Mead was even nominated for a Grammy but lost to Elvis Presley. She declined an offer to tour the United States and donated all her royalties to charity.

But for those who weren't monitoring Top 40 radio in 1974, they might have heard her arrangement played during Masses at Catholic churches and schools.

Mead pioneered the concept of the "rock Mass" in South Australia, and the Mass was celebrated regularly in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Adelaide.

Yet despite this fleeting encounter with pop stardom, Mead became even better known in Australia for her work helping people experiencing homelessness and teaching at St. Aloysius College in Adelaide.

Mead was named the South Australian of the year in 2004, not for "The Lord's Prayer" but for decades of caring for people experiencing homelessness. The same year, she won the Yamaha Golden Gospel Award in recognition of her services to Australian Christian music.

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St. Aloysius College issued a statement Jan. 31 on Mead's death.

"Janet was an old scholar, past staff member and dear friend and supporter of St. Aloysius College. Our staff and students join with the Romero Community and the Sisters of Mercy in their grief, and give thanks for a life that gave so much to many vulnerable members of our community here in SA," the statement said.

South Australia Premier Steven Marshall posted a tribute on Facebook, saying, "She touched millions of people worldwide with her inspired version of the Lord's Prayer."

Sr. Liz Morris, a Religious Sister of St Joseph who is vicar for religious in the Diocese of Adelaide, said while many would remember the cathedral youth Masses, "we also know of Janet's outstanding outreach and advocacy for the voiceless."

She worked with people experiencing homelessness through the Adelaide Day Center, which she helped establish in 1985. Until last year, Mead spent countless hours and enormous energy on the Romero Company theater performances that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for overseas projects.

Mead was an ardent supporter of Aboriginal rights in Australia. She also was actively involved in anti-war protests and support for refugees. In 1999, she raised money for stevedores who were fired in the midst of a waterfront dispute.