

WHITNEY'S SECRET AGONY

Five years on from Whitney Houston's tragic death, renowned filmmaker Nick Broomfield investigates her tumultuous life in a new documentary, *Whitney: Can I Be Me...*

Born on August 9, 1963, in Newark, New Jersey, to entertainment executive John Russell Houston Jr and gospel singer Emily 'Cissy' Houston, Whitney was destined to be a superstar. But with fame came tragedy, as Nick Broomfield – the mastermind behind rockumentary *Kurt & Courtney* – reveals in his new film about the late songstress. The enthralling documentary, *Whitney: Can I Be Me* tells a compelling story of her life, from her rise to stardom in the 80s to her sudden, shocking death. At age 48, she suffered a major heart attack – caused in part

by her prolonged drug abuse – which resulted in her dead body being discovered in a hotel bathtub in 2012.

Using never-before-seen footage, interviews from family members, friends and those closest to the star, *Whitney: Can I Be Me* allows the US singer to be seen in a whole new light.

It touches on her infamous cocaine addiction and delves deeply into her most intimate relationships – offering viewers a raw and sensitive depiction of her troubled life.

Here, we take a look at those who contributed to Whitney's phenomenal career and demise.

ROBYN CRAWFORD – THE RUMOURED LOVER

Wherever Whitney went, Robyn Crawford – an all-star basketball player – was right by her side.

After hitting it off in 1979, rumours swirled the pair were an item, as they quickly moved in together and a year later, Robyn was working as Whitney's creative director.

Both girls vehemently denied this, but stylist Ellin Lavar suggests their relationship wasn't platonic. 'I don't think she [Whitney] was gay. I think she was bisexual.

'Robyn provided a safe place for her... in that Whitney found safety

and solace,' she says.

According to Arista Records president, Clive Davis – who signed Whitney in 1983 – Bobby Brown's arrival on the scene in 1989 'impacted on [Robyn and Whitney's] relationship', leading to Robyn's departure in 2000.

Despite now living as an openly gay woman with her partner and children, Robyn, now 56, remains tight-lipped on the rumoured romance, only hinting at their close bond in an open letter to the late star in 2012.

'I knew right away she was special,' she wrote.



Two peas in a pod: Whitney and Robyn



BOBBY BROWN – THE HUSBAND WHO LET HER DOWN



The pair were Lost In Love

Whitney hit it off with R&B bad boy Bobby Brown at the 1989 Soul Train Awards. They got married in 1992, and welcomed daughter Bobbi Kristina a year later.

Plagued by drugs, alcohol, physical fights and rumoured adultery, their 15-year marriage was far from perfect. Bobby, 48, admits he did strike Whitney one time while he was 'trying to maintain sobriety', but ultimately says he's 'never been a violent man towards a woman, ever'.

While reports claim Bobby introduced the star to narcotics, he maintains, 'I didn't start her', explaining the first time he saw her do cocaine was on their wedding day.

The documentary suggests Whitney's drug problem may have stemmed from childhood, with her older brother, Gary, admitting to first taking drugs at age 10.

Following the star's death, Bobby revealed he'd known all about her alleged romance with Robyn.

'Whitney would have been alive today if Robyn was accepted [by Whitney's mother],' he said.

CISSY HOUSTON – THE CONTROLLING MOTHER



Her mum wanted Nippy to nip it in the bud...

As a backing singer to Aretha Franklin and Elvis Presley, Cissy Houston showed signs of being jealous about her daughter's rising success, Whitney's friends claim.

In her 2013 memoir, *Remembering Whitney*, Cissy hinted at her daughter copying her style, writing, 'My son, Michael, used to joke with me about Nippy's technique. He'd say, "Nippy [Whitney's nickname] should be in jail for stealing all your riffs and everything.'"

Cissy never approved of her daughter and Robyn's friendship,

writing in her book, 'I knew I didn't want Robyn around my daughter, and I told [Whitney] that.'

Speaking to Oprah Winfrey the year Whitney passed away, the 83-year-old admitted it would have 'absolutely' bothered her if her daughter and Robyn were in a 'gay relationship'.

However, devout Christian Cissy staged many interventions to get her daughter into rehabilitation in the 90s, on one occasion obtaining a court order, and the assistance of two sheriffs, to persuade her daughter to undertake treatment.



JOHN HOUSTON – THE FATHER WHO BROKE HER HEART

I'll never find anyone to love me like my daddy does,' Whitney once gushed about her father.

John Houston, the CEO of Whitney's company and her manager, played a crucial part in the singer's career, which continued even after his divorce from Cissy in the 90s.

However, the father-daughter relationship became strained following Whitney's marriage to Bobby.

In 2002, John took out a \$1 million lawsuit against his daughter, accusing

the singer of missed payments.

Making a public appeal to his daughter, he said, 'You get your act together, Honey, and you pay me the money that you owe me.'

Whitney won the court battle, but friends say the star felt betrayed.

'When the trust was broken, it broke something inside of her she could never repair,' a friend states in the film.

After a long battle with diabetes, John passed away in 2003, at the age of 82. Whitney didn't attend the funeral.

Grace Henry

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Whitney: Can I Be Me is in cinemas from June 16. Whitneyhoustonfilm.com