

## Who Am I? – Celebrating a mystery person

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Print a “Who Am I?” [sign](#). Add a clue in the text box, print, and post on your bulletin board. Post a different clue every day or so and see who can guess the identity of the mystery person of the month. Then plan a “Who am I?” discussion and reminiscence activity.

**Do you know who I am?** Here are some clues:

1. I was born in El Centro, California, on May 20, 1946.
2. My parents divorced when I was still an infant.
3. I am dyslexic.
4. Appearing in a 1993 hair-care infomercial almost ended my career.
5. I played all the male roles in a grade school production of *Oklahoma!*
6. I dropped out of high school at 16.
7. At age 19, I sang as part of a duet that reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.
8. During the 1980s, I focused on my film career.
9. I married my first husband in 1964.
10. My first attempt at acting in the late 1960s was unsuccessful.
11. My singing career began when Phil Spector hired me as a backup singer.
12. I married singer Gregg Allman in 1975.
13. I had a knack for onstage banter with my first husband.
14. Due to the power of my contralto range, I have had to step away from the microphone while singing.
15. I sang backup vocals on the hit songs “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling” and “Be My Baby.”
16. My entertaining, unpredictable tweets have garnered more than three million followers.
17. I made my Broadway debut in 1982.

18. When he died in 1998, my ex-husband represented California in Congress.
19. I won an Academy Award for Best Actress in 1988.
20. I legally changed my first name to become my full name.
21. I've collaborated with fashion designer Bob Mackie for stage wear.
22. I once performed in a band called Caesar & Cleo.
23. My youngest child appeared in the music video of my single "If I Could Turn Back Time" as a guitar player.
24. In 1986, I wore a mostly transparent dress to the Academy Awards ceremony.
25. I ended every episode of a 1970s variety show singing "I Got You Babe" with my then-husband, Sonny.

**Have you guessed who I am?** Did you turn back time in your mind as you listened to these clues? I am Cher.



Print a copy of the [pictures](#) to pass around as you share and discuss the information in the article with your group.

## Introduction

Captivating film, live, and television audiences across several decades, it's no wonder that singer, actress, activist, fashion icon, and author Cher goes by only a single name. Known to provoke with her wardrobe and her plain-spokenness, Cher's singular journey through stardom began when she was just 19 years old. In an industry that is often unforgiving of professional setbacks or failure, Cher has experienced both, and more than once. As she turns 80, Cher continues to remain relevant—not an easy feat in a culture with a short attention span.

## Challenging Early Years

Born Cherilyn Sarkisian in El Centro, California, on May 20, 1946, Cher's early years were anything but glamorous. Her father struggled with addiction, leading Cher's parents to divorce when she was an infant. She remained with her mother, Georgia Holt, who was only 19 when she gave birth to Cher. Holt aspired to be an actress or a model, and frequently relocated her young daughter in pursuit of her passion. As they moved around the country, at various times calling California, Texas, and New York home, Holt also remarried several times.

Eventually, the two settled in the Valley district of Los Angeles, where Holt worked as a server in restaurants to support her family. In school, Cher preferred the expressive freedom to entertain and pursued creative extracurricular activities. At 11 years old, she directed a school production of *Oklahoma!* Frustrated with her male classmates' lack of interest in auditioning for the musical, Cher solved this hiccup by playing all the male parts herself and discovering her contralto singing range. Cher was less enthusiastic about her academic studies; eventually, she was diagnosed with dyslexia. Lacking immediate insight into why she struggled in school, 16-year-old Cher knew where she shone. She decided to drop out of high school and devote herself to a career in entertainment.

Cher moved to Hollywood, enrolled in acting classes, and earned money singing and dancing in clubs on the Sunset Strip. While networking and taking assorted jobs to pay her rent, Cher met Sonny Bono, who was 11 years her senior. Soon, Bono employed Cher to work for him. He also recognized Cher's singing talent. He convinced his employer, record producer Phil Spector, to offer her work. Because Cher's contralto vocals were so powerful, Spector purportedly advised her more than once to step back from the microphones. Before she had turned 20 years old, Cher appeared in backup vocals on Spector-produced hit singles such as the Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" and the Ronettes' "Be My Baby." Cher and Bono, meanwhile, fell in love and married in 1964.

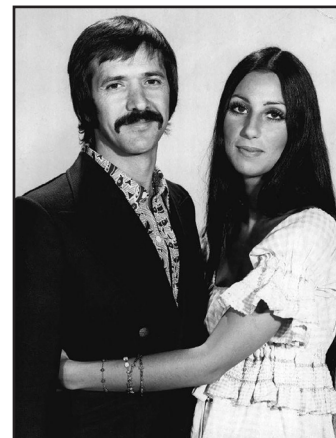
### Discussion Starters

- Do you think an unconventional upbringing, such as Cher's, contributed to her creative and performative nature, or was it because she took after her mother, who was also a performer?
- Describe a risk to pursue a dream from when you were younger.

### The Sonny and Cher Era

Following their marriage, Cher tried to launch a solo career, with Bono working behind the scenes, writing and producing her music. When that failed, they decided to sing together under the name Caesar and Cleo, to play off of Cher's Cleopatra-like long hair and angular features. Audiences did not respond favorably, so they switched to their first names: Sonny and Cher. In 1965, they released their first album, featuring "I Got You Babe," which reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100.

The duo cut a striking study in [physical contrast](#). At five foot seven, with long, black hair, a commanding self-possession, and meeting no costume that she could not pull off, however unorthodox, [Cher](#) garnered most of the attention. [Bono](#) was just a few inches shorter, but combined with his higher-pitched midwestern speaking voice and playing comedically off of composed Cher, he did not possess the same stage presence. Their onstage banter as a [married couple](#) resonated with audiences.



As the 1960s ended and cultural changes shifted, interest in Sonny and Cher's musical style diminished. Cher attempted to pivot from singing to acting, appearing in a few films, but they were not well-received. Bono, meanwhile, parlayed his professional connections to book them for talk-show and variety-show appearances, as well as live performances. Although their recording career had waned, their live and variety show appearances resuscitated their act.

In 1971, *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour* premiered on television as summer content and was subsequently picked up for the fall schedule. Meanwhile, Cher found success as a solo artist, orchestrated by Sonny, who produced her first solo hit, “Gypsies, Tramps & Thieves.” The couple had welcomed their only child, Chastity, in 1969, and incorporated Chastity into [some of the show’s skits](#). Television audiences connected with their wholesome family image, and the show enjoyed enormous success. Fashion designer Bob Mackie designed many of Cher’s elaborate costumes for the show, and Cher also [wore his couture creations](#) to awards shows.

As the television version of Sonny and Cher thrived, the real-life couple’s relationship deteriorated. Many aspects of their relationship were out of balance: their age gap, Cher’s superstar status overshadowing Bono’s behind-the-scenes efforts, and each pursuing separate romantic relationships. For a few years, they maintained their relationship; after all, the success of their show depended on it. Eventually, they separated, but not amicably.

Unbeknownst to Cher, when Bono formed Cher Enterprises as their business corporation, he was 95 percent owner, and their lawyer owned the remaining five percent. Cher also learned Bono had advised her to sign a restrictive contract that required him to be involved in any of her work—even solo ventures. Less than a week after her divorce from Bono was finalized in 1975, Cher married Gregg Allman of the Allman Brothers. They had one child, Elijah Blue, in 1976. When that marriage ended in 1979, Cher legally dropped her last name. From then on, she was simply Cher.

### Discussion Starters

- What are advantages and disadvantages of collaborating professionally with a spouse or partner?
- Cher legally changed her name after divorcing Gregg Allman. What do you suppose motivated her to do so?

### Reinvention and Redemption

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Cher’s career was at a standstill. She had modeled, recorded more albums, and even reunited with Bono briefly for a revamped version of their variety show. None of this took off, so Cher shifted her focus back to her first love: acting. She appeared in a Broadway show, *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, which was then made into a movie. Cher received favorable reviews for her role, leading to a string of critically and commercially successful films throughout the remainder of the ’80s. When the Academy snubbed her for an Oscar nomination for her role playing the mother of a boy with a rare disease in *Mask*, Cher concluded that the old Hollywood guard did not take her seriously. She contacted Mackie and told him she wanted him to design a dress for the Oscar ceremony that would send a message. He delivered. Wearing a Vegas-style feather headdress, a loincloth, and a halter-style exposed bra, [Cher’s dress](#) made a statement—offensive to some, hilarious to others.

Two years later, Cher got her Academy Award for her starring role in *Moonstruck*. Not one to rest on her laurels, Cher then revived her recording career, releasing three albums between 1987 and 1991; all three yielded singles peaking at least in the top 20 of the U.S. charts. In the 1989 video for her hit single “If I Could Turn Back Time,” which MTV refused to air until after 9 p.m. due to the fishnet, bum-baring unitard she wore, she appeared alongside her son, Elijah Blue, who played guitar. Following her next film, 1990’s *Mermaids*, Cher experienced health setbacks, and her career cooled a bit as a result. Seeing an opportunity to earn easy money, she appeared in infomercials for Lori Davis Hair Care. When *Saturday Night Live* parodied her, and critics accused her of selling out, public perception indicated her career was over.

Ever the survivor, Cher rebounded spectacularly in the late 1990s. However, it was a bittersweet time. In 1998, her ex-husband Sonny Bono, who had remarried and had recently won a seat in Congress representing California, died in a skiing accident. Despite their tense divorce, the two had remained friends in their own way. Reflecting later in her life on her relationship with Bono, Cher said, “I had such a hero worship of Sonny, long after we were together.” This became evident when she [touchingly eulogized him](#) at his funeral.

That same year, she released a comeback album, *Believe*, and the success of its [title track](#) catapulted 53-year-old Cher to the top of the charts. Over the next few decades, Cher continued to add to her already considerable accomplishments. She authored books, embarked on farewell concert tours (yes, plural), held a three-year residency performing in Las Vegas, and mastered the art of going viral with her cheeky Twitter posts, cultivating more than three million followers. In 2024, she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. A philanthropist and activist, Cher also founded the nonprofit Cher Charitable Foundation to raise funds for causes close to her heart. As she turns 80, Cher remains in the spotlight. As she once remarked about herself, “I think maybe that’s my best quality: I just don’t stop.”



### Discussion Starters

- Cher is a singer, a fashion icon, an actress, an activist, an author, and more. Is there a particular aspect of her achievements that you feel strongly about, either positively or negatively? Explain.
- Cher and Bono overcame a difficult public divorce and clearly maintained a level of affection for each other. Do you know of any real-life examples of people who separated or divorced, but remained friends? What about their bond or connection might explain how they were able to get along?

### She’s Got Hits, Babe

Cher has the distinction of being the only recording artist to hit No. 1 on the Billboard charts in seven decades. Listen to the following clues about her music, including audio clips, and choose the answer that fits the description.

1. The hit single from the soundtrack for the 1989 film *Chances Are* contains [this duet](#) with Cher and another singer. Is it Sonny Bono, Peter Cetera, or Kenny Loggins?

**Answer:** Peter Cetera

2. Cher reached Billboard’s No. 1 spot with [the controversial song “Half Breed”](#) in 1973. What made it controversial: a theme of crime, assisted suicide, or racism?

**Answer:** Racism

3. In 2018, Cher played a role in *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*, featuring her performing the song [“Super Trooper.”](#) The film’s music featured hits from a 1970s band. Is it ABBA, the Bee Gees, or Electric Light Orchestra?

**Answer:** ABBA

4. In 1966, Cher’s single “Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down),” written by Sonny Bono, was released. It peaked at No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100. Cher recorded a [more modern version](#) that appears on one of her later albums. Is it 1987’s *Cher*, 1995’s *It’s a Man’s World*, or 2013’s *Closer to the Truth*?

**Answer:** 1987’s *Cher*. (Michael Bolton and Jon Bon Jovi sang backup vocals.)

5. Co-produced by music legend Diane Warren, “Love and Understanding” features a video of Cher in what appears to be a rehearsal alongside several dancers. Was this video recorded in 1991, 2001, or 2011?

**Answer:** 1991

6. “[Believe](#)” returned Cher to cultural relevance and revamped her singing career when it was released in 1998. Besides helping Cher nab her first Grammy Award, it was also the first song to feature a new technology. Was it auto-tune, modern scat, or reverse reverb?

**Answer:** Auto-tune. (Studio heads at her label wanted to eliminate auto-tune from the singles’ final cut. Cher followed her instincts that it was an essential part of the single’s essence, and fought the studio, and won. It went on to become her most successful single, topping charts in more than 20 countries.)

7. Cher’s cover of Betty Everett’s hit “Shoop Shoop (It’s in His Kiss)” from the film *Mermaids* reached No. 33 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100. The [video](#) features her two co-stars from the film. Are they Christina Applegate and Anna Paquin, Christina Ricci and Winona Ryder, or Natalie Portman and Mara Wilson?

**Answer:** Christina Ricci and Winona Ryder

8. In 1973, [this single](#) became Cher’s first No. 1 hit. Is it “Alfie,” “Gypsies, Tramps & Thieves,” or “Hell on Wheels”?

**Answer:** “Gypsies, Tramps & Thieves”

9. Sonny and Cher’s breakout hit, “[I Got You Babe.](#)” became something of an anthem for the duo. Long after their divorce, they reunited and (reluctantly) agreed to perform the song on a late-night talk show. Was it *The Arsenio Hall Show*, *The David Letterman Show*, or *The Tonight Show*?

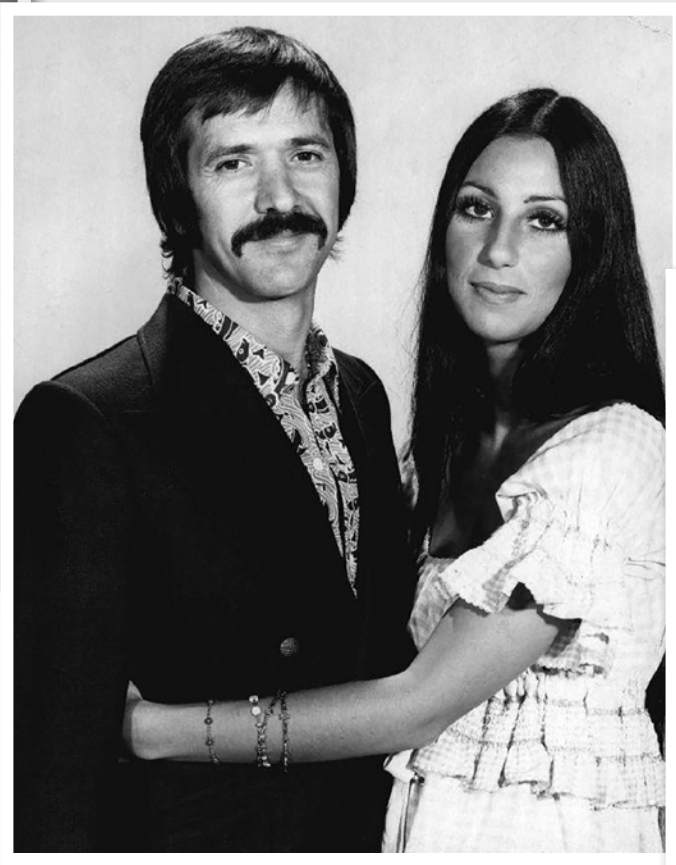
**Answer:** *The David Letterman Show*

10. Cher’s “I Found Someone” broke the Top 10 when it was released in 1987. It had been recorded the previous year by another female solo artist. Was it Laura Branigan, Olivia Newton-John, or Tina Turner?

**Answer:** Laura Branigan

### Additional Activities

1. See Cher perform alongside her son Elijah Blue in the [1989 music video for “If I Could Turn Back Time.”](#)
2. View the [closing segment](#) (49:47) of *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour* from September 16, 1972, which includes their child, Chastity Bono.
3. View a [segment](#) (1:45) from Cher’s 1993 infomercial promoting Lori Davis Hair products, and then a skit from a [1993 episode of Saturday Night Live](#) that lampoons it.





Celebrating a mystery  
person born this month