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Legends of American Music Series: Popular Singers

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*Popular Singers
Nat 'King' Cole*



First Day of Issue



The American Music

Rodney Lawrence
Thomas G Carpenter
Special Collections

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Popular Singers

Nat 'King' Cole

First Day of Issue: *September 1, 1994*

First Day City: *New York, New York,
home of the Lincoln Center for the
Performing Arts*

Stamp Designer: *Chris Payne
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Nat "King" Cole (1917-1965), who is featured on this U.S. stamp, was a leading entertainer over three decades. He first gained fame in jazz circles as a pianist and leader of the King Cole Trio. Later, he moved into the pop music mainstream and became the first African-American singer of ballads to be successful with audiences of all races.

Cole's professional career began in Los Angeles in the 1930s, where he became a popular jazz club performer. He pioneered the sophisticated West Coast nightclub style. Among his innovations was the emphasis of the piano as a

solo, rather than a rhythm, instrument.

The King Cole Trio was named Top Small Combo four years in a row. The success of their recordings encouraged Cole to concentrate increasingly on singing. In the 1950s, he burst on to the pop music field with hits such as "It's Only a Paper Moon," "For Sentimental Reasons," and "Nature Boy," which all climbed to the top of the charts. They were delivered in his distinctively smooth and mellow voice.

In 1956-57, Cole scored another milestone, as the only African-American with a television series. Further, his film, nightclub, and concert appearances made him an international star. Some of the many songs associated with Cole are "Mona Lisa," "The Lazy, Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer," and "Unforgettable." The latter zoomed to the top of the charts again in 1991, when modern technology allowed his daughter, also a singer, to record it as a duet with her late father.