

Karel Gott, Pop Singer Called ‘Sinatra of the East,’ Dies at 80

His crooning in Czech and several other languages brought him great popularity, especially in countries behind the Iron Curtain.



The Czech singer Karel Gott in a 1971 television appearance. He recorded hundreds of albums and performed all over the world.



By [Richard Sandomir](#)

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Karel Gott, a romantic Czech crooner whose popularity behind the Iron Curtain helped earn him the nickname “Sinatra of the East,” died on Tuesday at his home in Prague. He was 80.

His death was confirmed by his wife, Ivana Gottova, on his website. Last month he wrote on Facebook that he had received a diagnosis of acute leukemia.

“Extremely sad news for our whole country,” Milos Zeman, president of the Czech Republic, said in a statement. “Karel Gott was a real artist who gave himself to others.”

A dapper and expressive tenor who sang in Czech, English, Russian, French and German, Mr. Gott recorded hundreds of albums and performed before audiences in his home country; in Poland, Austria, Hungary, Romania and West Germany; and in the United States and Canada.

He won the Golden Nightingale Award as his country’s top male singer, voted on by Czech music fans, 42 times.

“It says a lot that almost everyone in the Czech Republic loves Karel Gott,” Pavel Turek, a music journalist with the Czech magazine Respekt, [told The New York Times](#) in 2017. “His popularity is exceptional, and it is really interesting that all generations appreciate him.”

Mr. Gott largely thrived under Communism in Czechoslovakia. He was not known for challenging the Soviet-backed regime. But while on tour in West Germany in 1971, he said he would remain in the West indefinitely — he did not specifically call it a defection — because of the Czech government’s attempts to censor his lyrics and demands that he cut his long hair.

Gustav Husak, the chief of Czechoslovakia’s Communist Party, rebuked him at the Slovak party congress as a pampered performer.

“Everyone knows what conditions of work we gave him — glory, money, as much as he wanted, travel throughout the world,” Mr. Husak said. “Let him decide for himself if he wants to return to serve the Western bourgeoisie.”

Editors’ Picks

Mr. Gott did return, several months later, after Mr. Husak took a surprisingly conciliatory tone in a letter that guaranteed the singer’s continued freedom to travel to the West to perform.

“It was completely logical” to accept Mr. Husak’s appeal, [Mr. Gott told the writer Alan Levy](#) in an article in 1978 for the journal Index on Censorship. “The Czechoslovak people made me whatever I am. Besides, I wanted very badly to see my parents.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/04/arts/music/karel-gott-dead.html>

This is truth.