

**Avicii obituary**

Swedish DJ and producer who spearheaded a revolution in electronic dance music

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The Swedish DJ [Tim Bergling](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/20/swedish-dj-avicii-dies-aged-28), who recorded and performed as Avicii, was the quintessential shy superstar, a man who disliked the attention that global fame brought him but who also inhabited a world of huge wealth and extroversion.

“I love what I do, but I’ve never liked being recognised or being in the spotlight,” he said, after years of relentless scrutiny from the media and the thousands of electronic dance music (EDM) fans for whom he performed up to 250 shows a year. Despite his antipathy to public exposure, [Avicii](https://www.theguardian.com/music/avicii), who has died suddenly aged 28 in Oman, spearheaded an EDM revolution that earned him nightly fees estimated at $250,000 or higher; in 2015, Forbes estimated his annual earnings at $19m.

His biggest single was 2013’s Wake Me Up, a song with folk music elements that alienated some of his audience on its live debut but topped the charts in the UK and across [Europe](https://www.theguardian.com/world/europe-news). He said: “I knew it was going to be controversial at the time, but the audience have really come around. It’s important to believe in what you do.” Both of Avicii’s studio albums, True (2013) and Stories (2015) charted worldwide, and his songs have been streamed more than 11bn times on the music platform Spotify.

He was nominated twice for Grammy awards, the first in 2012 for a collaboration with fellow DJ David Guetta titled Sunshine, and the following year for his first mainstream hit Levels. Musicians flocked to work with him; he recorded with artists as disparate as Wyclef Jean, Robbie Williams, ABBA members Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, Rita Ora and Billie Joe Armstrong of Green Day. He also modelled for the fashion designer Ralph Lauren.

The speed and suddenness of Avicii’s ascent – he got his first deal in 2007 aged 17 – led him to develop an alcohol dependency. He said: “You’re travelling around, you live in a suitcase, you get to this place, there’s free alcohol everywhere – it’s sort of weird if you don’t drink … I just got into a habit, because you rely on that encouragement and self-confidence you get from alcohol.”

Tim was born in Stockholm to Klas Bergling and [Anki Lidén](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0509258/), the latter an award-winning actor whose credits include Wallander and Irene Huss.

At the age of 16, influenced by the French duo [Daft Punk](https://www.theguardian.com/music/daft-punk) and later the dance music act [Swedish House Mafia](http://www.swedishhousemafia.com/), he began making his own remixes, posting them at the online forum of Dutch DJ Laidback Luke under the name Avicii – a version of *avīci*, a Buddhist term for hell. These led to a meeting with a manager, Arash Pournouri, and a deal with the Dejfitts Plays label.

Avicii later recalled that Pournouri had a clear strategy in mind. “He started saying these things like, ‘I’m going to make you the biggest artist; we’re going to get there in two years.’” Pournouri’s approach paid off: single releases under the names Tim Berg and Tim Hangs, as well as Avicii, were successful, in particular the single [Seek Bromance](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4F6ksfBYmo) (2010), which charted in several European countries, including No 13 in the UK mainstream charts. The songs were formulaic, usually based on a four-chord structure, sub-bass and a simple synth melody, but proved popular among fans of deep and progressive house. Crucially, Avicii found a fanbase in the US, where EDM had exploded in popularity in the first decade of the century.

Following the impact of [Levels](https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/dance/8358624/avicii-levels-greatest-songs-of-all-time) in 2011 – featuring a vocal sample from the soul singer [Etta James](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/20/etta-james) – Avicii’s profile went stratospheric in a matter of months. He perform- ed at the 2012 Ultra music festival in Miami with Madonna, later working with her in the studio; played at major events including Coachella and Tomorrowland; performed a residency in Las Vegas; collaborated with Coldplay; and was [featured on massive roadside billboards](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/20/avicii-appreciation-the-poster-boy-for-edm-who-struggled-with-the-spotlight) across the US.

In 2014, Avicii’s lifestyle caught up with him and he cancelled a headline set at Ultra to make time for gallbladder and appendix surgery. He told the Guardian: “I realised that my body and mind couldn’t handle it any more,” and although he remained in demand as a touring artist, he retired from live performances in 2016 after a bout of acute pancreatitis. [He parted ways with Pournouri the same year](https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/dance/7633087/avicii-ash-pournouri-split). An EP, Avīci (01), appeared in 2017, which was nominated for a Billboard music award, and a documentary, Avicii: True Stories, was released last autumn.

Avicii is survived by his parents, his sister, Linda, and his brothers, Anton and David.

• Avicii (Tim Bergling), DJ and producer, born 8 September 1989; died 20 April 2018