



## George Michael jailed for driving while on drugs

British pop star George Michael was sentenced to eight weeks in jail by a court after he admitted driving under the influence of cannabis when he crashed his car into a shop.

The Freedom and Careless Whisper singer was arrested after his Range Rover smashed into a photography shop in north London in the early hours of July 4, the latest in a long line of clashes with the law.

Michael, 47, who was charged under his real name Georgios Panayiotou, sighed as the sentence was announced and a fan sobbed in the public gallery of Highbury Magistrates Court in London as he was taken to the cells.

"It does not appear that you took proper steps to deal with what is clearly an addiction to cannabis. That's a mistake which puts you and, on this occasion, the public at risk," Judge John Perkins said.

He said a jail term was inevitable because Michael had a conviction for driving while unfit dating back to 2006, adding that this time he had taken a "dangerous and unpredictable mix" of prescription drugs and cannabis.

"I accept entirely that you have shown remorse for the offence, that you are ashamed of it, that you admitted it," Justice Perkins said, but added that it was with "regret" that he could not find any mitigation against a prison sentence.

He said Michael would serve four weeks in prison and after that he would be released and the remainder of the term would be spent under strict conditions.

The court also slapped Michael with a five-year driving ban and a fine of £1250 (\$2060).

Michael had admitted the driving offence at an earlier hearing in August. He also pleaded guilty to possessing cannabis cigarettes.

The singer was found by police slumped at the wheel of his Range Rover with the engine still running after the crash in July. Officers roused him and said he appeared "spaced out".

The star's lawyer, Mukul Chawla, said Michael had personally repaid the cost of the damage to the owner shop.

"The only thing that Mr Michael has specifically asked his lawyers to address to the court is his profound shame and horror



British singer George Michael arrives at Highbury Magistrates Court in London. Photo: AFP

of having repeated the conduct of 2006," Chawla told the court.

Michael arrived at the court wearing dark glasses and waving to fans, some of whom screamed his name and tried to burst through police barriers to reach him.

He spoke only to confirm his name and address and to say he wished to be addressed by his stage name in court.

The singer - who first found fame in 1980s pop group Wham! and has gone on to sell more than 100 million records worldwide - has fought a long battle with drugs.

In June 2007, Michael was given a two-year driving ban after pleading guilty to driving while unfit through drugs, when he was found collapsed in his Mercedes.

On that occasion, he claimed he was tired and had been taking prescription drugs.

In 1998 he was fined after making lewd advances to an undercover male police officer in a public toilet in Beverly Hills, California - an incident he poked fun at in the video for his hit Outside.

AFP

### George Michael: A colourful life

George Michael - whose real name is Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou - was born in north London in 1963 to a Greek Cypriot father and English mother.

While at secondary school in Bushey, Hertfordshire, he met his future pop partner Andrew Ridgeley.

Within a year of forming duo Wham!, the teenagers released debut single, Wham Rap, closely followed by Young Guns (Go For It!).

It was to be the first of many top 10 hits, including Wake Me Up (Before You Go Go) and Last Christmas.

After the band broke up, Michael embarked on a successful solo career - his debut album Faith spawned several number one singles including Careless Whisper and the title track.

It sold more than 20 million copies and earned Michael a best album Grammy in 1988.

His second solo album was titled Listen Without Prejudice, Vol. 1. It sold about eight million copies, considerably less than its predecessor but it did reach number two on the UK album chart and was named best British album at the Brits in 1991.

In the 2005 documentary, George Michael: A Different Story, the singer admitted he had been striving to match the achievements of Michael Jackson and Madonna.

But following the golden success of the early 1990s, Michael's life and image became dogged by trauma and controversy.

Michael was devastated when he lost his lover Anselmo Feleppa to Aids in 1993.

"Anyone who's experienced having somebody they love, whether it be a member of the family or a loved one, who has a terminal illness - which HIV was still considered in 1991 - anyone who's lived through that knows that it's a terrifying, terrifying thing," he said later.

He fell out spectacularly with his record company Sony in 1994 and tried to get himself released from his contract, which he called "professional slavery".

He accused Sony of not marketing Listen Without Prejudice Vol 1 adequately.

A three-month court case ensued, which Michael eventually lost, forcing him to fulfil his contractual commitments and record two more songs to be used on a greatest hits album.

Michael then signed a record deal with Dreamworks, releasing his album Older in 1995 but it sold less than one million copies in the US.

Michael lost his mother to cancer in 1997 and was arrested for a sex act in Los Angeles the following year, leading to a public admission that he was gay.

He parodied the arrest incident in the video for his single Outside in 1998 - which reached number four on the UK singles chart. But headlines surrounding his brushes with the law soon began to overtake his music.

He released a covers album, Songs From the Last Century, in 1995 and five years later returned with Patience which featured controversial single, Shoot the Dog.

The video for the song was a political satire showing Tony Blair as George Bush's poodle.

In 2006, he embarked on his first solo tour in 15 years, 25 Live, taking in Europe, the US and Canada.

The 106 tour shows were performed in 41 countries and seen by 2 million fans.

Tickets for the final two UK dates sold out in two hours.

Earlier this year, he also toured Australia but it has been six years since he released an album of new material.

Article from BBC News

#### GEORGE MICHAEL'S LEGAL HISTORY

April 1998 Arrested in LA for "engaging in a lewd act" in a public toilet. Ordered to pay a \$810 fine and 80 hours community service.

February 2006 Arrested for possession of Class C drugs. Cautioned and released.

June 2007 Charged with driving while unfit through drugs. Given a two-year driving ban and 100 hours community service.

September 2008 Arrested for possession of Class A and C drugs. Cautioned and released.

August 2010 Charged with driving under the influence of drugs and possession of Class C drugs. Given six-month interim driving ban until sentencing.

September 2010 Sentenced to eight weeks in prison, fined £1,250 and given a five-year driving ban.