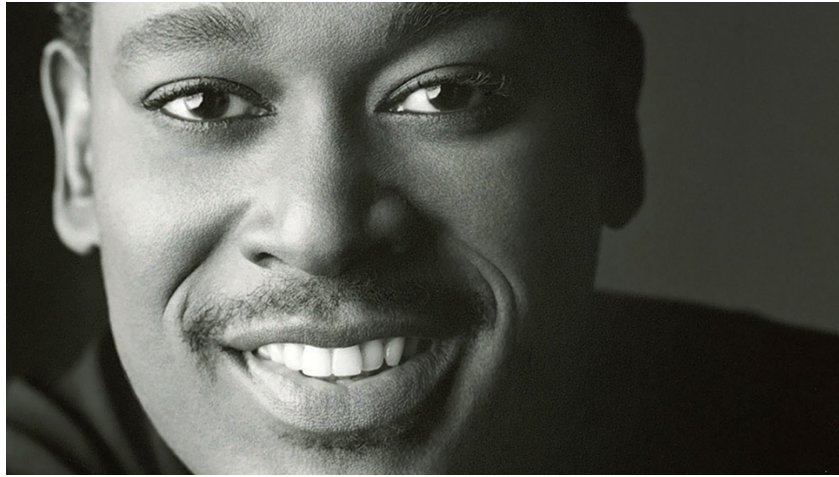


LUTHER: NEVER TOO MUCH



Directed by Dawn Porter
2024 | English | Documentary | USA | 101 minutes

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ABOUT LUTHER VANDROSS

Luther Vandross, the American pop/soul craftsman, singer/songwriter, producer and vocal virtuoso, emerged to success in the early 1980s. Influenced by iconic female vocalists of the '60s, he's collaborated with some of the greatest artists of our time, including Beyoncé, Mariah Carey, Janet Jackson, Stevie Wonder, David Bowie, Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick, Chic, Diana Ross, and many more.

During his career, Vandross received 8 Grammy Awards, four in 2004 (including Best R&B Album and the coveted "Song of the Year Award"), along with 33 Grammy nominations. Vandross won the American Music Award for favorite Soul/R&B album twice (1992, 2003) and favorite soul/R&B male artist 7 times (1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2003). Vandross won at the Soul Train Awards 4 times and was honored with the Quincy Jones Award for outstanding Career Achievement in 1999.

Vandross has toured across the globe and sold out 10 shows at London's Wembley Arena. Throughout his career, Vandross received 11 consecutive platinum albums and sold over 50 million records worldwide. Three of Vandross's songs, "Never Too Much", "Here and Now" and "Dance with My Father," have earned their place as timeless classics, achieving platinum status. In 2023, Rolling Stone named Vandross as the 31 greatest singers of all time, as part of their "The 200 Greatest Singers of All Time" list."

SYNOPSIS

TEASER SYNOPSIS

“Luther: Never Too Much,” the documentary film, chronicles the story of a vocal virtuoso. Using a wealth of rarely seen archives, Luther tells his own story with assistance from his closest friends and musical collaborators including Mariah Carey, Dionne Warwick, Valerie Simpson and Roberta Flack. The film relives the many stunning moments of Luther’s musical career, while exploring his unrequited love life, health struggles, and a lifelong battle to earn the respect his music deserved.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Luther Vandross always thought he would be a star. The film “Luther: Never Too Much” explores the formative years of Luther’s musical career, back to the epicenter of black culture, Harlem’s very own Apollo Theater. Luther was inspired by female iconic vocalists such as Dionne Warwick. Of her concert at the Brooklyn Fox Theater, he said “She came on stage and just killed me; the music was more serious, the song value was more serious.” His big break comes during a studio session with David Bowie, where he would go on to sing background vocals and arrange Bowie’s iconic *Young Americans* album. Love is joyous for Luther as in ***Never Too Much***; it is pure, as in the duet with Mariah Carey in ***Endless Love and Dionne Warwick***. For Luther love is harmony, and perhaps most exquisitely and painfully (for what is the dark side of love but pain?) ***If only for one night*** – who hasn’t made this Faustian bargain? Willing to live a life of loneliness for one perfect night with one true love.

We explore his process of creation, an exacting style that culminated in the most exquisite compositions. A portrait of a master emerges. He would control what he could as best he could. His weight, his craft, his love of family and close friends. If romantic love eluded Luther, he made up for it in other ways. Luther is a man of passion, a man who delighted in beauty and luxury.

The film explores the incredible investment the artist put into his musical presentation, only to be met with frustration from being pigeonholed as an “R&B” artist, struggles to crossover, and battles with the record industry. Vandross suffered a sudden stroke and passed away at the age of 51. The final chapters of Luther’s life are celebrated by the memories of his cherished friends, family, collaborators.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Anticipation builds as Luther Vandross takes the stage. Luther – in a dazzling tuxedo – a single spotlight bathes him in light. He owns the stage. You close your eyes when Luther sings because you don’t want to miss a thing. As he lingers on notes meant to be heard, he keeps full control of the song, and of the audience. Where he leads, they follow -- precise whisper, soft vocals caress and carry the song where it needs to go. Luther is at home on stage, fully in command of his world.

Luther always thought he would be a star. The film explores the formative years of Luther’s musical career, back to the epicenter of black culture, Harlem’s very own Apollo Theater. Luther was part of The Apollo house band, Listen My Brother, later appearing on the very first episodes of Sesame Street. The young artists sang about black power and excellence, during

the height of the civil rights movement. Luther was inspired by female iconic vocalists such as Dionne Warwick. Of her concert at the Brooklyn Fox Theater, he said “She came on stage and just killed me; the music was more serious, the song value was more serious.” His big break comes during a studio session with David Bowie, where he would go on to sing background vocals and arrange Bowie’s iconic *Young Americans* album.

Luther Vandross knows what he was born to do. He sings about love not sex, and he reveled in the distinction. Luther’s love is a pure love, of connection and admiration, of joy and belonging. There is of course an irony to this story. The great master of the love song never married or had children or even a long-term partner. There was endless curiosity about his sexuality, questions he refused to answer. But in his music Luther never gave up on love. We may never know how he experienced love, but we know he understood it. Love is joyous for Luther as in ***Never Too Much***; it is pure, as in the duet with Mariah Carey in ***Endless Love***. For Luther love is harmony, and perhaps most exquisitely and painfully (for what is the dark side of love but pain?) ***If only for one night*** – who hasn’t made this Faustian bargain? Willing to live a life of loneliness for one perfect night with one true love.

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But it is too simplistic to say that Luther never found love. We see the love he poured into work, into family, into other artists and ultimately into music itself. Mariah explains what a vocal virtuoso is, why she wanted to sing with Luther and what they accomplished together. Valerie Simpson and Dionne Warwick tell us about Luther’s gifts. Luther is pushing boundaries, collaborating with some of the greatest female artists of our time. The film explores the incredible investment the artist put into his musical presentation, only to be met with frustration from being pigeonholed as an “R&B” artist, struggles to crossover, and battles with the record industry. Vandross suffered a sudden stroke and passed away at the age of 51. The final chapters of Luther’s life are celebrated by the memories of his cherished friends, family, collaborators.

FILMMAKER STATEMENT

“Luther: Never Too Much” is a result of the collective devotion of our team to the life and legacy of Luther Vandross. It celebrates the leader and musical virtuoso that Luther was. Having the opportunity to be the first to tell the story of one of the greatest vocalists ever and give him the recognition that he should’ve had during his lifetime is surreal, and I am extremely proud of this movie.

Many of my formative years were accompanied by Luther’s music so it was very important for me to make this film and do Luther right by it. But as much as I’ve always loved his music and personality, I learned so much more about his story through the making of this film. Discovering insights into stories you think you know is one of my favorite parts about documentary filmmaking.

I wanted to bring Luther back to tell his own story through this documentary as much as he possibly could. I intentionally worked with his closest friends and collaborators to speak about his personal life and legacy. With the blessing from his family and resources from Sony, I had access to a wealth of rehearsal footage, archival footage and photography that allowed me to study and translate all aspects of Luther’s life into the film. I carefully chose to include interviews from those closest to Luther which really shared parts of his life that weren’t known and selected archival footage to represent the various moments of success and struggle throughout Luther’s lifetime.

The production of this film was as collaborative as Luther’s career was and I am so proud of the hard work that every team member did to get to this moment. I cannot wait to share this film with the world and I hope that everyone who watches this can laugh, cry, and of course, sing, in honor of Luther Vandross.

- Dawn Porter

FILMMAKER Q&A

Why were you interested in the project?

Dawn Porter: “I wanted to do this film because Luther sang the soundtrack that accompanied so many of my formative years. But as much as I loved his music, and his personality, I learned about so much more of his story. That's what I love about documentaries - finding new insights into stories you think you know. That's the joy of this film, I hope everyone who watches it laughs, cries, and of course sings.”

How did the estate get involved?

Ged Doherty: “I worked with Luther Vandross between 1992 and 2003 whilst he was at Sony Music. I was in South Africa in 2015 producing “Eye in the Sky” and heard Luther’s music everywhere I went. I called Dave Gottlieb, a former Sony Colleague who was now managing the Luther estate and asked why they had never made a doc about Luther and begged him to let Raindog make the film. Dave responded they had never made a film as they had never liked any of the pitches submitted to them so Producer Trish D Chetty spent 3 years researching Luther’s story and developed a pitch that the estate liked and so Raindog were given the rights in 2020.”

How did Jamie get involved?

Ged Doherty: “Sony Music Vision boarded the project in early 2021. Later that year introduced Datari Turner from Jamie Foxx’s company who had expressed interest in getting involved with any Luther projects and both companies hit it off and agreed to work together on everything Luther related. In May 2022, Sony Music Vision introduced Dawn Porter to myself, Trish and Datari and the rest is history.”

How did Colin get involved?

Colin Firth is co-founder and partner at Raindog Films with Ged Doherty and Trish D Chetty.

TRACKLIST

Title	Artist
Ain't No Stopping Us Now	Luther Vandross
Funky Music (Is a Part of Me)	David Bowie/Luther Vandross
Young Americans	David Bowie
A Brand New Day	Luther Vandross
The Glow of Love	Change ft. Luther Vandross
Never Too Much	Luther Vandross
Bad Boy Having a Party	Luther Vandross
Til My Baby Comes Home	Luther Vandross
How Many Times Can We Say Goodbye	Dionne Warwick & Luther Vandross
Give Me the Reason	Luther Vandross
If Only for One Night	Luther Vandross
Here and Now	Luther Vandross
Power of Love	Luther Vandross
Stop to Love	Luther Vandross
Superstar	Luther Vandross
Until You Come Back to Me	Luther Vandross
Endless Love	Luther Vandross ft. Mariah Carey
A House Is Not a Home	Luther Vandross
Take You Out	Luther Vandross
Any Love	Luther Vandross
Wait for Love	Luther Vandross
Dance with My Father	Luther Vandross
So Amazing	Luther Vandross

INTERVIEWS

In total, **20 interviews** conducted were included in the film including the following participants (listed in order of appearance):

1. Fonzi Thornton - Lifelong Friend and Musical Collaborator
2. Robin Clark - Lifelong Friend and Musical Collaborator
3. Carlos Alomar - Lifelong Friend and Musical Collaborator
4. Danyel Smith - Music Journalist
5. Jon Platt - Chairman/CEO, Sony Music Publishing
6. Ava Cherry - Background Singer
7. Seveda Williams - Niece, Founder of FANDROSS
8. Nile Rodgers - Founder of Chic
9. Valerie Simpson - Singer
10. Deborah McDuffie - Commercial Producer
11. Marcus Miller - Bass Player, Songwriting Collaborator
12. Nat Adderley Jr. - Musical Director
13. Jamie Foxx - Actor, Singer
14. Lisa Fischer - Background Singer
15. Kevin Owens - Background Singer
16. Richard Marx - "Dance with my Father" co-writer
17. Clive Davis - Record Executive
18. Mariah Carey - Singer
19. Dionne Warwick - Singer
20. Max Szadek - Personal Assistant

BIOGRAPHIES

DIRECTOR - Dawn Porter

Dawn Porter is an American documentary filmmaker and the founder of the production company Trilogy Films. Her award-winning films include “Gideon’s Army”, about three black public defenders working in the southern United States, “Trapped”, about the impact of anti-abortion laws on abortion providers in the South, and “Bobby Kennedy for President”, which debuted on Netflix. As a two-time Sundance film festival director, Porter’s work has been featured on HBO, Netflix, CNN, PBS, MSNBC, MTV Films, and other platforms. Porter’s latest documentary, “The Lady Bird Diaries”, an all-archival documentary about Lady Bird Johnson debuted at the 2023 SXSW Film Festival where it won the Lone Star Prize. After a successful festival run, the film made its broadcast debut on Hulu in November and was nominated for 2 Critics Choice Awards. Nominated for a 2024 Spirit Award, “Deadlocked: How America Shaped the Supreme Court”, is her newest project, a four-part docuseries that explores the history of the Supreme Court, the justices, decisions, and confirmation battles that have shaped the United States. Additional credits include “The Me You Can’t See” (Apple TV+), “Rise Again: Tulsa and the Red Summer” (National Geographic), “The Way I See It” (Focus Features), “John Lewis: Good Trouble” (CNN, Magnolia Pictures), “37 Words” (ESPN), “Un(re)solved” (Frontline PBS), and “Gideon’s Army” (HBO).

PRODUCER - Leah Smith

Leah Smith is a dynamic and award-winning filmmaker, whose illustrious career in media spans over two remarkable decades. Her journey through the ever-evolving media landscape is a testament to her unwavering dedication to the art of storytelling and her unrelenting pursuit of truth. Her passion for journalism and storytelling quickly emerged as a defining trait, and she made an indelible mark by launching the iconic nightly prime-time news show, “Anderson Cooper 360”. Her journey continued as she dedicated several years as a producer at NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt, steadfastly focusing on impactful storytelling. It was within these roles that Leah's relentless pursuit of truth and her extraordinary ability to convey powerful narratives through reporting earned her an array of accolades, including three prestigious News and Documentary Emmy Awards, a revered Peabody Award, and numerous nominations. She's currently working with Trilogy Films on two highly anticipated projects.

PRODUCER - Ged Doherty

Ged Doherty is the Former Chairman & CEO Sony Music UK. He first met Luther Vandross whilst working as head of international marketing for Epic Records NY in 1992 and subsequently worked on 5 of his albums. Doherty co-founded Raindog Films in 2012 with Colin Firth. Produced PGA award winning and Oscar nominated film “Loving” that premiered at Cannes in 2016 and global hit “Eye in the Sky” that premiered at Cannes and Toronto in 2015.

PRODUCER - Trish D Chetty

Trish D Chetty is the Producer/Writer and Partner at Raindog Films London. She developed and produced “Kickback” a corruption in sports documentary for Amazon in 2022. Chetty also developed, wrote and produced the award winning feature documentary “Squaring the Circle” that premiered at Telluride in 2022 and featured at Sundance in 2023.

PRODUCER - Datari Turner

One of the most prolific producers in film, Datari has been a producer who has helped to produce and finance over 35 feature films, including 10 films that have premiered at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival.

In 2023, Datari produced the critically acclaimed film “They Cloned Tyrone” for Netflix, which currently holds a 94% score on Rotten Tomatoes. The indie drama “Story Ave”, which premiered at SXSW and holds a 94% score on Rotten Tomatoes, and the widely acclaimed courtroom drama, “The Burial”, for Amazon which recently premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and holds a 90% score on Rotten Tomatoes.

Together, Datari’s films have earned 98 festival award nominations. Datari has worked with seven Academy Award winners and 13 Academy Award nominees.

In 2019, Datari partnered with Oscar Winner Jamie Foxx from Foxxhole Productions.

Blackfilm.com ranked Datari Turner fourth on the list of Top 10 African- American producers of the decade (2010-2019) only behind Will Packer, Broderick Johnson, and Tyler Perry.

In television, Datari has produced over 300 hours of original programming for networks such as Fox, Showtime, WEtv, Netflix, BET, Starz and Apple.

Datari created and executive produces the hit WEtv franchise “Growing Up Hip Hop,” currently in its 8th season and the network’s highest-rated program. “Toya & Reginae”, and “Brat Loves Judy”, are other TV- series that are executive produced by Datari on the WeTv network.

Datari was nominated for both an NAACP Image Award and an Emmy in 2019, for producing the critically acclaimed Showtime doc series “Shut Up and Dribble” alongside NBA Superstar LeBron James.

Other recent hits that Datari has produced include the action film “Day Shift” on Netflix and “Uncorked” on Netflix. The hit television series “Alert: Missing Persons Unit” on FOX, “Hip-Hop Family Christmas” and “Hip-Hop Family Christmas Wedding” on Vh1.

In 2019, Datari began conversations with Morehouse College to create a Producers program that aimed to establish a pipeline of future black producers and executives into the film & television business by providing early career exposure, financial support and mentorship at the undergraduate level. In the fall of 2023, The CTEMS Datari Turner Producing Program at Morehouse college is in its inaugural class!

PRODUCER - Jamie Foxx

Born Eric Morlon Bishop, Jamie Foxx has emerged as one of the most diversely talented entertainers of his generation. Foxx started out on television as a cast member of In Living Color before landing his own sitcom in 1996. He then proved himself as a dramatic actor in 2004, for his performances in the thriller Collateral and the biopic Ray. The latter earned Foxx an Academy Award for his portrayal of Ray Charles. His other acclaimed roles include in Dreamgirls, Django Unchained, and Just Mercy. As a singer, Foxx has released five studio albums and won a Grammy Award for “Blame It.” Perhaps his most well-known musical success has been his 2005 hit collaboration with Kanye West on the song “Gold Digger.” In 2023, Jamie produced and starred in two critically acclaimed films. They Cloned Tyrone and The Burial. Foxx was praised for his performances in both films.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER - Colin Firth

Colin Firth is the Academy Award, BAFTA, SAG, Golden Globe winning actor for “The King’s Speech” and co-founded Raindog Films in 2012. He produced PGA award winning and Oscar nominated film “Loving” that premiered at Cannes in 2016 and global hit “Eye in the Sky” that Premiered at Cannes and Toronto in 2015. Most recently starred in HBO’s “The Staircase”.

PRODUCTION ANECDOTES

From Director, Dawn Porter

- “For me, my favorite moments were finding incredible archives, like Luther singing on ‘Sesame Street’, and with David Bowie and finding all those jingle commercials!”
- “I love the interviews in this film, and the look created by our DP, Bryan Gentry.”
- “Valerie Simpson played the piano for us in her home!”
- “But I have probably never laughed so much as the time spent interviewing Jamie Foxx. I wish you could see all of the impressions - but I could not find a place for his imitations of Jay-Z or Kanye although I promise you I thought about it.”

From Producer, Leah Smith

- “My favorite shoot was definitely the background singers. There were four people, so coordinating schedules was a major task. Lisa had a flight to catch and with me having to interview four people in one day, it was a major task, but everybody was on their A-game as crew and it showed.”
- On the background singers’ interview, “They just fell back into the vibes.” “They all had such personal and heartfelt stories of Luther. It was emotional. It was hard not to show emotion as an interviewer because they’re stories were all so powerful.”
- “[Robin Clark] was a stand out interview. She was so open and thoughtful. Having known Luther for the longest time, she had great stories, but also wanted the best for him. We use so much of her throughout the film.”
- “Funny story: when we were filming Marcus, ConEd cut off the electricity in the area so of course, I had to handle that.”
- “Marcus was another standout interview. He’s so skilled at music and explaining structure and musicality.” “He was right there with Luther so he knew intimately how ‘the biscuits got baked.’”
- “Though I was always a fan of Luther’s from a distance, growing up and connecting with his songs, speaking to the people closest to him, I felt like I connected more to him. I was getting emotional, similar to Robin’s interview, I became somewhat protective of him as well, while also wanting the best for him and for this film.”
- “We really tried to tell a fully pictured story, the great parts and not so great parts.”
- “[Mariah] came on camera ready and looking beautiful.”
- “[Mariah] was in between shoots but had so much love for Luther that she wanted to definitely participate. We were in an office space with four white walls, close to a larger soundstage where she was rehearsing another event. We had a set designer come and make the space look warm and inviting - no one would ever know we started the day with a blank canvas. Mariah was so gracious to the whole staff and while the interview was one of shorter ones, her words and experience with Luther added immense value.”
- Favorite line in the film : “I tell a lot of you young people, fame and fortune. Fortune’s cool. Fame’s not always so cool.” - (Marcus Miller)
- Favorite performance in the film - “Any Love” by Luther Vandross

FILM CREDITS

Sony Music Entertainment

Sony Music Publishing

Raindog Films

Foxxhole Productions

**Sony Music Entertainment and Sony Music
Publishing Present**

A Raindog Films / Foxxhole Production

In Association With

Trilogy Films

A Film By

Dawn Porter

Luther: Never Too Much

Directed By

Dawn Porter

Produced By

Trish D Chetty
Ged Doherty

Produced By

Jamie Foxx
Datari Turner

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