

## King of the Cowboys

Western legend Roy Rogers passes away leaving behind a legacy of film, radio and television performance

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Happy trails, Roy Rogers.

The singing cowboy and one of the last of the white hats from the golden era of Hollywood Westerns died Monday. He was 86.

Rogers died in his sleep of congestive heart failure at his Apple Valley home, in the high desert 90 miles from Los Angeles.

"What a blessing to have shared my life together with him for almost 51 years," said Dale Evans, Rogers' wife and singing partner.

Rogers was a star of television, radio and movies, turning out country music songs, 87 Westerns — 26 of them with Evans — and a 1950s TV series that continues in reruns.

For 12 years, from 1943 to 1954, he was the No. 1 Western star at the box office in a magazine poll of theater op-

erators.

With his trusty horse Trigger, Rogers played the straight-shooting good guy who always fought fair — instead of killing the bad guys, he would shoot the gun out of their hands — and always lived to sing about it.

"I really appreciate what he stood for, the movies he made and the kind of values they embodied," President Clinton said. "Today there will be a lot of sad and grateful Americans, especially of my generation, because of his career."

Rogers' theme song was "Happy



ROGERS

Trails to You," sung over a clippity-clop beat and bum-bah-dee-dah bass line. It was co-written by his wife.

His movies included "King of the Cowboys," "Song of Texas," "The Cowboy and the Senorita," "Don't Fence Me In" and "My Pal Trigger."

Rogers and Gene Autry were the most popular cowboy crooners in Hollywood history.

"This is a terrible loss for me," Autry, 90, said in a statement. "I had tremendous respect for Roy and considered him a great humanitarian and an outstanding American. He was, and will always be, a true Western hero."

A shrewd businessman, Rogers became a millionaire many times over through real estate, Roy Rogers restaurants and television productions.

He opened a museum near his Apple Valley home in 1967. When Trigger

died in 1965, Rogers had the golden palomino stuffed and placed on display in the museum, to Evans' chagrin.

"I was so angry, I said, 'All right, but when you go, I'm going to have you stuffed and placed on top of Trigger,'" she said in 1984.

Rogers said: "I told her just make sure I'm smiling."

Born Leonard Slye in Cincinnati on Nov. 5, 1911 (some reference books give his last name as Sly, and list a different date of birth), Rogers grew up in rural Portsmouth and Duck Run, Ohio. By the time he was a teen-ager, he had made a name for himself locally as a square-dance caller and yodeler.

During the Depression, his family moved West and Rogers worked as a truck driver, peach picker and singer and guitarist in hillbilly musical groups. He helped found the Pioneer

Trio, soon renamed Sons of the Pioneers. It had such hits as "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" and "Cool Water."

Rogers' first screen appearances were with the Sons in movies such as "Rhythm on the Range." But he left the group in the late '30s.

He heard they were looking for singing cowboys at Republic Studios, and the only way he could get in was by waiting until the workers began returning from lunch and sneaking in with them, he later recalled.

Rogers replaced Autry as Republic's top cowboy when Autry left to serve in World War II.

Rogers was first teamed with Evans, a radio singer and sometime actress, in "The Cowboy and the Senorita," 1944, and they married in 1947, 14 months after his first wife, Arlene, died.

After they left Republic, Rogers got

locked in a legal dispute with Evans over whether he had the right to share in the profits of their films were sold to television.

Rogers took the battle all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1953.

He later blamed the battle on movie offers after 1953. He had 57 television series, TV special appearances on everything from "Tonight Show" to "Wonderful World of Disney." The couple in the spotlight, but Rogers never fit him comfortably.

"I'm an introvert at heart," Rogers once said. "And show business is even though I've loved it, it has always been hard for me."

A memorial service was held for Saturday at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Apple Valley, followed by a procession around the Roy Rogers Evans Museum in Victorville.

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