

Sang 1960's hit 'Running Bear'

BEAUMONT, Texas — Pop singer Johnny Preston, who in 1960 had the chart-topping hit "Running Bear," has died. He was 71.

His son Scott Preston said the singer died Friday afternoon at Baptist Beaumont Hospital. He had bypass surgery late last year and suffered from lingering health problems.

He was born Johnny Preston Courville and spent most of his life in Port Arthur. He first performed in the Lamar

University group the Shades in 1957 and was brought to the attention of Mercury Records by disc jockey and singer J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson.

Richardson wrote and produced "Running Bear," which became a million-seller for Preston the year after Richardson died in the same plane crash that killed Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens. Preston followed up with another hit, "Cradle of Love."

AP