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Disco Star Welcomed by Brezhnev Laid to Rest

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Bobby Farrell of Boney M performing in Zurich, Switzerland, in May 2005. **Alessandro Della Bella**

Boney M singer Bobby Farrell, who was found dead Dec. 30 in his hotel room in St. Petersburg, where the group had come for a performance, was buried in the Dutch town of Amstelveen on Saturday.

Russian investigators said earlier that 61-year-old Farrell — whose group topped the 1970s European charts with glittering showmanship and a dance floor-filling blend of disco and Calypso music — died of heart disease.

Farrell appeared as scheduled at a concert in the city the night before his death, but Farrell complained of breathing problems before and after the show, said his agent, John Seine.

Sergei Kaptionov, a spokesman for the St. Petersburg branch of the Investigative Committee, said the death was due to heart disease and it was not a criminal matter.

The three surviving members of the original Boney M lineup — Marcia Barrett, Liz Mitchell

and Maizie Williams — performed at a two-hour live show in memory of Farrell in Amsterdam on Saturday, Gzt.ru reported.

Boney M had 38 top 10 hits, including 15 No. 1s in Germany. They included "Brown Girl in the Ring" and "Mary's Boy Child." Their version of "By the Rivers of Babylon" sold nearly 2 million records in Britain alone, keeping it No. 1 for five weeks in 1978.

The same year, Boney M became the first Western music group invited by a Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, to perform in the Soviet Union. A Soviet military plane flew the performers from London to Moscow, where they sang for an audience of 2,700 people on Red Square.

Alphonso "Bobby" Farrell left his home on the Caribbean island of Aruba at 15 to work as a sailor, then drifted to Norway and Germany to pursue a career as a disc jockey, his official biography said.

He was chosen in 1974 to front Boney M, put together by German singer and songwriter Frank Farian, who did much of the recorded singing while Farrell was more a dancer and showman.

The band, based in Germany, broke into the charts with "Daddy Cool" and "Sunny" in 1976.

The original group of Farrell, Barrett, Mitchell and Williams broke up in 1986 and Farrell, who lived in Amsterdam, continued on his own or with various female back-up singers, maintaining his flamboyant style and flashy costumes. In recent years he toured under the name Bobby Farrell's Boney M.

(AP, MT)

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