

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Valerie Simpson

PERSON

**Simpson, Valerie, 1946-**

**Alternative Names:** Valerie Simpson;

**Life Dates:** August 26, 1946-

**Place of Birth:** New York, New York, USA

**Residence:** New York, NY

**Work:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Singer; Songwriter

## Biographical Note

Singer and songwriter Valerie Simpson was born on August 26, 1946 in the Bronx neighborhood of New York City. She attended and graduated from Morris High School and studied music at Chatham Square School.

In 1964, Simpson met and teamed up with Nickolas Ashford to record music as a duo, and they later began collaborating with solo artist Joshie Jo Armstead, a former member of the Ikettes, to write songs. Their works recorded by other artists included "Never Had It So Good" by Ronnie Milsap, "One Step at a Time" by Maxine Brown, as well as several compositions recorded by the Shirelles and Chuck Jackson. Another of their songs, "Let's Go Get Stoned," gave Ray Charles a number one U.S. R&B hit in 1966. That same year, now known as "Ashford & Simpson," the pair joined Motown Records where they wrote their best-known songs, which included "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," "You're All I Need to Get By," "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing," and "Reach Out and Touch (Somebody's Hand)." Simpson also released two solo albums, *Exposed!* (1971) and *Valerie Simpson* (1972). In 1973, a year before Simpson and Ashford were married, they began performing, with the albums *Keep It Comin'* and *Gimme Something Real*. After *Keep It Comin'*, they left Motown and signed with Warner Bros. Their first major success was in 1977 with the gold album *Send It*, which included "Don't Cost You Nothing," a Top Ten U.S. R&B track. They subsequently released two more gold albums, *Is It Still Good to Ya?* (1978) and *Stay Free* (1978), which featured the pop Top 40 track "Found a Cure." In 1984, they released *Solid*. During this time Ashford & Simpson continued songwriting for artists like Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, and Gladys Knight and the Pips, composing hits including Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman" (1978) and Teddy Pendergrass's "Is It Still Good to You?"

(1980). In 1996, Simpson and her husband opened Sugar Bar in New York City, a restaurant and live entertainment venue. That same year they recorded the album *Been Found* with Maya Angelou. Simpson released another solo album in 2012, *Dinosaurs Are Coming Back Again*.

In 1969, Ashford & Simpson won three Broadcast Music, Inc. Awards for the songs "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing," and "Your Precious Love." They also were awarded the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers highest honor, the Founders Award, in 1996. In 1999, they were recipients of The Rhythm & Blues Foundation's Pioneer Award; and, in 2002, they were inducted Songwriters Hall of Fame. Simpson was also recognized by the Bronx Walk of Fame in 2003 and received an honorary doctorate degree in music from Berklee College of Music in 2014.

Simpson and Ashford were married until Ashford's death in 2011. They have two daughters, Nicole and Asia.

Valerie Simpson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 19, 2011.

## **Related Entries**