



Nina Simone

Singer, Songwriter, Musician, Civil Rights Activist

- Born in 1933 in Tryon, NC, under the name Eunice Kathleen Waymon
- Began playing the piano at the age of 3 and the first song she learned was "God Be With You, Till We Meet Again"
- Gave her concert debut, a classical recital, when she was 12
- At her first recital her parents, who had taken seats in the front row, were forced to move to the back to make way for white people and Simone refused to play until her parents were moved back to the front
- Due to her parents' modest income, her music teacher helped establish a special fund to pay for her education which allowed her to attend Allen High School for Girls in Asheville
- After her graduation she spent the summer of 1950 at the Julliard School under the tutelage of Carl Friedberg to prepare for an audition at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia
- At Julliard she taught piano and worked as an accompanist for other performers at the school, but had to leave early when she ran out of funds
- Her family moved to Philadelphia with the expectation of her entry to Curtis, but only 3 of 72 applicants were accepted that year and she was not among them and she suspected the denial was racially motivated
- Following her denial at Curtis she began taking private lessons under Curtis professor Vladimir Sokoloff but could never re-apply at the school because they did not accept students over 21
- Began performing at a New Jersey pub in order to pay for her private lessons and because she knew her mother would never approve of her playing the "Devil's Music" she adopted the stage name Nina Simone, with Nina being derived from the Spanish word niña, a nickname given to her by a boyfriend named Chico, and Simone being inspired by the French actress Simone Signoret
- Her mixture of Jazz, blues and classical music earned her a small but loyal fanbase
- Recorded George Gershwin's "I Loves You, Porgy" as a favor to friend in 1958 and it became her only Billboard Top 20 success in the US
- Released her debut album *Little Girl Blue* in 1959 on Bethlehem Records and ended up never benefitting financially from the album and missing out on more than \$1 million in royalties because she sold her rights to the song for \$3,000
- Signed on with Colpix Records in 1960 after being granted full creative control and recorded a multitude of studio and live albums, despite being mostly indifferent to having a recording contract
- While her repertoire had always drawn on her African American heritage, it wasn't until she signed on with Dutch company Philips Records in 1964 that her songs began addressing racial inequality in the US, with "Mississippi Goddam" ushering in this new era in her music
- Performed and spoke at Civil Rights meetings and marches, including Selma to Montgomery
- Following a boycott by the US music industry due to the racially charged nature of her new music, Simone flew to Barbados in 1970 and when she returned to the US she discovered a warrant had been issued for her arrest for unpaid taxes, which she had not paid as a protest against the Vietnam War, so she returned to Barbados to evade authorities and prosecution
- The original 1958 recording of her song "My Baby Just Cares for Me" was used in a Chanel No. 5 commercial in Britain in 1987, which led to a re-release of the recording and a brief surge in her popularity in the UK
- Continued to tour around the world through the 1990s and during the last decade of her life Simone had sold more than 1 million records, making her a global catalog best-seller

***"I had spent many years pursuing excellence, because that is what classical music is all about...
Now it was dedicated to freedom, and that was far more important."***

(Nina Simone)