

**meshell ndegeocello**

**pour une âme souveraine  
a dedication to nina simone**

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## **a dedication to nina simone**

- 01 **Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood** 04'08
- 02 **Suzanne** 04'27
- 03 **Real Real** feat. Toshi Reagon 03'08
- 04 **House Of The Rising Sun** feat. Toshi Reagon 03'36
- 05 **Turn Me On** 03'08
- 06 **Feeling Good** 04'10
- 07 **Don't Take All Night** feat. Sinead O'Connor 03'28
- 08 **Nobody's Fault But Mine** feat. Lizz Wright 02'37
- 09 **Be My Husband** feat. Valerie June 03'31
- 10 **Black Is The Color Of My True Loves Hair** 03'53
- 11 **See Line Woman** feat. Tracy Wannomae 05'51
- 12 **Either Way I Lose** 03'29
- 13 **To Be Young, Gifted And Black** feat. Cody ChesnuTT 03'16
- 14 **Four Women** 05'02



## Nina (for those various Kevins, and Bonnie) by Hilton Als

**Listen here, Nina, who did you belong to?** Certainly not to me, or any other critic or journalist who's limited to and limited by the facts, no matter how admiring, trenchant, or true, they're flat, and you come from another country altogether, one where interpreting the fictive and the autobiographical, sometimes simultaneously, defined your days, and you literally underscored those worlds at the piano, which talked as you talked, maybe that was the only conversation you could ever really have, in any case, who could get far enough inside that communion, the one between your voice and the keyboard, to say let alone accurately describe who or what you belonged to, certainly not documentary filmmakers like Peter Rodis, who directed an informal-seeming 1969 portrait of you, nor Nadine Cohodas, one of your more earnest biographer's, and certainly not Stephen Cleary, who co-authored your 1992 memoir, "I Put A Spell on You," a book rife with landscapes and recrimination, Nina in love and disappointment in Barbados, Nina in love with black power in Liberia, Nina bored in Switzerland, Nina feeling friendless in Los Angeles, Nina changing planes, Nina sometimes jettisoning family members, managers, promoters, musicians to get at or not get at the music in her head, her hands.

**Listen here, Nina, who did you belong to?** Certainly not to your first name, Eunice Waymons, she who was the sixth of John Davan and Eunice Waymons' eight children, all of whom were born and partly raised in Tryon, North Carolina, where the industrious John was a barber, among other occupations, and Mama kept house and close to the Lord, He was everywhere in Tryon, a town on the border of North and South Carolina, spit and it would land somewhere near the Blue Ridge Mountains, and I don't know how much you believed in place as a source of your art, Nina--I do know that after a while you could not live in America for fear that it would murder you just as it murdered the people you loved, people blessed and cursed by racial consciousness, such as Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X--but sometimes, if I close my eyes, I can hear the Blue



Ridge Mountains in your voice, I've seen them at dawn, a natural wonder that makes one wonder, the edges of the mountain peaks actually are blue and sort of glowing, as if God outlined them with his pinky finger, it's the same blue you make me see in several of your more well known tunes, such as "Black is the Color," and "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," and "Be My Husband." syncopated tunes clotted with the dirt one finds at the bottom of a dirge, as lonely and solid as that, and as true.

**Listen here, Nina, who did you belong to?** Maybe some to Mrs Massinovitch, or Miz Mazzy, as you called her after a while, your beloved English-born piano teacher in Depression-era North Carolina, you met her and began to study with her while you were still a child, about whom you wrote, "The first time I went to Mrs. Massinovitch's house I almost fainted--it was so beautiful," which pretty much describes your feelings about Miz Maizy herself, about whom you also wrote, "That first Saturday morning when I walked in my new tutor was standing by the grand piano. I thought then the same thing I thought every time I saw her for the next forty-five years: how could one person be so elegant?," and how amazed is the talented child when she is recognized, and is made to feel less strange in her various intensities by someone who sees her, especially when it's another female, not your Mama, Nina, she couldn't love you properly or enough, where did you come from?, in any case Miz Maizy did see you, Nina, she saw the classical pianist you both thought you'd be, then the musical hybrid you became, you always went back home to see her, which is why the claim that you hated white people always seemed ridiculous to me, what you struggled for was an equality of the soul, it hurt you and perplexed you that human beings could be so shitty, but you stood firm in your belief in the family of man, and that given enough instruction people could get their manners straight, for instance you refused to start playing at one of your first recitals until your parents were moved from the back of the auditorium to the front of the house, a move that I wouldn't call bold so much as necessary, evidence of your moral rigor when it came to the big issues like mutual respect but a rigor you were less apt to follow in your personal life.

**Listen here, Nina, who did you belong to?** Maybe some to those kids who gathered to hear you play at the Midtown in Atlantic City in 1955, you were twenty-one, you took the job to help pay the bills, you treated that dive like a concert hall, and by demanding respect from the audience--you'd stop playing if one of those drunks made a crack--the boozy clientele began to respect themselves, as listeners, and that only intensified after you began to sing, the Midtown's owner said you'd have to sing, too, if you wanted to keep your job, so you added your voice to your musical conversation, and in that way you developed your way--classical keyboard technique, black voice, superlative acting, and the mystery of style--that expressed itself in I don't know how many live performances, studio albums, bootlegs, and so on.

**Listen here, Nina, who did you belong to?** Certainly to my sister, Bonnie (christened Yvonne), who wrote poetry and played the trumpet and wore thrift store clothes in our late nineteen-sixties black Brooklyn world, and one day, while watching our black and white Vietnam infused television, you came on, Nina, and as you played my sister murmured, "She's so beautiful," and our mother, looking critical, looked at you, Nina, and said, "Yvonne, that is the ugliest woman I have ever seen," and I could see my sister collapse into herself, and it took me years to understand that any idea of beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and based on what they themselves feel about themselves, and my mother was not unique among the women of her generation to find Nina ugly, and my sister Bonnie was not unique among the women of her generation to feel otherwise, and to say it, but to still be crushed when our mother's approval regarding Nina was not forthcoming, couldn't our mother see she was as much a part of the "Four Women," story as the next black girl?, and that what Nina was offering up was something extraordinary, pathos that was not marred by sentimentality, and I turned away from my sister and mother as they had this exchange, and their silence was even greater than their words, women often go silent in their anger when the conversation turns to beauty, and what other women should and shouldn't look like, and as a result of their silent fury about

their bodies and another black woman's body, I didn't want to think about Nina Simone ever again until, in the late nineteen-eighties, I fell in love with a Dutch man who was a real Nina connoisseur in ways Americans weren't back then, he had every bootleg, every VHS image, and his interest in blackness frightened me, he treated Nina as a kind of oracle or goddess, which didn't leave much room for anyone else's interpretation, let alone mine, in any case why would that Dutch man think that a black woman, self-exiled from her own country for many years and who, in fact, ended up living in the Netherlands for a time, needed to be understood when in fact what she was singing about was her understanding of how we are all misunderstood, wanderers in strange countries, sometimes called ugly, and sometimes revered to the point of no longer being human at all, and this was Nina's audience for years: women like my sister and too reverential white queens.

**Listen here, Nina, who do you belong to?** Certainly to Meshell Ndegeocello, who initiated a different kind of conversation with you on this record, a record that gets at you while deepening her understanding of her own artistry by finding her own notes in between your notes, which is to say this record is a conversation between two women, no matter the other personnel, including myself, a conversation that no doubt began as an homage but if you listen to Meshell's other albums, you will understand that she's not taking no for an answer when it comes to eliciting a response from anyone she loves, like you, Nina, on the other hand Meshell doesn't shut you up by deifying you but by helping to keep you alive in her own way, which includes not defending you against those women who thought you were ugly or wrong by contradicting their respective internal realities, she opens you up to their conversation, and hers, no matter how painful, she let's you speak, Nina, by encouraging all those complications, complications one hears in her own voice, which is underscored by her famous bass, and her desire for communion, which is her wish, Nina, as much as it was yours.







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Guitar: Chris Bruce.  
Drums: Deantoni Parks.  
Keyboards & Piano: Jebin Bruni.  
Bass: Meshell Ndegeocello.

Engineered, Mixed and Mastered by Pete Min.  
Toshi Reagon and Valerie June vocals engineered  
by Eric Elterman at East Side Sound.  
Photos : Charlie Gross.

- 01 **Please Don't Let Me  
Be Misunderstood** 4'08  
(Benjamin Bennie Claude, Marcus Sol, Gloria Caldwell)  
Publisher: Mediasong Anstalt, Benjamin Bennie Music Inc.
- 02 **Suzanne** 4'27  
(Leonard Cohen)  
Publisher: EMI Music Publishing, Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.

- 03 **Real Real**  
**feat. Toshi Reagon** 3'08  
(Nina Simone)  
Background vocals arranged, and executed by Toshi Reagon.  
Publisher: EMI Waterford Music Inc.
- 04 **House Of The Rising Sun** 3'36  
**feat. Toshi Reagon**  
(Holmes Libby Reynolds, Josh White)  
Publisher : Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC.
- 05 **Turn Me On** 3'08  
(John D Loudermilk)  
Publisher : Sony ATV Acuff Rose Music.
- 06 **Feeling Good** 4'10  
(Leslie Bricusse, Anthony George Newley)  
Publisher: Musical Comedy Productions Inc,  
Musical Comedy Productions Inc.
- 07 **Don't Take All Night** 3'28  
**feat. Sinead O'Connor**  
(Benjamin Bennie Claude, Marcus Sol)  
Publisher: Benjamin Bennie Music Inc.
- 08 **Nobody's Fault But Mine** 2'37  
**feat. Lizz Wright**  
(Nina Simone)  
Publisher: EMI Waterford Music Inc.  
Lizz Wright appears courtesy of The Verve Music Group.

- 09 **Be My Husband** 3'31  
**feat. Valerie June**  
(Andrew Benjamin Stroud)  
Publisher: EMI Waterford Music Inc.
- 10 **Black Is The Color  
Of My True Loves Hair** 3'53  
(Emile Latimer)  
Publisher: EMI Music Publishing, Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.
- 11 **See Line Woman** 5'51  
**feat. Tracey Wannomae**  
(Nina Simone, George Bass)  
Soprano saxophone & flute: Tracy Wannomae.  
Publisher: Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.
- 12 **Either Way I Lose** 3'29  
(Van Allen Mc Coy)  
Publisher: EMI Blackwood Music Inc.
- 13 **To Be Young, Gifted And Black** 3'16  
**feat. Cody ChesnuTT**  
(Nina Simone)  
Soprano saxophone and flute arranged  
and executed by: Tracy Wannomae.  
Publisher : N. Weldon Jonathan Irvine.
- 14 **Four Women** 5'02  
(Nina Simone)  
Publisher : Filmtrax Mogull Inc.



I would sincerely like to thank Secret Weapon, Charlie Gross, Toshi Reagon and Chris Bruce.  
Thank you for your support and brilliance in bringing this idea to fruition.

I believe you know what is in my heart and mind and help me to be the best of myself,  
and save me when I falter. Thank you Sinéad, Cody, Lizz, Valerie June, and Tracy for your beautiful gifts.

Thank you Eric Elterman for your reliable calm, humor, and help.  
Thank You Hilton Als for your generosity and thoughtfulness, I am so grateful for your words.

D and Jebin, I am in awe of you both.

I could never thank you enough or communicate the extent of my respect.

And to Nina. I wonder what she was like, how she rehearsed,  
what she read, how she loved, who she thought of late at night,  
if she knew how good she was or ever believed it, where did she go to unwind,  
what did she drink... cheers! I raise my glass to you.

With my humble praise and my everlasting gratitude,  
I hope I might bring even a shadow of your spirit just a little closer to Earth.

Thank you to everyone at Naïve, Girlie Action, The Rosebud Agency, and to Laurie Soriano,  
Errol Wander, and Christine Russell and Evolution Music Partners.