

# Motown songwriter Nick Ashford dies

By Steve Jones, USA TODAY

Updated 8/22/2011 11:40 PM

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**Nick Ashford**, who along with wife **Valerie Simpson** helped set the gold standard for R&B duets, both as songwriters and performers, died of throat cancer Monday in a **New York** hospital. He was 69.

Ashford & Simpson — you can't think of one without the other — penned and produced almost all of the '60s hits for Motown's Marvin Gaye and **Tammi Terrell**, including *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*, *You're All I Need to Get By*, *Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing* and *Your Precious Love*. They also wrote hits for **Chuck Jackson**, The Shirelles, Maxine Brown and the **Fifth Dimension**.

Ray Charles' 1966 No. 1 R&B hit *Let's Go Get Stoned* was their breakthrough record. They would later write and produce **Diana Ross'** biggest solo hits, including her signature *Reach Out and Touch (Somebody's Hand)*. They also wrote Chaka Khan's *I'm Every Woman*, which was later recorded by **Whitney Houston**.

Though they had initially performed together in 1964 as Valerie & Nick, after meeting a year earlier at Harlem's White Rock Baptist Church, they didn't fully break out as R&B stars until the late '70s and '80s with songs like *Don't Cost You Nothing*, *It Seems to Hang On*, *Found A Cure*, *Street Corner* and *Solid*. They generated excitement onstage with the tall, leonine Ashford trading harmonies with the sultry Simpson.

Ashford, who was born in Fairfield, S.C., and raised in **Willow Run**, Mich., had originally aspired to be a dancer.

The couple, who had been married since 1974, were inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2002. They recorded eight albums for **Warner Bros.**, including four that went gold, five with Capitol and two independently. Their last album, 1996's *Been Found*, was a collaboration with poet Maya Angelo.

They continued to perform sporadically and frequently hosted events at their New York restaurant, Sugar Bar.

Nick Ashford, who wrote many Motown classics with his wife Valerie Simpson, died Monday. He was 69.

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