

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Norma Fairhurst

PERSON

Fairhurst, Norma, 1943-

**Alternative Names:** Norma Fairhurst;

**Life Dates:** October 24, 1943-

**Place of Birth:** Verona, Mississippi, USA

**Residence:** Flint, MI

**Work:** MI

**Occupations:** Singer

## Biographical Note

Singer and performer Norma Fairhurst was born in Verona, Mississippi and raised in Flint, Michigan. Fairhurst and her cousin, Bertha McNeal, first sang in a group with their uncle called the Barbees, where they recorded an album for the Stepp label in 1957. Following high school and the breakup of the Barbees, Fairhurst enrolled as a student at Flint Junior College.

In 1961, while a freshman at Flint Junior College, Fairhurst was asked by her cousin to join a singing group at Western Michigan University with Mildred Arbor, Carolyn Street and Betty Kelley, which they named the Velveettes. After the quintet won a talent contest at the University, fellow student and nephew of Berry Gordy, Robert Bullock, suggested they audition for Gordy's Motown Records. The Velveettes signed to Motown in late 1962 and started recording in January of 1963. They recorded two singles in 1963: "There He Goes," which was written by Fairhurst, and "That's The Reason Why." In 1964, the Velveettes recorded and released the single "Needle In A Haystack" on Motown's VIP Records, which peaked at #45 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100. The group then recorded "He Was Really Sayin' Somethin'," which peaked at #64 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 and at #21 on the Billboard R&B Singles chart.

In September of 1964, Betty Kelley left the Velveettes to join Martha and the Vandellas. The remaining four Velveettes continued to perform and released the singles "Lonely Lonely Girl Am I" and "A Bird in the Hand (Is Worth Two in the Bush)" in 1965, and "These Things Will Keep Me Loving You," in 1966, which later became a hit in the United Kingdom peaking at #34 on the UK Singles Chart. In the late 1960s, Arbor, Fairhurst and McNeal left the group and were replaced by Sandra Tilley and Annette Rogers-McMillan. Then, in 1969, Carolyn Street married and disbanded the Velveettes. Fairhurst went on to become general manager of the Radisson Hotel in Flint, Michigan.

In 1984, four of the original Velveettes, Arbor, Fairhurst, McNeal and Street, reunited. In 1990, the group re-recorded their original hits and new songs for the album *One Door Closes* for Motorcity Records. Motown Records then released *The Very Best of the Velveettes* in 1999, *The Velveettes: The Best Of* in 2001, and *The Velveettes: The Motown Anthology* in 2004. The Velveettes are the only Motown group of the classic era still performing with the "original" line-

up.

Norma Fairhurst was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 25, 2014.

## Related Entries

**Charles Stewart Mott Community College** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Flint Southwestern Academy** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Emerson Junior High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Jefferson Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Radisson Riverfront Hotel** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**General Manager**

**Flint and Genesee Convention and Visitors Bureau**  
[EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Sales Representative**

**Stapp Records** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1957 to ?]

**Member, "The Barbees"**

**Motown Records** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1962 to 1967]

**Member, "The Velvelettes"**

**Motorcity Records** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1990 to ?]

**Member, "The Velvelettes"**

**The Barbees** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**The Velvelettes** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1961 to 1967]

**Member**

**The Velvelettes** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1984 to ?]

**Member**