

Episode Title: **Valerie June's Memphis Soul**

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of Southern Living Magazine, talks to singer/songwriter Valerie June about her grandmother's yeast rolls, working with soul legend Carla Thomas, battling diabetes, and focusing on the good things in life.

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**VALERIE AX:** You're born with the story, when you're southern. You're born with the song. It's like, oh, you're going to be born in the South? Here's your song and here's your story.

**(NEW Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)**

**Sid NARRATION:** Welcome to Biscuits and Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of Southern Living Magazine. My guest this week is one of the most exciting new voices from the South, an acclaimed singer/songwriter who followed her heart to Memphis at the age of 18. She also followed a calling to country music, despite not seeing many Black artists in the genre.

**VALERIE:** I could've given up a long time ago because everybody in the world is like, "don't you know, you Black? Why you want to sing country?" I'm like, it's not a question. It's who I am, you know?

**Sid NARRATION:** Valerie June split time as a kid between the rural towns of Humboldt and Jackson, TN, hunting in the creeks for crawdads and connecting to other wildlife around her. When she began making music, she would do open mic's at night while working at coffee shops or cleaning houses during the day. Along the way, legends began to take notice of her unique style and voice, like Booker T. Jones, Carla Thomas and even Bob Dylan, who mentioned in an interview that Valerie is one of his favorite new artists. With a range that spans from rhythm & blues to Appalachian and bluegrass, she's even penned songs for Mavis Staples and The Blind Boys of Alabama.

On today's show, Valerie tells me that attending both Black and white churches as a child helped her find her voice.

**VALERIE:** I learned how to sing the same songs from the same book two different ways. And then I found my voice in the middle. And I found also in my life that I'm always in the middle of the room when it comes to races. I'm like "Come on, y'all, let's get together."

**Sid NARRATION:** Plus the yeast rolls that were so good they got their own song, and much more this week on Biscuits & Jam. **[THEME MUSIC ENDS]**

**SID:** Well, Valerie June, welcome to Biscuits and Jam.

**VALERIE:** Thank you. Biscuits and jam, my favorite things. I made some biscuits this winter. Oh, they were so good. And I put some raspberry jam on there. Mmm. It was amazing. Raspberries with the seeds, you know.

**SID:** Oh yeah. You've got a good biscuit recipe?

**VALERIE:** I actually don't have a good biscuit recipe. I was bad. I ordered a container and it had it already together, so all I had to do was add milk.

**SID:** Well, nobody's judging.

**VALERIE:** It tasted good to me and I was the only one eating em... I mean, I put on a little pounds from it, but I'm happy with that, too.

**SID:** Well, Valerie, I've got to tell you, I'm really excited about this interview because I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee.

**VALERIE:** Oh, wow...how about that.

**SID:** And I know Memphis has been an important part of your life.

**VALERIE:** Yes, I love Memphis and I don't live there anymore. I live in, Humboldt, Tennessee, and Brooklyn, New York. And I still call Memphis home...

**VALERIE:** Because everything I do creatively, it has roots in Memphis. And even now, like my first book is out as of this week, and that's because of a lady, who I met from a Memphis connection. And she is a New York Times best-selling author. And she introduced me to her agent. And her agent found me a publisher. But that came because of Memphis. And my music because of Memphis. So...

**SID:** Well, so what are some of your favorite places to go visit when you're back in Memphis?

**VALERIE:** I really love going to Royal Studios, which I actually recorded there recently, and that was huge. I just go visit friends. I have my friends over at Loudean's, which is right near, Java Cabana Coffeehouse that my best friend owns.

**VALERIE:** But the number one place is Maggie's Pharm, which is—it's this tea shop but herb shop but beauty and care shop but holistic healing shop. And I used to work there, but I still love going to Maggie's Pharm. There's nothing like it. You walk in and the scent just overtakes you and anything you need to take care of yourself, you'll find it there. So. Beaver O' Cain, Elizabeth O'Cain is her real name. And Sue Jordan, they are the best team of ladies that are running this small business. And it's been there for over 30 years, probably going on 40 years now. And so I used to work on Maggie's Pharm, Bob Dylan!

**SID:** I love that. You all have a connection. You all have *many* connections, but now you have that one.

**VALERIE:** That's true.

**SID:** Well, Valerie, so you grew up in Humboldt, Tennessee, which is about an hour east of Memphis, kind of right down I-40 near Jackson. Right?

**VALERIE:** It is. And I was born at the Jackson General Hospital, which is, you know, I still drive by there all the time. And, I still go to Humboldt for random things, but I really—it's always been back and forth between the two towns for us because we live between the two towns. So I tend to go to Jackson a lot more and I actually tend to get all my stuff in the big cities between Memphis and Nashville and drive to Humboldt and lock myself in the house listening to birds singing and watching frogs jumping, chasing butterflies and playing with plants. So...

**SID:** What can you tell me about Humboldt? And especially as a kid, what was it like for you?

**VALERIE:** Well, we had a lot of land between the two towns, and, my parents, they built a cinder block garage and we lived in the garage and we had all this land around it so we would go outside and take showers. And nobody could see us because there are all these trees in the land. And we would just pick up crawdads and wild cats would get dropped off out there and dogs. So we have lots of wild animals around. They were not tamed. I actually got bit by a cat because my brother told me to hold it while he washed it and he sprayed shampoo and the hose on it, which got me, this wild cat...

**VALERIE:** There were snakes, lots of snakes and lizards and salamanders. We would sometimes pick up salamanders. Sometimes snakes would get in the house and stuff. And my mom would be like, “get a hoe.”

**SID:** Take care of that snake.

**VALERIE:** Mm-hmm. So this kind of stuff...I mean, is real. My country life is pretty real. Being in Humboldt, it's got the strawberry festival. So it once a year around May, the beginning of May, a carnival would come to town and everyone will be there. And you would eat funnel cakes and would ride on all these rides. And then it's like a fair. And then there would have the strawberry festival where you know, the princesses? My sister was the first Black, princess of the city of Humboldt. It's called the hostess princess, which sounds a lot like a little Debbie cake. I know, but she's like this hostess princess going down the middle of Main Street, doing her hand with the beautiful pageant wave to all sides, which is kind of important for other kids of color to see their first Black lady up there.

**VALERIE:** Going on this float. And so she broke a door open. And recently I was in the Humboldt Hall of Fame, which is kind of one of the only awards I've ever received for my music. And it's the most meaningful award I've received for my music. And they honored me in the town. I got a plaque and it just meant so much that my town was like, hey, we see you. So...

**SID:** Did you get to be in the parade?

**VALERIE:** I did! They rented me a red convertible. I got to be in the parade. Finally got to be in the parade and it was just wonderful. It's a great town. I really love that town.

**SID:** Well, so I want to ask you about food for a minute. And I'm wondering who is the cook in your family?

**VALERIE:** My mother is a really great cook, but my brother Jason is actually the absolute best cook of the family. Now, Jason is a pretty big man and he's always loved to eat. So when he cooks, he dances and he gets excited. Like he will dip the fork down in there to taste the sauce and take a little taste to be like, "Whoooo, yeah!" Get it all shaking. You know? Everything's shaking, and he'll be dancing. Ahhhhh yeah. “That's some good sauce. Y'all are gonna wanna eat that.”

**VALERIE:** It's really fun to watch him cook. And because we are all on this insane family to the extreme. I mean, it's huge. We get tons of photos of what he's grilling, what he's making in the

kitchen, what Sunday dinner is going to be. I mean, we get photos of each step along the way. You know, and it's wonderful. And he doesn't just cook. He also will go to different places around the south because he owns a construction company. So he works in different parts of, west Tennessee and he will stop in and get the best pictures of these strawberry cakes made by little old ladies at a diner or a pecan pies or different things like that. And I'm like, Jason, my mouth is watering right now. Where is this chocolate cake? Oh, it's in Nutbush, Tennessee. I'm going to get it when I get home.

**SID:** NutBush, Tennessee. I know Nutbush. That's where Tina Turner grew up, isn't that right?

**VALERIE:** It is. That's where she grew up. We also have in Humboldt, I don't know if you knew about it, but it's like the best barbecue place. It's called Sam's Barbecue. They were awarded for their barbecue because it's so amazing and they barbecue turkeys and stuff like that on the holidays and stuff.

**VALERIE:** So between going to Sam's, Jason's cooking, my mom's cooking and my cooking, we—we're good. We get a lot of food. I mean, last summer Jason dropped off these ribs. Me and my mom. Cause it was pandemic time, right? So we weren't going out to eat. We weren't doing anything. We weren't going anywhere. It was just the two of us at the house for months. And Jason pulled up this big old tin foil thing, full of ribs sopped in sauce with some greens, with some macaroni and all this stuff. And my mom and I were both like, “We love you. Thank you so much.” He was like, yeah, I've been grilling all week.

**VALERIE:** It was so good.

**SID:** All right. So the holidays have got to be a pretty big event in your house.

**VALERIE:** Oh, yeah. Holidays are definitely a treat. They really are. The biggest memory of holidays, though, is Gran's yeast rolls. Oh. Because she makes the best yeast rolls. I actually sang about them on my last record. The very first song is “Long Lonely Road” and it says, “Pile in the church pew rows. Gran makes the best yeast rolls. Gospel of stories told. 'Bout the one way to save your soul.”

**VALERIE:** Because that was my memory was the yeast rolls. I would eat as many of them as I could get in my body. I feel like gram make me an extra tray but you know she grew everything that she made and ate. The strawberry jam that we would put on the yeast rolls. They from the strawberries that were there. And she had a cellar downstairs and she would fill it up with all kinds of things, preserves and deep freezers -- Like three or four different deep freezers full of

food and frozen vegetables that she had grown. So she got through like most of the years of her life by what she got off the land. You know?

**SID:** Hmm.

**VALERIE:** And she's ninety-five now. So...

**SID:** Wow.

**VALERIE:** She's now living in, Indianapolis. So she no longer does that, but she did it till maybe she was maybe eighty-eight?

**SID:** Have you learned how to make those yeast rolls?

**VALERIE:** I haven't. And I haven't for a real good reason, and that is because I have my mom making them now.

**SID:** Oh.

**VALERIE:** So if momma starts seeming like, you know, she's not gonna be able to pull it off, then I will learn how to do it. But for now, it's like, I have to wait my turn. It was gran, now it's mom and then it'll be me.

*(EDITING: Instrumental music break -- pull from various choices -- :10 fade in/fade out)*

**SID:** So, Valerie, you've talked a lot about how the church was an important part of your growing up and it's been an important part of your musical journey. I'm just wondering if you can talk about that a little bit and what that meant to you as a kid.

**VALERIE:** Oh, yes. Well, everyone in my family sings and we all sing because when you go to church, like the Church of Christ, you use your voice as an instrument. And there aren't any instruments in the church. It's actually banned from Church of Christ is to have like, any instrument keys, drums, guitar, stuff, choruses, even. We are the chorus as we sit in the pews.

**VALERIE:** There is a song leader and there's a songbook that's maybe like nine hundred songs in there. It's pretty thick and it's all great songs. And they'll tell you which page to turn to. And everyone turns and everyone sings all together. And I have to explain this to a lot of people when I'm doing interviews in Europe or the UK because they think that this church would be

like, you know, the ones you see of Black churches on TV, where there's like a beautiful chorus of people are turning flips and stuff. But it's not like that.

**VALERIE:** We are the chorus and everyone has to use their voice. And when they use their voice, you hear a lot of different kinds of voices. You hear some voices that are very beautifully trained, other voices that are just old, young, happy, sad, a lot of voices. And I love that character of voices that I learn from the church. And I also love the messages of the songs that are still with me.

**VALERIE:** Like this world is not my home. I'm just passing through.

**VALERIE:** [sings] "My treasures are laid off somewhere beyond the Blue. The Angels beckon me from heaven's open door. And I can claim home in this world anymore..."

**VALERIE:** Because I know that this is just a body I'm in. You know? I'm bigger than this. We're all bigger than this, but we get the treat of being able to be here and be together. And so church was always the door to opening my heart and to opening my soul to the spirit and appreciation for life in each other and the world. So it's been a huge thing for me.

**SID:** So can you paint a picture of the church for me? What is it kind of look and feel like on the inside?

**VALERIE:** So let me start with gran's church, which was a small church and it's on Highway 45. So imagine this highway, which is kind of a lonesome highway, not very many cars coming down it, but it's big. And you have this little white church on the side and, it probably could hold about a hundred people, but really it only holds about 30 people. And they're old country Black folks. And they all come dressed to the T's and the 9's and the Q's and the P's and the I's. And it's amazing. And they all sing and every voice is different. But, you know, it's just so beautiful. And it's country. This is Black country music and the other church is East Jackson Church of Christ and it is a very large congregation, like maybe five hundred people.

**VALERIE:** And I mean huge. And it's mostly Black. There are a few white people who attend there and it's the same kind of voices as what would be a gran's church, but more. So 500 of them versus 30. And then when I got to be about 12, 13, 14, we moved between Humboldt and Jackson. And when we moved there, we were closer to North Jackson Church of Christ. So instead of driving all the way to East Jackson because we were Black, my parents are like, "We ain't doing that. We just go and drive right down straight to the churches right there." We showed up, it's 500 white folks. They all turned around like, [gasps], what is that Black family

doing coming in here? Seven of us....get on a pew, and we open the songbook. And I'm ready to sing. Right?

**VALERIE:** But instead of singing like, [sings deep] "This world is not my home..." You're singing, [sings higher] "This was not my home..." It's higher. It's from a different place in the body and in the head and so it's like, [sings] ahhhh, versus, [sings] hmhhh.

**VALERIE:** And I was just like, "What? How do I sing in here with these white folks?"

**VALERIE:** And I learned how to sing the same songs from the same book two different ways. And then I found my voice in the middle. And I found also in my life that I'm always in the middle of the room when it comes to races. I'm like "Come on, y'all, let's get together."

**SID:** Wow, I've never heard anyone describe the difference between two churches like that, but it's so true. I mean, there is a different kind of singing. It comes from a different place.

**VALERIE:** It is. And you can hear it in say Carter family and Mississippi John Hurt. They do some of the same songs, but his voice and his phrasing is different from theirs. But they're doing the same kind of songs, you know? So you can hear it in other artists, too.

*(EDITING: Instrumental music break of NEW Biscuits and Jam theme "Fiddler's Barn" from Epidemic Sound -- fade in/fade out)*

**SID NARRATION:** We'll continue with Valerie June, after the break.

BREAK

*(EDITING: Instrumental music break of NEW Biscuits and Jam theme -- "Fiddler's Barn" from Epidemic Sound -- fade in/fade out)*

**SID NARRATION:** Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and we're talking singer/songwriter Valerie June.

**SID:** So, Valerie, you moved to Memphis when you were still a teenager, right? Late teens.

**VALERIE:** Yeah, I was 18.

**SID:** So tell me a little bit about that move and what, that journey was like for you and what those first few months were like in Memphis, trying to kind of find your way as a musician.

**VALERIE:** Oh, I left the home, 18. My mother was on the porch, she was crying, she was mad at me. She didn't want me to move to Memphis and live in sin, shacking up with my boyfriend.

**VALERIE:** But I follow my heart. That's what I always do. I don't care. My heart said go and I followed it. But the thing about the heart, it's like a Norman and Nancy Blake—I've been friends with them in my life. And I was hanging out with them in Chattanooga. And Nancy said, “well, the heart is a muscle and it might come back and whoop your ass sometimes, but you always got to follow it.” I'm like, “yeah, I feel like it whooped me when I moved to Memphis.” Like, my parents said, “don't look back if you hit the door.” And I took it seriously. And I was so broke. And I found as many jobs as I could find and I made ends meet. You know? I was young and I wanted to go to art school but I wasn't able to because of finances. And I said, well, it's either going to be art school or it's going to be music. So I just started doing music. And I started booking bar shows and open mics and stuff. And I worked at coffee shops. I cleaned houses and worked at Maggie's Pharm. I had all these jobs, so I knew I had my money coming for paying bills and keeping the lights and the food on the table. But I also knew I was working on my craft and I did that for...I guess, maybe ten years.

**SID:** Wow.

**VALERIE:** Pretty close to ten years. Yeah.

**SID:** Long time.

**VALERIE:** Yeah. And...

**SID:** Play Beale Street? Did you play Beale street a few times?

**VALERIE:** Oh yeah, I did. I did busking on Beale but I also just would go and get invited to do Rum Boogie every once in a while.

**SID:** Oh yeah.

**VALERIE:** Or they get on stage at BB King's another manch, you know? And then once my music took off I was invited to do the Beale Street Music Festival, which is a huge treat.

**SID:** Well, so Valerie, your new album is called *The Moon and Stars: Prescriptions for Dreamers*, which I've got to say is about the coolest name I've ever heard for an album.

**VALERIE:** Thank you.

**SID:** I just love it. And I want to ask you about something that must have been a dream for a Memphis musician, and that was to have Carla Thomas, the queen of Memphis soul perform on your album. What was it like to work with such a legend?

**VALERIE:** Oh, it was amazing. What a legendary voice and a legendary person and spirit. [sighs] She, from the moment I met her that day, she wore a few red flowers pinned to her jacket and she had a cowgirl hat on and she had rings on every finger. And guess what I was wearing? I had red flowers in my hair. I had a ring on every finger and I was wearing my hair as a cowgirl hat. So...we were covered, I tell you.

**VALERIE:** And from the moment we saw each other, we just knew that this was going to be a fun day. And it was really supposed to be just 40 minutes of us doing a song, like her singing the [sings] oooo, Some Call Me a Fool. But we hung out from 10am till past midnight. We went and saw a band. We had a few glasses of wine. We had fun and dinner and walked around and I listened to her tell these stories about Otis Redding and Rufus Thomas and Memphis history, Dr. King, all of it. She is a huge well of knowledge.

**VALERIE:** She's one of the elders, her spirit is so young and she's so young and vibrant and beautiful. And—but when you think of what she's contributed to music, she is a musical elder, who paved the way for me. So I met my fairy godmother. That's what it was.

**SID:** Well, so one of her contributions on the album is to read an African proverb. And she says, "Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet." And then it goes right into this wonderful song, "Call Me a Fool." Can you tell me what inspired that proverb and the song?

**VALERIE:** Well, the record is a concept record for dreamers and everyone who has a dream, sometimes as you get older, when you have a dream, the world can usually—is not set up for dreamers and it can kind of discourage you. And you can also have a lot of fear in your heart. It's scary to decide to follow a dream. You're going down a new path. You're putting yourself out there. You're standing on the edge of the cliff. You could fall or you could soar.

**VALERIE:** And so when Carla reads the African proverb, "only a fool will test the depths of the water with both feet." She's the fairy godmother, who's warning the dreamer, are you sure you want to follow that dream? Are you sure you want to test the depth of the water? And what we all have to do is to tell the voice to saying, I'm afraid to be quiet and jump right off the—that ledge and just explore. And if we fall, we fall. Just dust off and get up. And so she's warning the

dreamer and she is this magical fairy voice. But at the end, this very wise woman voice, she is so happy that you dare to venture, that you dare to dream, that she joins you and sings the...[sings]

**VALERIE:** And she's dancing and so happy, "yeah, you did it." And I just think about other Memphis energy, like the energy of Dr. King who had this dream. And as I was watching all of the world last year with the protest and everything we're fighting for in our nation I think about that great leap he had to take with his life so that I can be a singer and do what I came to do as an African-American woman in music. He opened so many doors for me. He was that fool on the ledge, you know? And we need more dreamers in the world today, because that's the only way things like his dream stay alive, is if we keep on dreaming, even personal dreams, but dreams for humanity, too.

**SID:** Hmm. So true. Valerie, would you mind sharing just a little bit of that song?

**VALERIE:** [sings] They call me a fool. They call me a fool. A heart forlorn. A heart that's scorned. A new love born.

**VALERIE:** And then it goes into...

**VALERIE:** [sings] Thought I had it under control...

**VALERIE:** Because you can't control a dream. You can't control love. You can't control anything.

**VALERIE:** [sings] But it shook me, gripped me, grabbed my soul. Yeah.

**VALERIE:** You feel it deep in your heart. You feel it vibrating your spirit and your soul and it's calling you every single day to be courageous.

**VALERIE:** [sings] Heard it knocking, pounding on the door.

**VALERIE:** And it's pounding like, come on. Come on, you can do it.

**VALERIE:** [sings] When I knew I had to let go.

**VALERIE:** You just let go of your fear and you just take that leap. And it moves into the next verse and it's emotional. It's like, yeah, but they call me a fool.

**VALERIE:** And it just gets [grunts] visceral. It gets really emotional and powerful because you are going against the world sometimes, you know? And when you have a dream of something beautiful or something magical or loving or sweet, it could even just be having a love affair. Sometimes you got everybody against you but you know that that's what you got to do with your heart. You know? You know, you kind of moved to Memphis and leave your mother crying on the porch.

*Editing: Valerie June's "Call Me A Fool" fades in as Valerie says "Sometimes you got everybody against you," and we hear the following from approx 2:51 - 3:16 at full volume -- "You can call me a fool / Call me a fool for your love baby / And I'll be a fool anytime, I'll be a fool anytime for loving you / Ta da da ta da ta da da" Song fades out and Sid comes back in.*

**VALERIE:** Valerie, you know, you mentioned Dr. King, and I just wanted to ask you what this last year has been like for you personally as a Black artist, and especially in the wake of George Floyd's Death and the Black Lives Matter movement and everything that happened last summer?

**VALERIE:** Well....it has been...so heavy at times. And my heart is broken. But I think it was broken when I, came to Earth and I realized that we still have so long to go. And, and at that point what I started to do was focus my energy because everything is energy and I can focus my energy on the oppression and the heaviness and the heartbreak. Or I can focus my energy on my imagination, dreams, wishes, hopes, and what I see in my mind's eye for humanity and what the world can be and the way we treat each other and the way we relate to each other, kindness and mindfulness.

**VALERIE:** And seeing people beyond skin. Like I've said before, I've always been middle of the room, like, y'all come out. And so positivity is my form of activism. I saw the protest and I knew that we're in the middle of this heavy pandemic. And I'm personally—I deal with diabetes, so I'm high risk. So I was like, I can't get out there. But what I can do is start to share some of my practices of positivity. So I started to share my meditations and I started to be fearless in my mind in saying that the things that have kept me open-hearted and kept me dreaming and joyful and not allowing systems to keep me down and heavy.

**VALERIE:** Like I could've given up a long time ago because everybody in the world is like, "don't you know, you Black? Why you want to sing country?" I'm like, it's not a question. It's who I am, you know? But I just wake up every day and say, we have to put our energy into what we wish to see. And that's where my book comes in and my record comes in because it's igniting the sweetness in people's hearts. It's reminding us to dream. It's taking our minds to the moon and stars. It's given a prescription. Like what Aretha's "Respect" gives me. Or Sam Cooke, "A Change

is Gonna Come", gives me. It's giving a prescription as we come back into the world after everything we've been through, after this break and after all the loss and the heaviness and it's saying, hey, what is our dream collectively and how can we rewrite this story? Because we have the opportunity every day to rewrite it.

**SID:** And your... And you're a big part of rewriting it right now.

**VALERIE:** That's what I'm trying to do, anyway, I think we all have to right now. It's so important. Open the door.

**SID:** You know, you mentioned, diabetes and I know that that was a big challenge for you a number of years ago. And you had to overcome some real difficulties. And I'm wondering if you could talk about what learned from having to go through that and having to overcome that?

**VALERIE:** Well, diabetes is such an ever-present, thing that I have to deal with that, it teaches me something all the time. I was vegetarian for 10 years. The 10 years I lived in Memphis, when I could have been enjoying ribs. And I was super yogi and I still am that, but, you know, like jogging and everything healthy you could think about. But I was raised on neckbones and cornbread and biscuits. And so I think my body just needed to—you know, vegetarian lifestyle wasn't healthy for me. Like I was eating too many carbs and it's in my bloodline already to have diabetes. And, you know, my body just said, no, no more. So I had all of these practices in place for my dream because when I was cleaning someone's house, it was hard for me to see how I was going to get to the day when I would be making my own record and in a studio. I just couldn't even imagine.

**VALERIE:** But I just would clean and I would say “thank you because I am now radiant. Thank you. Because I am now growing. Thank you. Because I am now beautiful. Thank you. Because I am now gorgeous. Thank you. Because I am now successful.” And I did that for seven years and when I got sick I was in the bed, I couldn't get up to go to the restroom even. It was just like crawling there. Had no strength to even like open anything up. And I just kept that practice laying in the bed. I just kept sending those mantras, those prayers, that light, that sweetness through my body. Until I got enough energy, to start getting up and then enough strength to start doing yoga again, and then enough strength to start traveling the world and playing music. Because I told whoever it is when I was sitting in the emergency room, I said, “oh, you got the wrong one. It's not time for me to go. I didn't make a record yet!” So we made a deal. I bought a little more time through technology using pumps and things to stick around here. Endless lessons.

**SID:** Well, Valerie, I have one more question for you. And I just want to know, what does it mean to you to be Southern?

**VALERIE:** Oh. Wow. That's—[sighs] I almost started crying at that one. I am an African American southerner, and I do think about everything that, you know, the hands that worked the soil and the bodies and...Oh, and the growth that we are seeing in the way we relate to each other in the South. And our potential for beauty and [sighs] it's—it is resilience. It is strength. It is power. It is inspiration. It is appreciation and gratitude and humility. It's just like—you're born with the story, when you're southern. You're born with the song. It's like, oh, you're going to be born in the South? Here's your song and here's your story. So that's what it is for me. All of those words and then some. I can't even say.

**SID:** Well, what a beautiful way to put it. Valerie June, it has just been a delight to have you on Biscuits and Jam.

**VALERIE:** Thank you for having me. I'm glad we had this time. [CUT]

**NEW Biscuits theme music “Fiddler’s Barn” from Epidemic Sound fades in**

**Sid NARRATION:** Thanks for listening to my conversation with Valerie June. You can find her latest album *The Moon & Stars: Prescriptions for Dreamers*, as well as her new book, *Maps for the Modern World*, both in-stores or online.

Southern Living is based in Birmingham, AL, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, TN. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program. You can find us online at [southernliving.com](http://southernliving.com), and subscribe to our print publication by searching for Southern Living at [www.magazine.store](http://www.magazine.store).

Biscuits and Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid Evans, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Danielle Roth, Matt Sav, Erica Wong and Rachael King at Pod People.

We'll see you back here next week for more Biscuits & Jam!

**END MUSIC**