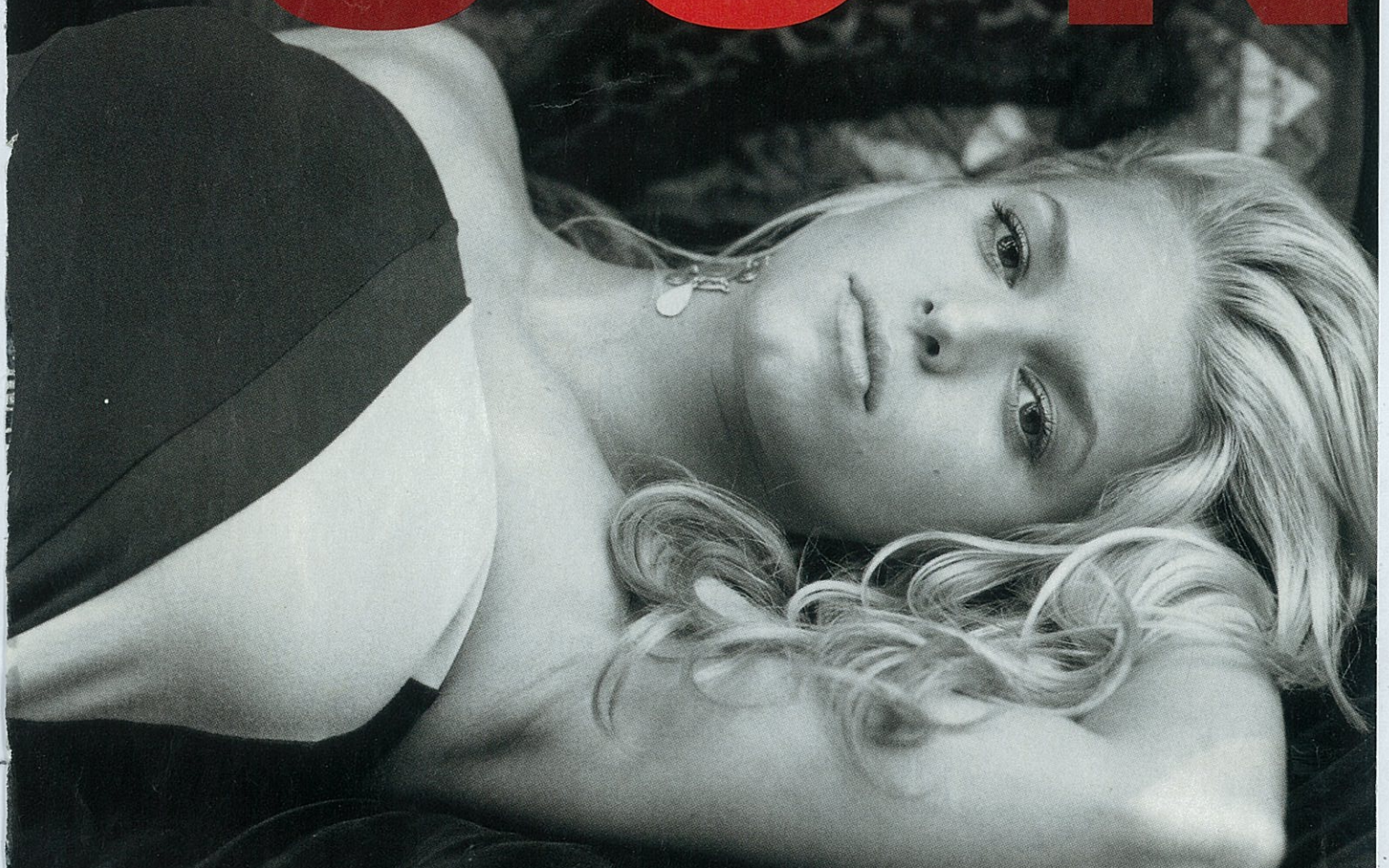


JESSICA SIMPSON



She always seemed to follow in other people's footsteps. This time, *she's* leading the way. By Lauren Brown

Who is the real Jessica Simpson? When she first came onto the scene in 1999, she was the wholesome, girl-next-door pop star whose album *Sweet Kisses* went double platinum. Despite her success, the fact remained that her debut came on the tail of Britney and Christina, so Jessica was automatically lumped in with this new crop of young blonde singers. And when Britney and Christina sexed up their images, Jessica's label pushed her to give in and do

the same. After all, sex seemed to be selling. But her newly sexual lyrics, hot pants and provocative poses for the cover of men's magazines didn't sit well with many of her fans, whose admiration for her was based on her good-girl image. Consequently, her second album, *Irresistible*, sold only about half as many copies as her debut, and Jessica's future in the music industry became a question mark. Her struggle to find herself even led to a separation from →

Nick Lachey of 98 Degrees, whom she'd been dating for about two years at the time. But now, at 23, the Texas-born singer is back, has since married Nick, and is going out on a limb to do something that none of her counterparts have: become a TV star. She's documenting her new marriage on the MTV reality show *Newlyweds: Nick & Jessica* (premiering August 4). Then, two weeks after that, she's releasing *In This Skin*, an album of autobiographical songs that she cowrote. (Nick releases his solo debut, *Soulo*, the same day.) When we caught up with Jessica, you could tell she was excited about this new phase of her life. But excitement is usually part happiness and part nerves. After all, she's got a lot riding on these projects, and this time, every mistake and misstep will be caught on tape. But with all the new hats she's wearing—songwriter, TV star, and wife—Jessica Simpson has come a long way, and she wants to tell her fans how she gained control of her life.

CosmoGIRL!: When *Irresistible* came out, you seemed really different. What was going on?

Jessica Simpson: Well, [the label] told me to tell everybody, "This is the new me—I've never been so happy." But really, I was completely miserable. I was apart from the love of my life, and I was a robot, trying to do everything that everybody was telling me to do, trying to please everybody.

CG!: What did you take away from that experience?

JS: I learned to trust my own opinions. It's hard because you have people saying they want it this way, and there are so many people to please and so many people that you have to, like, kiss the ground they walk on. There's so much politics in the music industry that you lose sight of the music. What I learned most from that record is that it should be about the music—not the image.

CG!: How would you describe your image now?

JS: I'm trying to delete the whole "image" thing. I think it's ridiculous that a pop star has to have a belly ring, show the belly—and it's not even about if the top is cute. It's just refreshing to watch, let's say, a movie star just wear a really great outfit that's not leather with chains hanging off of it!

CG!: Did you ever worry that you might not even have the opportunity to record a third album?

JS: Absolutely. After my second single, the label dropped the record, and I felt there were more singles on it. But everything happened for a reason. I get to write my own stuff now, and before, I wasn't sending out the messages that I wanted. But I do have a lot of pressure on me. I haven't had a single on the radio in two years. I gotta close my eyes, jump in, and hope for the best.

CG!: During that time, you also broke things off with Nick. Why did you make that decision?

JS: Our next step was to get married. He didn't want me to regret it, and I didn't want to regret it. I wanted to date other guys. It was the stupidest thing I've ever done, because I dated other guys, and I realized I was searching for something I already had.

CG!: What was different about those guys?

JS: They didn't respect me or my values and morals. I'd get caught up in situations that were scary. I can't believe that I left Nick like that. Now that we're back together, I *totally* have erased those five months out of my mind. All I want to remember is being with him. But he just knew I'd come around because he knew the love was real.

CG!: When Nick proposed, how did you know you were ready for marriage?

JS: He always told me he wasn't going to propose to me until I was a "woman." Like, I still had to grow up. He just wanted me to make sure that this was what I wanted to do. And so I started taking cooking lessons because I wanted him to think that I'd grown up. [Laughs.] I started cleaning up around his condo and all kinds of stuff. I guess he thought that was really cute, and I charmed him.


CG!: What are some things that the cameras are catching as you both adjust to married life?

JS: We're just finding all this stuff out about each other because we never lived together, period. I mean, he irons his *T-shirts!* There's so much we're finding out. He'll be like, "Jessica, hang up your dirty towel! It's gonna be wet, and it will never dry. You've got to hang it up!" Just stupid things. But it's cool, because it will always be documented.

CG!: You always said you'd wait to have sex until you were married. Do you regret being so open?

JS: Well, I didn't know that it was going to be such a big deal! An interviewer once asked me if I liked having sex, and I was like, "I don't have sex." Then all of a sudden, it was on the cover of magazines, and it was the biggest thing in the world. It was shocking to me that it was such a rarity. Me and my friends took the same vow together, so that was my life. I was naive to say what I said in an interview, but I don't *regret* saying it, because I think that it impacted a lot of girls.

CG!: You've got such a great attitude about everything. What do you attribute that to?

JS: My faith has definitely gotten me to where I am today. My life has been so good lately. But my faith hasn't just gotten me to where I'm at—because a *lot* of people are where I'm at. It's made me *happy* with where I'm at. I feel like I have an incredible life, and I don't have really much to complain about other than the pressure of it. 

I DATED OTHER GUYS, AND I REALIZED I WAS SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING I ALREADY HAD.

Win a T-shirt signed by Jessica, just like the one she's wearing on the cover, at cosmogirl.com! For details, see page 224.

