

Mavis Staples (b. 7/10/39) Mavis Staples was born on July 10, 1939 in Chicago, Ill. She is the youngest of four children born to Oceala and Roebuck “Pops” Staples. Her mother died when Mavis was very young, so primarily their father raised her and her three older siblings. “Pops” Staples was from Mississippi and had learned to play blues guitar there. After moving to Chicago in 1936 and playing in a gospel quartet, he eventually left the group because he felt that his band mates were not serious about music. It was then that he turned his musical attention on his three children, and the Staples Singers were formed. Mavis became the group’s lead singer at the age of 10 as they performed at various churches in Chicago and the surrounding area, and listeners couldn’t believe that a voice as mature as hers could come from such a little girl. The Staples Singers released their first recordings in 1953 on a local Chicago label and would do so on other local labels until 1957, when they signed with the Vee-Jay label and scored their first major hit, *Uncloudy Day*, in 1957.

In 1963, with their celebrity rising thanks to a nationwide folk and blues revival, the Staple Singers delivered a concert in Montgomery, Alabama that was attended by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and speaking with him after the show had a profound effect on the group’s direction. For the next several years they wrote songs exclusively in support of the American civil rights movement. During the 1960’s the group’s civil rights songs included “March Up Freedom’s Highway,” about the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery marches, “Washington We’re Watching You,” “It’s a Long Walk to D.C.” and “Why Am I Treated So Bad,” in honor of the Little Rock Nine.

In the 1970’s the Staples Singers also began to move away from traditional gospel and protest songs to record empowerment anthems such as “Respect Yourself” and “I’ll Take You There” and soulful R&B love songs like “Let’s Do It Again,” their only song to reach No.1 on the charts. Although Mavis also maintained a solo career beginning in 1969 with her self-titled debut album, and continued to release solo albums for the next two decades, none of them found much of an audience. That pattern changed with Staples 2004 album *Have A Little Faith*, her first release following the death of her father in 2000. This recording began a late career renaissance and Her most recent album, 2010’s *You Are Not Alone*, won the Grammy Award for Best Americana album.