

**Mavis Staples**, born in 1939 in Chicago, Illinois, is an American rhythm and blues and gospel singer and civil rights activist who recorded with The Staple Singers, her family's band.

Mavis Staples began her career with her family group in 1950. Initially singing locally at churches and appearing on a weekly radio show, the Staples scored a hit in 1956 with "Uncloudy Day". When Mavis graduated from high school in 1957, The Staple Singers took their music on the road. Led by family patriarch Roebuck "Pops" Staples on guitar and including the voices of Mavis and her siblings Cleo, Yvonne, and Pervis, the Staples were called "God's Greatest Hitmakers."

With Mavis' voice and Pops' songs, singing, and guitar playing, the Staples evolved from enormously popular gospel singers to become the most spectacular and influential spirituality-based group in America. By the mid-1960s The Staple Singers, inspired by Pops' close friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr., became the spiritual and musical voices of the civil rights movement. They covered contemporary pop hits with positive messages, including Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall" and a version of Stephen Stills' "For What It's Worth."

During a December 20, 2008 appearance on National Public Radio's news show "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me," when Staples was asked about her past personal relationship with Dylan, she admitted they "were good friends, yes indeed" and that he had asked her father for her hand in marriage.

Staples made her first solo foray with The Staple Singers releasing a lone single "Crying in the Chapel" to little fanfare in the late 1960s. The single was finally re-released on the 1994 Sony Music collection *Lost Soul*. Her first solo album would not come until a 1969 self-titled release.

In 2004, Staples contributed to a Verve release by legendary jazz/rock guitarist, John Scofield. The album entitled, *That's What I Say*, was a tribute to the great Ray Charles, and led to a live tour featuring Mavis, John Scofield, pianist Gary Versace, drummer Steve Hass, and bassist Rueben Rodriguez. A new album *We'll Never Turn Back* was released on April 24, 2007. The Ry Cooder-produced concept album focuses on Gospel songs of the civil rights movement and also included two new original songs by Cooder.

Her voice has been sampled by some of the biggest selling hip-hop artists, including Salt 'N' Pepa, Ice Cube and Ludacris. Mavis Staples has recorded with a wide variety of musicians, from her friend Bob Dylan (with whom she was nominated for a 2003 Grammy Award in the "Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals" category for their duet on "Gotta Change My Way of Thinking" from the album *Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan*) to The Band, Ray Charles, Nona Hendryx, George Jones, Natalie Merchant, Ann Peebles, and Delbert McClinton. She has provided vocals on current albums by Los Lobos and Dr. John, and she appears on tribute albums to such artists as Johnny Paycheck, Stephen Foster and Bob Dylan.

