

**This interview with  
MAVIS STAPLES  
was conducted by the Library of Congress  
on October 30, 2019**



**Library of Congress: When you think back to the “Soul Folk in Action” album, what immediately comes to mind?**

Mavis Staples: My first thought from that time, looking back now, is just how much I love all of the songs from that album. It was our very first album at Stax, and we were blessed to be working with Steve Cropper as a producer. He first brought us “The Weight” and Pops said it would be all right for us to sing it--and I'm still singing that song today.

**LC: When you and your family recorded “Soul Folk in Action,” you had just been signed to Stax records. What was the reason for the move to that new label?**

MS: We signed in the summer and started recording early that fall. We had been recording for Epic just prior, and toward the end of that deal we started playing more folk and rock material, performing for younger kids. We weren't doing as much gospel work at that point, but our message songs were coming across to young people--Pops said we were taking the gospel to the clubs. And I think the Stax people realized that and decided we would fit in with what they were trying to build after the success of Otis Redding.

**LC: What was the family dynamic and work dynamic like in the studio and, by that I mean, were the song selections and vocal parts already worked out or was this explored/developed in the studio?**

MS: It was big fun in the studio. We were excited to make a full album and we felt like we were open to some new ideas. But we always rehearsed before we got in the studio to save money, so we knew our parts, took care of business, and couldn't wait to hear the songs back. I think we only took about four or five days to make the record.

**LC: “Soul Folk” certainly tackles the Civil Rights movement within its song cycle. Was addressing this an intent when you began planning the album? Were you at all concerned about addressing such political themes?**

MS: Dr. King had just been shot when we started, and we knew what time it was. And the songwriters knew Pops wanted to spread Dr. King's message and that Pops had said to read the headlines when writing songs for the Staples. And "Long Walk to D.C." was right on time: *"It's a long walk to D.C. but I got my walking shoes on."* So was "Got To Be Some Changes Made." We were aware of the struggle going on and we wanted to help in the fight for our rights.

**LC: Why do you think that this album, among the many albums done by you and your family, has proved to have such staying power?**

MS: I think the content of each song was so strong, and we tried some new things, and captured it all in such a short span of time that you can feel something special in it. The album title tells the listener exactly what they're about to hear: gospel, folk, and soul....and we delivered.