



The sound of the Staple Singers, was part of the 70s, soulful civil rights songs such as the often covered +Respect Yourself and +I'll Take You There'. Three sisters (including Mavis who records with Prince) outfront and Pops Staples singing along. Before phoning Pop I figured if Mavis is over 40, how old is her father? He's 76 and starting a solo career. Good timing.

Today there's the usual international toll delay and then Pops is no speed freak. His laconic Southern style is part of his charm. And he's not sitting on a shady veranda in the south.

"I'm in Chicago, at home." Pop migrated north like so many others, leaving the Mississippi, for urban economic opportunities. The train still runs — "The City of New Orleans" — leaves Louisiana, heads North to Memphis then concludes its journey in Chicago.

Starting out as a folksy gospel group, the Staple Singers toughened up in the 70s, called themselves "The Staples" and echoing the Church-based Civil Rights movement and even the growing Afro-American consciousness.

"We were singing before Dr King started preaching. When he started I told my children this is what needs to be heard, and if Dr King can preach it, we can sing it. So let's sing protest songs and songs that are an inspiration to the world. He called us and we would go all over the country singing and he was preaching and it was that way until he got killed, we were very close to him..."

Just as Pops releases his album *Peace to the Neighbourhood*

How far have you come from your Gospel roots?

"No, as far as I'm concerned I haven't come nowhere from it because we are singing contemporary gospel, constructive songs that people need to hear. All we tryin' to say in songs, everybody want to be treated right and I don't see why it's so hard."

Pops sadly describes the USA as "racist."

"You can go to Cuba, some of their people are as black as we are, and they treat them as if they were a white Cubans, they treat them all the same but here we are treated different and we built this country, the black people built this country as slaves."

For Pops and the Staple Singers their music career took them back to Memphis and the Stax soul label to record their No.1 hit 'I'll Take You There'. And Pops recorded his new album *Peace to the Neighbourhood* in Memphis too, this time with Al Green producer Willie Mitchell.

On two traditional tracks on *Peace to the Neighbourhood*, Pop Staples works with Ry Cooder producing and playing guitar while Bonnie Raitt and Jackson Browne join Pops on Browne's 'World in Motion'.

"Bonnie Raitt saw us in New Orleans. She was raised up on our music. She wanted to come in and sing and produce a song 'World in Motion'. Bonnie was so nice to give up some of her precious time, on her birthday she came in to sing with us."

Mavis Staples must be the talk of the Staples' family, recording and touring with Prince.

"She gonna make another record with Prince and she's gonna say some gospel stuff in there with the next record she do."

But for now Pops' mind is on finding a record label for a new Staple Singers album — going "solo" doesn't seem to have gone to his head.

MURRAY CAMMICK

Tell the Spirals' Belinda Bradley that she reminds you of a cross between Belinda Carlisle and Kate Pierson and she'll shake her head at mention of the sugary pop diva, but concede a B52s comparison might be valid. The Spirals have suffered from perceptual pre-conceptions in the past and they're not going to let it happen again with the release of their new single 'Normal'.

Their self-produced *Three Graces* album released in 1988 inspired comments like "acceptable if not exceptional" from the normally hyperbolic *Herald* critic Dominic Roskrow. Back then the general consensus about the group was "nice", a word that makes Bradley cringe.

"Yeah, it was 'nice', that's how people described it. 'The Spirals are a really good pop band, they have a lot of potential, it's nice music'. We'd read that and go, 'we're not trying to be nice, we want to affect people'. Love us or hate us, but don't call us nice."

On the evidence of 'Normal', the Spirals are still rather nice,

but with enough pop sass to land them somewhere on the charts. "Yes, it is really commercial and it is a radio song, but it's a song song," says Bradley. "The guitar for us is really important and we're really happy with the guitar sounds and the layering because that is very much us. The B-side is a little bit more indicative of where some of the live show is going. Our live show takes the audience on a much bigger musical journey, for want of a better phrase. It can get really full-on and loud. I think a lot of people who saw us a couple of years ago when we released the album would see a band who has grown up a lot if they came and saw us now."

A strong reaction to the single is imperative if the Spirals



SPIRALS

are going to get the green light from BMG to record a new album. Bradley says they have a stockpile of material ready, songs that are more aggressive ("in a good way") and focused. The clean, chimy guitars of old are out, 'attitude' is in.

"The rule now is no rules," she says. "We used to really worry about what people thought, or what was musically correct. Who gives a stuff. If it works it works."

As to whether the Spirals are a pop or rock group, Bradley hedges with "both". "We were a real pop band a few years back. We changed bass players because as much as we liked the guy, we found that we just couldn't make the music we wanted to make happen. I'm not saying we're there yet, but as a band we're really happy with where we're at musically at the moment."

As Bradley says, the Spirals are never going to be the sort of band that can fart and a journalist is going to run up and record it.

"For us, it's going to have to be the music that paves the way. We're not saying we're pushing down any boundaries. We hope that the music we make is fresh and unique and I

sort of think that it is."

Back-up vocals on 'Normal' (about how nobody really is) are supplied by Annie Crummer and the Holidaymakers' Barbara Griffen, two of the many strong female vocalists (like Jackie Clarke, Charlotte Yates, Janet Roddick) who all seem to reside in Wellington these days. Bradley says she is more influenced by male than female vocalists (current fave bands include the Pixies, Nirvana and the Red Hot Chili Peppers), but she does cite Annie Lennox as a major inspiration for live performance.

As for the rumour that the Spirals are a "Christian" band, Bradley replies that yes, they have a faith, but they really don't want to be pigeonholed for it because it's "absolutely misunderstood." It does seem an irrelevancy when considering this band make no reference to such matters in their music.

"We're just a band who make music and that's all we want to be judged on," she says. "Our faith is something personal, we're not ashamed of it, we're not embarrassed about it, but hey, we're ordinary people, that's all there is to it."

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