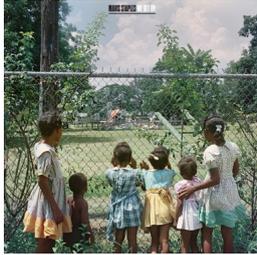


## MAVIS STAPLES: 'We Get By' (Anti-)

Written by Charles Waring

Thursday, 23 May 2019 10:38 - Last Updated Friday, 24 May 2019 18:28

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**Mavis Staples** just seems to get better with time. She'll be 80 in July but in the last decade she's recorded some of her best work as a solo artist. Though some singers inevitably lose their voices as they get older, Mavis's, like a vintage wine, has undoubtedly improved with time, gaining deeper textural nuances and a weathered sense of gravitas that makes everything she sings sound holy and profound. Her pairing up with alt-blues maven-turned-producer Ben Harper is an inspired alliance and together, the two have created a memorable sequence of songs that will resonate deeply with those who are acutely sensitive to the polarised world of haves and have nots that we continue to live in.

As a Civil Rights activist in the 50s and 60s, Mavis Staples knows all about division and prejudice and listening to this 11-song collection, it's as if the Trump era has taken us back to year zero and that all the victories she fought so hard for alongside Martin Luther King have been consigned to history's forgotten backpages. But the album is not just a bleak indictment of the current troubles that continue to besiege this planet but also pays testament to the spirit of simple human decency and offers a scintilla of hope in what seems a forlorn, hopeless world. From the robust and tense opener, a fuzz-toned blues shuffle called 'Change,' you know that Mavis is doing some serious preaching. "*What good is freedom if we haven't learned to be free,*" she hollers and it's a sentiment that will resonate with many. The urgency of this call to action contrasts with the uplifting stoicism of the title track, the Staples Singers-like storytelling philosophising of 'Anytime' and the simmering funk of 'Brothers And Sisters,' a message about the value of a togetherness in a fractured world.

The power of love is the inspiration behind the Bible-referencing 'Stronger' while 'Heavy On My Mind' is a pensive ballad where Mavis's voice is accompanied by a lone shimmering electric guitar *a la* Pops Staples. More rousing is 'Sometime,' which hitches a ride on a simple gospel-soul backbeat accentuated by handclaps. 'Chance On Me' is attractive with its jaunty rhythmic gait, while 'One More Change,' the closing track, is a sombre epilogue about faith, resolve and determination.

This is not so much a collection of songs but rather a compendium of heartfelt pleas, prayers and parables whose theme is hope for a better future: a future that unlike the cover picture of

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the album isn't defined by barriers, discrimination and segregation. Mavis Staples has made many fine solo albums over the years but this one is arguably her best yet: it's powerful yet sensitive, nakedly honest yet uplifting and hopeful. In these benighted times, it shines like a much-needed beacon of light.

(CW) 5/5