

THE STAPLE SINGERS: The Very Best Of (Label: Stax)

Written by Charles Waring

Thursday, 08 November 2007 10:55



Any seasoned soul fan worth his or her salt will probably possess numerous Stax 'Best Of' compilations in their respective record and CD collections. However, novices seeking to acquaint themselves with a Stax act or two - or even inveterate collectors looking to update their collections - will find something of interest in a newly remastered batch of 'Very Best Of' titles issued by the revitalised Memphis soul label. The stellar Stax careers of William Bell, Eddie Floyd, Albert King, Rufus Thomas, Little Milton, Johnnie Taylor, Isaac Hayes, Booker T & The MGs and the Dramatics are all individually featured in a clutch of new Rob Bowman-annotated compilations. The one that caught my ear, however, is devoted to those pioneers of gospel-infused soul, the Staple Singers. Led by Mavis's lusty, volcanic vocals and Pops' blues-drenched guitar, the quartet's unique brand of sanctified Windy City soul achieved global popularity thanks to memorable songs like 'Respect Yourself' and 'I'll Take You There' in the early '70s. Naturally, both those tunes are included on this sterling 20-track retrospective, which also features 'Heavy Makes You Happy,' 'If You're Ready (Come Go With Me),' 'Touch A Hand, Make A Friend' and 'City In The Sky.' The remastered sound quality is excellent and its transparency allows every nuance of the original recordings to shine through. Bowman's perceptive liner notes are a bonus, too, helping to reaffirm the fact that when it came to message-laden gospel-soul, the Staples were absolutely peerless. If, perchance, you're searching for the meaning of soul, have no qualms - you'll find it here.

(CW) 4/5