

Aretha Franklin (†) - Songs Of Faith (1956)



A1 There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood 4:31 A2 Precious Lord (Part One) 3:26 A3 Precious Lord (Part Two) 2:53 A4 You Grow Closer 2:42 A5 Never Grow Old 2:56 B1 The Day Is Past And Gone 4:59 B2 He Will Wash You White As Snow 4:19 B3 While The Blood Runs Warm 3:07 B4 Yield Not To Temptation 3:00 Aretha Franklin - vocals, piano

Aretha Franklin started singing in her father's church at a very young age. Her debut album, 1956's *Songs of Faith*, came out when she was just 14. It wasn't until the mid-Sixties, however, that the rest of the world learned of Aretha's brilliance after she signed to Atlantic and began an incredible run of hits that included "I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)," "Respect," "(You Make Me Feel) Like A Natural Woman," "Think" and many, many others. In 2008 *Rolling Stone* named her the greatest singer of all time. "Aretha is a gift from God," Mary J. Blige said in that issue. "When it comes to expressing yourself through song, there is no one who can touch her. She is the reason why women want to sing." ---rollingstone.com

In 1968, Franklin told a journalist from the American magazine *Downbeat* that she would always sing properly, from the stomach, when she was able to sit at the piano and think about what she was doing; but the necessities of self-presentation increasingly forced her to stand before her audiences, at which point she would lose her self-possession to some extent and start singing from the throat. Thus her style arrived – not in a flash of light, necessarily, but in a collision between the unschooled tendencies of her voice and the demands of showbusiness. You can hear that during the ad libs towards the close of "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman", in the fills between the lines of "Chain of Fools" – or on numerous other occasions where she leaves the written melody behind and ventures off to form her own. No female soul singer at full stretch remains quite so concentrated in the throat; pushed to its limits, her voice will tend to

growl, not boom. She began to learn control in the Fifties as a guest singer on CL Franklin's touring sermon shows. On *Songs of Faith* – the album made with her father in 1956 – she is only 14, the piano sounds as if it has been commandeered from the saloon bar scenes in a cheap Western and the recording overall is subject to long periods of indefiniteness, such that you suspect fur was used in preference to tape. But during the ecstatic "Precious Lord", you hear clearly how her church singing functioned, not mysteriously as an act of self-transcendence, but as an extended exercise in breathing, an opportunity to perfect a tactic she would deploy countless times – snatching an unexpected last gasp from a line where you might reasonably have thought she had run out of breath. (Compare, in 1974, her staggered building of the bridge on the version of Stevie Wonder's "Until You Come Back to Me".) The illusion is a canny one, granting the impression that you're getting more than the song could be made to sustain by any ordinary singer.

Gospel informed her later vocal arrangements, too. On *Songs of Faith* her voice picks a line through the noisy approval of the audience (her father's beefy "Yes", the shouted interjections of the choir and congregation). Her lines encourage a response and she is in turn encouraged to go higher. The reciprocal nature of this is later heard in her interplay with her backing vocalists, on the call and response effects in "Think" and "Respect", in the tradeoffs in the chorus of "I Say A Little Prayer" (one of the few pop songs in which the backing vocalists take all the strain at the song's key moments, while the lead singer offers pieces of punctuation). Franklin regularly did this arranging herself, and saw the virtue in keeping her partners consistent, and in cultivating the right company (she favoured on nearly all her big hits, Cissy Houston – mother of Whitney – and the Sweet Inspirations). ---independent.co.uk

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