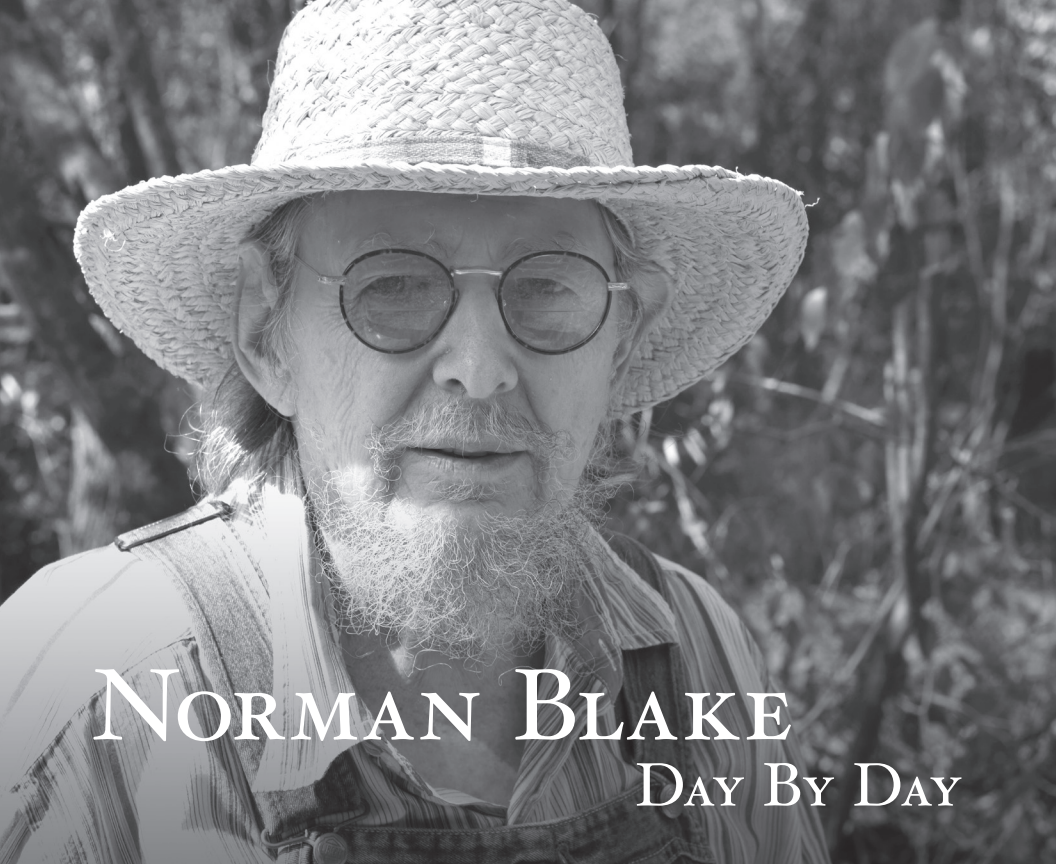


NORMAN BLAKE

A photograph of an elderly man, Norman Blake, standing on a dirt path in a wooded area. He is wearing a straw hat, sunglasses, a red and white striped shirt, and blue denim overalls. The path is surrounded by dense green foliage and trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The overall scene is peaceful and rural.

DAY BY DAY



NORMAN BLAKE

DAY BY DAY

1. **When the Roses Bloom** 4:03
(George Evans-arr. by Alvin Pleasant Carter/Peer International Corp., BMI)
2. **Just Tell Them That You Saw Me** 2:38
(Paul Dresser-arr. by Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
3. **I'm Free Again** 3:36
(Arr. by Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
4. **Old Joe's March** 2:38
(Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
5. **Montcalm and Wolfe** 6:25
(Arr. by Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
6. **Three Leaves of Shamrock** 6:25
(James McGuire-melody & arr. by Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
7. **Time** 2:54
(Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
8. **The Dying Cowboy** 3:55
(Arr. by Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)
9. **My Home's Across the Blue Ridge Mountains** 4:39
(Arr. by Norman Blake/Blake & Blake Music, BMI)



INTRODUCTION

JEFF PLACE

NORMAN BLAKE has had a long and illustrious career as a stellar acoustic guitarist and flat picker. Blake, who plays many instruments in addition to guitar, has performed with some of the biggest names of 20th-century American music, and his musical vision has greatly influenced the folk music tradition in the United States. Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1938, Blake moved to Sulphur Springs, Georgia, as a child.

Starting with local bands as a teenager, Blake eventually landed in the early 1960s in Nashville, where he worked as a studio musician. He joined the band for television's *Johnny Cash Show*, and recorded with Cash on and off for over 35 years. During this time, he met cellist Nancy Short, whom he would marry and perform with as a musical partner for the rest of his career. The Blakes have lived in Rising Fawn, Georgia, a small town just across the Alabama border, for the past 45 years.

During his career, Blake came to be a central figure in the key American roots music revivals. Blake is featured on Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline* record in 1969 and contributed to the legendary country and bluegrass collection, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* (1972), with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and some of the greatest stars in the history of country music. He played with John Hartford on his *Aereo-Plain* album (1971), said to be a precursor to the "newgrass" movement in the 1970s. In 2002, Blake's contribution to a renewed national interest in bluegrass and old-time music came from his participation in the soundtrack for *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, for which he

won a Grammy. With nine Grammy nominations to date, Blake has been at the front and center of the biggest cultural shifts in American roots music.

Blake has an extensive repertoire that consists of older tunes and songs, many dating to the 19th and early 20th centuries. He learned these songs from others with whom he played around home, as well as from classic 78 rpm records. His repertoire covers everything from the Tin Pan Alley era to early classic country and string band music. As his fans have noted, “Many of Norman’s songs are so old they seem like new.” A Norman Blake album can be a grand trip through the history of American music, with some original songs by Blake thrown in.

After recording for many labels over the years—Flying Fish, Rounder, and Shanachie among them—Blake released *Be Ready Boys* with guitarist Rich O’Brien in 1999 on the Western Jubilee Recording Company label. In 2004, Blake’s own label, Plectrafone Records—the old-time-country division of Western Jubilee Recording Company—released *The Morning Glory Ramblers*. Though his music has been in high demand throughout his career, Blake rarely recorded prior to his run with Plectrafone. *Day by Day* is the eighth consecutive release featuring Norman Blake on Plectrafone Records.

In 2020, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings acquired Plectrafone Records, along with its sister label Western Jubilee Recording Company. Both labels were significant additions to the Smithsonian Folkways archive for their thorough documentation of western, cowboy, and old-time music. Plectrafone was especially noteworthy because it highlighted Blake’s highly influential stylings, especially the musically focused second half of his legendary career. In all, the acquisition included eight Plectrafone albums that featured Blake.

The songs on this collection come from the storehouse in Norman Blake’s amazing and vivid



musical memory. It is always an adventure when Blake reaches into his song bag to see what he'll pull out. They include Blake's versions of old American folk songs, such as "Montcalm and Wolfe" and the Appalachian Mountain song, "My Home's Across the Blue Ridge Mountains."

Some of the songs included have roots in 19th-century commercial publishing, such as those found in theatrical productions or in popular songbooks that participants in informal musical gatherings shared widely. Many people of that era grew up with and learned these songs. These songbooks came from some of the most prolific American music publishing companies, located in New York City, in a booming enterprise known as Tin Pan Alley. Songwriters composed (or "collected") songs that these companies pitched to musical theaters, circuses, and minstrel shows. When published in popular songbooks, they entered the repertoires of many of the singers and musicians who began recording after the invention of the phonograph in 1877.

Recorded on commercial wax cylinders and 78 discs, these songs and their variants continued to thrive into the 20th century, eventually turning up in country and bluegrass music—though often with different interpretations that altered or updated the lyrics and sometimes even the melodies.

Day by Day was included in the Smithsonian Folkways acquisition of Plectrafone and Western Jubilee, but never before released until now. The album includes nine songs recently recorded in a studio in Fort Payne, Alabama, near Blake's home. Because Blake has been off the road for some years, we are fortunate to have new music from him here, featuring some of his favorites chosen from the many that have become staples in his repertoire over the years.

REFLECTIONS BY NORMAN BLAKE

EVERYTHING THAT I'VE EVER DONE all the way through my whole career has been a grand experiment. The albums I've recorded have almost always included songs that are meaningful to me at that particular time. But most of these recordings are just old stuff that's been around that just happens to hit me. I couldn't really define the reason why. I'm not complete without the music and it's just a statement of where I am at a given time. The material is always the main thing with me; I consider my performance to be a very humble part of it. It's part of what I leave behind, and is the way I look at it. I've done this all my life. And it's just part of what I am and what I do.

These recordings are age appropriate, and I am comfortable with them. They were done live in the studio in one afternoon. There are pick and fingernail noises that are part of the performance, but I feel the material overshadows these imperfections.

Norman Blake



SONGS

1. **When the Roses Bloom**

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar

George “Honey Boy” Evans (1870–1915) wrote this song in 1913, while leading the Honey Boy Minstrels, a well-known group of the time. As with most minstrel acts during this period, the Honey Boy Minstrels incorporated derogatory racial stereotypes into their performances.

Blake learned this song from a recording by the Carter Family (Victor 40229, 1930), when it was known as “When the Roses Bloom in Dixieland.” The shortened title removes the nostalgic reference to the antebellum South, which became known as Dixie for reasons still debated. One theory is that the name comes from the French word *dix* (meaning ten), which appeared on currency (known as “dixies”) issued by the Citizens’ Bank of New Orleans. Another theory traces the name to the Mason–Dixon Line which generally divided Northern free states from Southern slave states. Like many of the songs adopted and adapted by the Carter Family, this song has become a foundational classic of American country music.

2. **Just Tell Them That You Saw Me**

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar

The composer of this song, Paul Dresser (1859–1906), was a Tin Pan Alley songwriter and actor who performed in medicine shows and minstrel shows in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His younger brother, Theodore Dreiser, was a critically acclaimed novelist. This song was one of Dresser’s most popular compositions and was used in a wide variety of minstrel shows across





the United States. He was also a partner in the sheet music firm, Howley, Haviland & Co., which published this song in 1895—the same year that George Gaskin recorded it on an Edison wax cylinder. Numerous singers recorded it in the 1920s, including Vernon Dalhart, Uncle Dave Macon, and Buell Kazee.

3. **I'm Free Again**

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar

Also known as “I’m Free at Last,” this is a version of “I’m Free Again,” a song recorded by Mac & Bob (Lester McFarland and Robert Gardner) (Brunswick 164, 1927). Blake changed the order of the verses and added some of his own, thus creating his own version.

4. **Old Joe's March**

Norman Blake, five-string banjo

This is an original composition by Norman Blake.

5. **Montcalm and Wolfe**

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar

“Montcalm and Wolfe” (also known as “Brave Wolfe”) is a broadside ballad that appeared shortly after the battle it describes from 1759, during the French and Indian War. Balladeers often used newsworthy events to compose songs that they printed on broadside sheets and then circulated widely, shared among people hungry for current information.



British General James Wolfe (1727–1759) and the French Marquis de Montcalm (1712–1759) were opposing generals at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in Quebec. Both died in the battle—won by the British. According to legend, Wolfe’s dying words were, “Now I will die in peace,” after hearing that his troops were victorious. His legacy in this battle established him as a folk hero.

Folklorists Frank and Anne Warner collected folk songs from the 1930s through the 1960s in New York’s Adirondack Mountains. Among their informants was Yankee John Galusha, who performed this song for them. Blake learned the song from Galusha’s version.

6. Three Leaves of Shamrock

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar

Written by James McGuire ca. 1889, this song of Irish emigration (also known as “Leaving Dear Old Ireland”) was popular on both sides of the Atlantic. North Carolinian Charlie Poole recorded a well-known version of the song as “Leaving Dear Old Ireland” in 1929. Blake’s version is a composite of Charlie Poole and Mac & Bob’s, but the melody is Blake’s own.

7. Time

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar

This is another original composition by Norman Blake.

8. **The Dying Cowboy**

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar; The Rising Fawn String Ensemble:
Nancy Blake, cello; James Bryan, fiddle; Joel McCormick, guitar

“The Dying Cowboy” is a variant of a song that dates to the 18th century, “The Unfortunate Rake.” The rake was a young soldier “draped in white linen” who was dying. “The Unfortunate Rake” itself is related to earlier ballads from the British Isles, such as “The Bard of Armagh” and “Handful of Laurel.” It has other variants in the United States, notably “The Cowboy’s Lament” and “Streets of Laredo.” According to Blake, song collector Joseph Hall gathered this version in East Tennessee in 1939.

9. **My Home’s Across the Blue Ridge Mountains**

Norman Blake, vocal, guitar; The Rising Fawn String Ensemble: Nancy Blake, vocal, cello;
James Bryan, fiddle; Joel McCormick, vocal, guitar; David Hammonds, vocal

Louise Rand Bascom collected a version of this song in western North Carolina, and published the lyrics in the *Journal of American Folklore* (1909). Numerous recordings exist, including versions by Kelly Harrell, the Carolina Tar Heels, and the Carter Family in the 1920s. After former Carolina Tar Heel Clarence Ashley revived it in the 1960s, it entered many a musician’s song bag. In true folk fashion, Blake tinkered with the melody and lyrics, noting that he “doesn’t think it’s wrong to take the liberty to change things around a bit.” This common practice is part of the folk process in the American song canon.



Norman and/or Nancy Blake Recordings on Plectrafone Records and Western Jubilee Recording Company

Be Ready Boys (Appalachia to Abilene). 1999. (with Rich O'Brien).

High Lonesome Cowboy (Appalachia to Abilene). 2002. Featuring Peter Rowan and Don Edwards with Norman and Nancy Blake, Tony Rice, Billy and Bryn Bright.

The Morning Glory Ramblers. 2004. (with Nancy Blake).

Back Home in Sulphur Springs. 2005. (with Nancy Blake).

Shacktown Road. 2007. (with Nancy Blake and Tut Taylor).

Rising Fawn Gathering. 2009. (with Nancy Blake, the Boys of the Lough, James and Rachel Bryan).

Green Light on the Southern. 2011. (with Nancy Blake).

Wood, Wire & Words. 2015. (with Nancy Blake).

Brushwood Songs & Stories. 2017. (with Nancy Blake).

CREDITS

Produced by Norman Blake

Executive producer: Scott O'Malley

Recorded, mixed, and mastered by David Hammonds at Cook Sound Studios, Fort Payne, Alabama

Mastering assistant: Ray Gressett

Annotated by Jeff Place

Creative Consultant: Dom Flemons

Photos by Christi Carroll

Smithsonian Folkways executive producers: Huib Schippers, Daniel E. Sheehy, and John Smith

Production managers: Mary Monseur and Logan Clark

Production assistant: Kate Harrington

Editorial assistance by Carla Borden and James Deutsch

Smithsonian Folkways is: Cecille Chen, director of business affairs and royalties; Logan Clark, executive assistant; Toby Dodds, director of web and IT; Will Griffin, licensing manager; Kate Harrington, production assistant; Madison Hart, royalty analyst; Fred Knittel, marketing specialist; Seth Langer, licensing assistant; Helen Lindsay, customer service representative; Mary Monseur, production manager; Jeff Place, curator and senior archivist; Sayem Sharif, director of financial operations; Daniel Sheehy, interim director and curator; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, associate director; Jonathan Williger, marketing manager; Brian Zimmerman, sales and customer service specialist.

Norman Blake plays a John Arnold 1995 Nancy Blake Special guitar and a Fairbanks-Vega Senator Model (1910) banjo. On tracks 8 & 9, he plays a 1937 Gibson J-35 guitar.

Norman Blake is managed by Scott O'Malley & Associates / Artist & Publishing Representation
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Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In this way, we continue the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the production, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Folkways, Arhoolie, A.R.C.E., Blue Ridge Institute, Bobby Susser Songs for Children, Collector, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Educational Activities, Fast Folk, Mickey Hart Collection, Monitor, M.O.R.E., Paredon, Right on Rhythm, UNESCO and Western Jubilee recordings are all available through:

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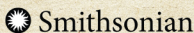
PLECTRAFONE
RECORDS



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 7. Time 2:54
 8. The Dying Cowboy 3:55
 9. My Home's Across the Blue Ridge Mountains 4:39
-

Guitarist Norman Blake is one of the unsung heroes of 20th-century folk music. With nine Grammy nominations and several dozen albums under his own name and with his wife Nancy Blake, his long and storied career includes stints with Johnny Cash and Kris Kristofferson, features on Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*, and performances on the seminal *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack. *Day By Day* is a collection of single-take recordings of original and traditional tunes, ranging from solo guitar and five-string banjo to ensemble performances with The Rising Fawn String Ensemble, which show Blake reaching back to the roots of country and old-time music. It is a rich, poignant send-off to one of folk music's most enduring voices.

Produced by Norman Blake



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