

Bluegrass is not the only commercial country music which has been interesting for folklorists, but for years it stood apart because it used acoustic instruments as opposed to the slick, electrified modern Nashville sound. Norman Blake provides an excellent example of middle ground. His instrumentation is acoustic, but not played in bluegrass style. Charlie Collins provides the bulk of the backup on either fiddle or 2nd guitar. Tut Taylor provides some very clean dobro backup on two cuts, and Nancy Short plays bowed cello on five cuts. Noticeably missing is the strong bass accent, the syncopated "chunk," of bluegrass bands. Instruments are held to a minimum (never more than three on one cut) and the vocal or lead instrument is always foregrounded. Some of the high points of the album come for me in the harmonic interplaying of the guitar and cello on "The Fields of November."

Norman Blake is an important contributor of new material to country music. Several of his pieces have been recorded by bluegrass bands, mainly the New Grass Revival. His music represents a younger generation of southern songsters who are musically sophisticated and yet preserve an identifiable connection with both their immediate predecessors in country music, centered around Nashville, and the older and more diffuse tradition of southern dance tunes.

Old and New. Norman Blake, with Charlie Collins, Tut Taylor, James Bryan, Ben Pedigo, Nancy Blake.

17 selections, vocal and instrumental.

Flying Fish 010. Flying Fish Records, 3320 N. Halstead, Chicago, Ill. 60657.

Reviewed by Jan Rosenberg

Oftimes, listening to recordings that combine traditional and original material can be tedious. The selection of songs may be uneven and the recording levels may not be fitting to the songs. These flaws cause failure in the recording's ability to communicate.

However, Norman Blake's combination of "old and new" is a fine recording of traditional and original material. Blake's musical background is primarily traditional and his songs reflect this. Instrumental selections such as "Widow's Creek" and "Rubagfre" bring out Blake's clean, concise flatpicking style. "Rubagfre," an original work, greets the listener with an interesting arrangement which features Ben Pedigo's banjo in a descending scale, while James Bryan's fiddle and Blake's guitar weave up the scale.

On eight of the seventeen selections, Blake is accompanied by Charlie Collins whose guitar style beautifully complements Blake's.

Many innovative ideas have been put to use in this record. The cello and the viola have taken a new role, lending themselves to the more traditional type of playing. "Cuckoo's Nest" has been divided into three parts, the first consisting of the standard fiddle tune with Blake playing mandolin and Charlie Collins on guitar. The second part consists of the version of "Cuckoo's Nest" that is sung, which Blake plays as a guitar instrumental. The third part incorporates

fiddle and cello in which they portray a classical version of the song. This version is not as clean as it could be, but the piece as a whole is very well carried out.

Altogether, Norman Blake on Old and New has managed to be successful in blending the traditional with his own ideas to reach what many seek and few attain--a synthesis of musical styles.