

July | August 2022

Of Poets & Poetry

A PUBLICATION OF THE FLORIDA STATE POETS ASSOCIATION

VOL. 49.4

Ronee Blakley

At TCM 10th Anniversary (red carpet for "Nashville" screening and panel) photography by Chris Chew

FloridaStatePoetsAssociation.org





Ronee Blakley

Photographer unknown

Award winning Actor, Singer, Songwriter, Producer, Publisher, Filmmaker and Poet

Interview by Al Rocheleau with Ronee Blakley, written in her own words, with photos from her personal collection

Al: Ronee, you have been an active part of many artistic genres in music and film across decades. In terms of personalities, you knew almost everybody who was anybody, as the saying goes, and they knew you and your work. You are one of the originators of the Americana genre. Present for the folk revival and protest-song movement, playing your own role within the golden age of the American singer-songwriter scene in L.A., recording solo albums on the Elektra and Warner Brothers labels in the seventies, more than ten since then, and lauded as a film actor of the period, you were comfortable in and among it all. In short...*the stories you could tell!*

Your role as a country music star in Robert Altman's *Nashville* [No. 59 of the 100 Greatest American Films of All Time, American Film Institute], brought you an Academy Award nomination, two Golden Globe nominations and a BAFTA nomination, and you won the

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Bob Dylan and Ronee Blakley at The Other End club on Bleecker Street with the poet Allen Ginsberg, October 1975

Best Supporting Actress award from the National Board of Review. You also received a Grammy nomination for your work on the *Nashville* soundtrack. Concurrent with this notoriety, you accepted your friend Bob Dylan's invitation to join his Rolling Thunder Revue, captured on film by Dylan's own *Renaldo and Clara* and last year by the film *The Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese*. You worked thereafter with director Wim Wenders (your former husband) on various innovative projects including the film *Lightning Over Water*, which won Film of the Year in Germany. Showing your range, you have appeared in popular films such as the #1 box office hit horror classic *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, on various television shows, and set records on Broadway (*Pump Boys and Dinettes*). That's a lot of accomplishment across frontiers, and that's before we even take up your poetry, a focal point of the last decade. But poetry, in fact, invests all your work, including several collections of recorded verse.

First, can you bring us through your earliest years, from Idaho to other spots in the West, the introductions to music and poetry, and on to adventures in the biggest of our big cities and your many successes? How did things progress?

Ronee: The Northwest was my home, born in an Idaho hospital, but I never lived there; as an infant I lived on Bainbridge Island off Seattle, and my first memory is of the train trestle after getting off the ferry, being held in mother's arms, looking up at it. We then lived in Portland where we were in the Vanport Flood, and in Corvallis, where dad graduated from Oregon State University in engineering. I moved to Caldwell when I was nine and graduated high school there; school activities were many and I was in the school plays and played golf. I began singing on stage at church in the Arena Valley of Idaho where my grandparents had a farm. I worked hard on piano but did not like to practice; I headed up some clubs for girls at school, attended Girls Nation and was Miss Caldwell. Mills College was my first university, Stanford my second, Stanford-in-Austria my year abroad. I graduated Stanford and went to Juilliard for grad school; from there, I went into the theater for summer stock, got my union card, and went on from there into performance of

electronic music with Moogs at Carnegie Hall, then the folk and rock scenes as a singer/songwriter, into movies and later, television, stage, writing (including poetry), putting music into films, recording and publishing, all of it as it came.

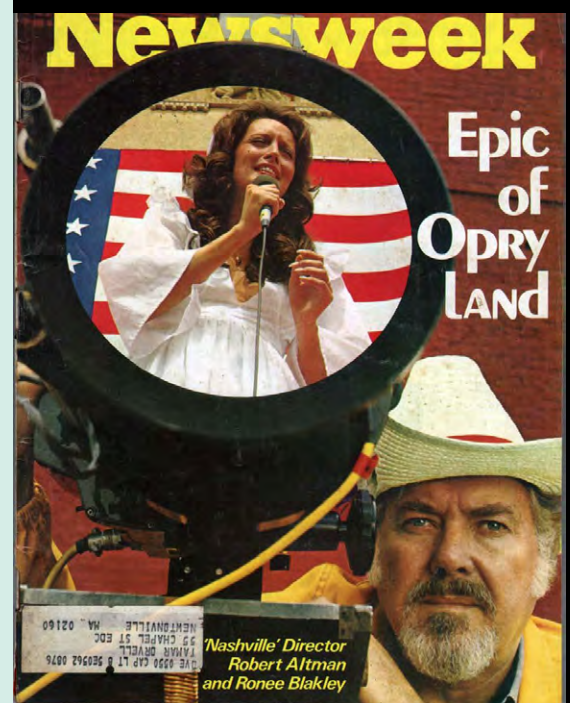
Al: Looking back on your upbringing, allow me a confession. There were two points in *Nashville* that brought me close to tears. One was in the hospital chapel, as patient Barbara Jean (you) sang the gospel standard “In the Garden,” so beautifully filmed by Altman. There was a sincerity in your rendition. The other was your own song, “My Idaho Home.” There is an earnest simplicity in those lines that rest at the heart of the American folk narrative, an ethos savagely challenged by too much of life in America, both then and now. Over the words “we were young then, we were together...” Altman’s full-screen shot reveals a subtly creased American flag straightened by a breeze; the moment grabs at the throat, and heightens the tragedy soon to follow. Your poetry and your perfect rendering of the song makes that possible. Thousands left theaters across our nation, shaken by events and yet somehow *still* hopeful, even after the shocking climax (and the quick, surprising denouement) of that landmark film. “My Idaho Home” is a wellspring, a kind of indelible American home movie.

Ronee: “In the Garden” was one of my favorite hymns, so I chose it to sing for that scene in the film, in which I have seven of my songs. “My Idaho Home” was written from the heart, the heart of a child, and has elements of my own childhood embedded in it—much of it is from truth, then shifted slightly to emphasize the country aspects of it; many were surprised to learn dad was an engineer, not a farmer, so a certain amount of Barbara Jean was assumed to be real, and the success of the song caused many to believe I really was Barbara Jean, both a compliment and a curse; for example, we really did drive the highways and sing harmony along the coastal roads of western Oregon when dad was in college.

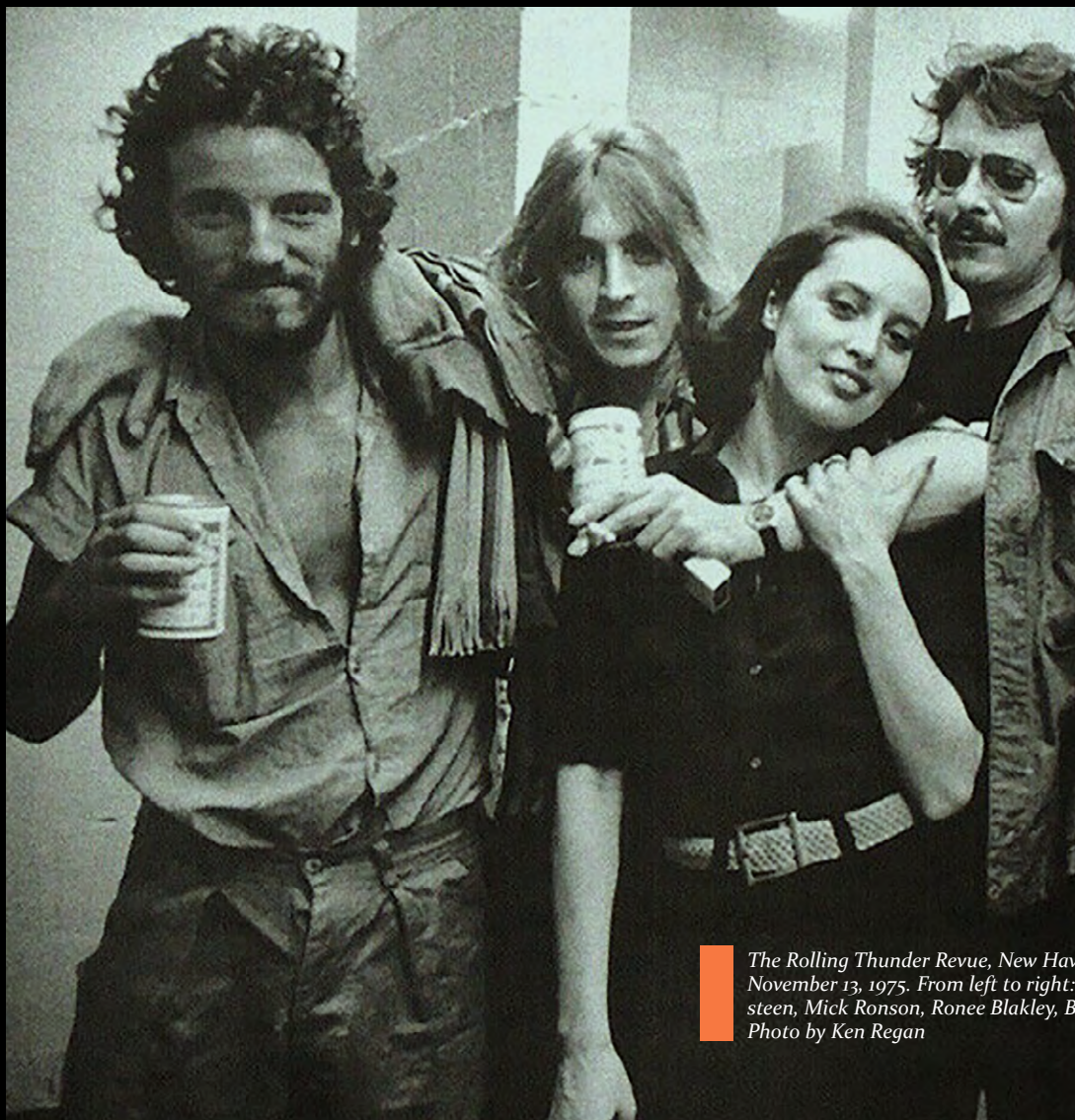
Al: You had some tough competition for the Academy Award, including Lee Grant (who won the Oscar for *Shampoo*), Brenda Vaccaro (who won the Golden Globe), Sylvia Miles, and finally, two fine young actors living in the happy injustice of dual great performances in the *same picture, same category* (you and Lily Tomlin).

Ronee: It was certainly an honor to be nominated, but it has been said Lily and I split the vote. The other great actors nominated also deserved to be honored and Lee Grant gave a superb performance, as she always does.

(Continued on next page)



TOP: Warner Brothers LP Album Cover for *Welcome*, 1975 MIDDLE: *Newsweek* cover, June 30, 1975 Bottom: Photographer unknown



The Rolling Thunder Revue, New Haven, Connecticut, November 13, 1975. From left to right: Bruce Springsteen, Mick Ronson, Ronee Blakley, Bob Neuwirth, Photo by Ken Regan

Al: Your own performance had many high spots, no more so than Barbara Jean’s subtle, slow-motion breakdown between songs at her post-hospital performance at Opryland. How much of that was improvised?

Ronee: I wrote the breakdown scene in *Nashville*; it was written in my journal and I called for Robert Altman to come to the makeup room and read it to him; he said, “Do you know it?” I replied, “Yes,” and he said, “Then we’ll shoot it;” and we did, that very day. The only improvisation in the scene was that Altman chose to break my speech into three parts, to have her stop and start up again, so that’s the way it was shot.

Al: Your first music album of that period, self-titled, got stellar reviews. One piece in *Ronee Blakley*, “Along the Shore,” stands out as the kind of art song common early in the 20th century and more so in the 19th century, where the piano directly dialogues with the purest of poetry contained in the lyric. It employs an elastic rhythm, and in this song, you add a penetrating refrain in French.

Ronee: “Along the Shore” was influenced by the Baudelaire poem “Les Berceaux” and the Debussy pieces of the time; I translated the poem and set it to music; the words “cradle” and “vessel” rhyme in French and form the comparison and the tender image of a woman rocking a cradle as the waves rock the vessel, or ship, in which her man will sail away to the far horizons.

I am an artist...
I value art and truth,...
creativity is a life-saver
and gives life meaning,
the sharing of humanity
and all it entails to be human...

~ Ronee




Photo: Cover of Elektra Records
LP, 1972, "Ronee Blakley"

Al: Tell me about your production of your first film score and how that led to the *Nashville* soundtrack album that earned you a Grammy nomination.

Ronee: My first film to score was 1970's *Welcome Home Soldier Boys* for 20th Century Fox; in that film were the songs "Dues", "Down to the River," and "Bluebird," from that film I got my first record deal at Elektra Records with Jac Holzman, produced by Robert Zachary. I retained my rights and formed my publishing company Sawtooth Music. Richard Baskin, music director on *Nashville*, was a fan of that record, called *Ronee Blakley*; he took me to Robert Altman, where I was originally brought on as a songwriter. However, they did not pay me so I went on the road with Hoyt Axton; only then was I offered the lead role as Barbara Jean. I always am writing, so two songs were added to my role in the film; "Tapedeck" and "My Idaho Home." My *Welcome* album for Warner Brothers, produced by Jerry Wexler, was recorded in the spring of 1975 following the shooting of *Nashville* and prior to its release in July of that year. I did not want those songs on that album because I don't like to repeat them, but Warner Bros. insisted, which upset Altman and his recording entity ABC at that time, who released the official soundtrack album.

Al: Had you ever thought of moving to Music City?

Ronee: My country roots are indelible, but so is my Stanford background. In high school we had a girls quartet which sang lots of folk music, so I come out of folk, church music, classical, musicals favored by mother, cowboy songs favored by dad, which creates a mix not uncommon for people of my era, when Joan Baez blew our socks off in high school, Elvis reigned, Dylan tore it all apart and allowed us to start over, and then the Beatles and Stones came to the USA. My favorite country music is Hank Williams, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, George Jones, Johnny Cash—you name a classic country artist, even Merle Haggard, and I'm right there with you. I would love to have a home in Nashville—it's a beautiful city, and I was honored to appear at the Ryman with Hoyt. I have thought about moving there but I also have a film-related career and deep roots in Los Angeles. Above all, I'm a writer.

Al: Something I notice in your songs and your poems is the ready use of internal rhyme and consonance, as in the 'd' and 't' sounds in the majestic "New Sun,"

(Continued on the next page)

"I was on the lake at twilight
I saw my skirts in the moonlight
I saw blood-red spread the sunset
I saw the full moon rising violet

And I was glad."

Your rhyme is full of color.

Ronee: The use of color is rather literal, in that I do see these remembered visions when I write. And yes, I studied piano and write mostly on piano, though some guitar tunes are favorites of mine; for this I thank my mother, who required me to take lessons until we made a deal that I could quit if I played a concerto in concert, which I did at age sixteen, Beethoven's Third in C Minor.

Al: Regarding the piano, I find that various songwriters (Tim Moore for instance, or Joni Mitchell on Blue) lean heavily on their personal piano styles. It's like a signature. Having heard you live in an intimate setting, as I did in Newport, R.I. many years ago, I can say your own relation to the piano comes across vividly.

Ronee: Piano style can be recognizable. Sometimes I use too many arpeggios, for example, but you can find me online two-handing with Dr. John on blues, and yes, I write piano parts and use them.

Al: Do you like to write lyrics from your melodies, or do you find strains of melody to match with your lyrics?

Ronee: Most often I write lyrics first, but these days, rather like Beethoven, I hear the melodies as I write the words, so that the songs write themselves in my head.

Al: In 1975, and shortly after *Nashville* was released, Bob Dylan sought you to be a featured performer in his Rolling Thunder Revue. Can you tell something of this story?

Ronee: When *Nashville* was released it became a hit and I was forklifted by the PR firm for the film into the top floor of the Sherry Netherland in New York City. One night I was invited to dinner with Woody Allen, but my friend David Blue was playing at The Other End, the same club I played, and I had promised to attend, so I went. Bobby Neuwirth introduced me to Bob Dylan there and I got up on stage and played and sang with him after the club closed down and only musicians were left inside; Dylan invited me to go on tour but I said no because I was headed for Muscle Shoals to rehearse with my band for my own tour to support my new album *Welcome*. To make the story short, I flew out early in the morning and my band told me I could go with Dylan, so I called him in New York. He had me flown back the same day, picked up at the airport and taken to Columbia Studios where we recorded his classic song "Hurricane" that night into the early hours; I had not slept and this all took place within about 28 hours. That album, *Desire*, went to #1 on the charts.

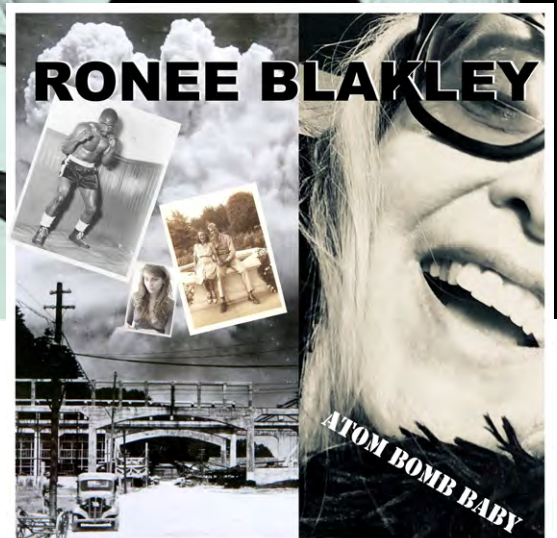


Ronee Blakley, "River Nile" CD cover detail, photo by Austin Young

Ronee Blakley website:
www.roneeblakley.com

Albums available at:
www.CDBaby.com

Link to Atom Bomb Baby:
https://www.amazon.com/music/player/albums/B08QDXF2CT?ref=sr_1_1&keywords=atom+Bomb+Baby+album&crd=15ON6SP45NE4V&sprefix=atom+bomb+baby+album%2Caps%2C74&qid=1656687554&sr=8-1



AI: Did you invite Joni Mitchell to visit you while you were on the Rolling Thunder tour?

Ronee: I was the fourth headliner and I asked Dylan if my dear friend Joni could come visit me and he said “Yes.” I had called Joni to invite her out to join me to hang out as a friend, which she did, and she sat in with me on a duet on my song “Dues” during my set— she did not even bring her guitar and used mine; however she decided she wanted to be a part of the show, so her manager arranged it.

AI: The Revue tour also served as the backdrop for a full-length, semi-improvised film, *Renaldo and Clara*, where various performers played characters other than themselves in a kind of alternate universe. Can you describe your own character, who became “Mrs. Dylan?”

Ronee: This great film is the most valuable record of those times; I wrote for the movie and I improvised for the movie and I had no idea my character would be named “Mrs. Dylan.” It was heaven and hell at the top of the world with all my heroes; this is my favorite way to live and I would do it every day if I could.

AI: What did you think of Martin Scorsese’s later film documentary of the Rolling Thunder experience? Did it capture the vibe for you as well as the music?

Ronee: Martin Scorsese is a genius and this is a brilliant film, filled with surprises so adept even I was fooled. Selfishly I wish I were singing in it more, but Bob gave me a huge honor in *Renaldo and Clara* by including me singing my song “New Sun.” Marty gave me lovely moments too and I am thrilled to be in it; the music is everlasting and this film will be seen into the future. It is magical; it shows Dylan

(Continued on next page)

TOP: Left to right: David Blue, Lainie Kazan, Bob Dylan, Sally Kirkland, Robert De Niro, Ronee Blakley and Gisela Getty, in her dressing room after Blakley’s show at the Roxy Theatre in Los Angeles, 1976. Photo by Brad Elterman. MIDDLE: Cover for the single “Hurricane” from her new album “Atom Bomb Baby”, RBPI, the Ronee Blakley Productions distributed Symphonic Bottom: Ronee working on her journal with Andy Warhol, photo by Bob Colacello at The Factory in NYC



Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine cover photo, February 1977

singing at his best, mesmerizing close ups of songs and performances I watched with my own eyes and heard with my own ears, and was a part of. I thank Marty for making it and preserving the tour for posterity, with his expertise, his sense of humor, his jokes, his art, his gravitas.

Al: After the success of *Nashville*, you remained engaged in various film and television projects, and provided other memorable performances. Can you give us a brief rundown? Also, who were some of your personal influences across the genres of music, film, the stage, as well as in poetry?

Ronee: During the decade between playing Barbara Jean in *Nashville* and Marge Thompson in Wes Craven's *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, there were many film and TV appearances and also Broadway, off Broadway, regional theater, and a bus-and-truck fortnight. They included *The Driver* with Ryan O'Neal by Walter Hill, *She Came to the Valley* with Scott Glenn and Dean Stockwell, *Lightning Over Water* with Wim Wenders and Nicholas Ray, *The Baltimore Bullet* with Coburn and Sharif, setting house records in *Pump Boys and Dinettes* on Broadway, my own production *I Played It For You*, *Glass Menagerie* with Tennessee Williams, the television shows *Vegas*, *Loveboat* with Sonny

Bono, and television movies with Waylon Jennings and Susan St. James. My influences across genres were many, including those we've mentioned with whom I was fortunate to know and work: certainly Robert Altman, Bob Dylan, Wim Wenders, Gordon Lightfoot and John Ritter. Andy Warhol was an influence, too. In poetry, my primary influence is Allen Ginsberg, yet I could go further into the classics of the past century and a half, including T.S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. Going further back, way back, Shakespeare. In music, back to Binchois, Purcell, Artistole and Plato...everyone, really.

Al: Four of your poetry collections are available on CD: *Grief Holes*, *Naked Truth*, *Djerassi Collection*, *Songs and Words of Love*, as well as nine albums of songs. One of them, *Grief Holes*, explores with courage and poignancy the loss of your mother. Can you share something of your work process?

Ronee: Like Billy Collins, I write almost daily, and while I am looking at mostly the same scenery, sometimes I imagine I am he, but this never gets me all the way home, though I picture him looking through his kitchen window; I write wherever I am and I have no formula. Hopefully, I improve over time. The Facebook layout appears to provide an almost natural space for me to express my more conventional thoughts, the size of the print on the bare white background, the eighteen or sixteen lines; and then there are the poems I write for a suite for my daughter every year, which may go on for pages. I try to be honest, not to use too many "ing" words, which Ginsberg taught me, sometimes to spin a tale or go off into unexpected territory—I never know where I'm going when I begin. Lyrics for songs are different and must be tighter in form—for me, it is unusual for a song-poem to become a literary poem or vice versa. I am not ashamed to say I am an artist and that I value art and truth, for creativity is a life saver and gives life meaning, the sharing of humanity and all it entails to be human—all too human, as Nietzsche put it.

Ronee Blakley is an artist of fearless commitment who uses words and music that move hearts and minds, an authentic poet in a lineage that goes back to poetry's origins in the marriage of words and music. Her work is powerful, even stunning in its brilliance. ~ Richard Modiano, Director Emeritus Beyond Baroque Literary/Arts Center

Al: You have always been a political activist, and are not afraid to share your views. Your recent collection of songs, *Atom Bomb Baby*, includes a fourteen-minute poem and seems written not only from your own point of view, but actually for all of us, the “atom bomb babies” of our generation and beyond.

Ronee: I do think we brought about real change, but inequity remains. My published work includes the frontispiece of the closing defense statement of Angela Davis, about 1970, called “Angela.” Political work has been of primary importance in my life, foremost being the passage of the ERA and civil rights; I covered Dylan’s “Hurricane” as the first single on last year’s album, with a second single being “Oh, Mama” for George Floyd. In my view everything is political.

During the past fifteen years I have released CDs of my spoken word titled: *Naked Truth, Grief Holes, The Djerassi Collection* where I was poet in residence in 2013 and where I became a fellow of the McElwee Family Foundation. I also released albums of my original music, including: *River Nile, Live at the Bitter End, Live at the Mint*, the album soundtracks from my feature films *I played It For You* and *Of One Blood*, and my most recent one *Atom Bomb Baby*, the score to *Lightning Over Water*, and more. Warner Brothers re-released my seventies solo albums in 2006, and Universal re-released the *Nashville* soundtrack.



“Selfie” by Ronee Blakley, 2022

Al: There are vibrations in *Atom Bomb Baby* that play up a musicality within, and a refrain supported by rhythmic, spare percussion. The approach seems to travel from current performance-poetry, back to the work of Gil Scott-Heron, and decades further back, to the Beat poetry-and-jazz collaborations once popular on both coasts. (Of note also are the songs supported by full band, with a top collection of West Coast musicians.)

Ronee: In *Atom Bomb Baby* the poem “Fear by Request” is dedicated to my daughter because she gave me the title; in 1980, I traveled to the Belize jungle to learn to beat the drums and that is what I do here, using the beat I was taught by Alfonso Flores, with the addition of what I call a “Greek chorus,” though there is no melody and no song. I chant “Fear by request. Anatomy of an atom bomb baby,” overdubbed four times.

Al: The album includes a cover of Bob Dylan’s epic narrative, “Hurricane,” telling the story of wrongly-imprisoned boxer Rubin “Hurricane” Carter. Why did you choose to revisit the song, a record you had made with Dylan so many years ago?

Ronee: I wanted to honor Bob, and I had such a personal connection to that great anthem exactly because I had sung with Dylan on the original track; justice still needs to be served.

Al: Regarding Dylan, I was asked to lecture on him at the University of Florida upon his selection as Nobel Laureate, in a series that examined the special work of each Laureate in their fields that year. I read your own detailed account of attending a recent Dylan concert. Can I excerpt from your appreciative experience, your bit of impromptu rock journalism?

(Continued on next page)



Ronee: Yes. I was Bob's guest at the concert.

Excerpt:

"I went by myself.

All in black, Bob and the band, Bob's piano with its wooden back facing the crowd, I in direct line of sight. Straightforward but moody lighting from atop the high proscenium and on the instruments, artfully done and with "smoke" floating in small wisps into the air. Bob needs a bit more light on him, unless he doesn't wish it. His guitar players are more in the light than he is. It was wonderful to see Bob's face as he played the spinet and I will do the same from now on when I play onstage. I screamed many times, beginning when he came out. I was not ready for the show to end, not ready at all - I was rather stunned it was over and no encore. Oh the Streets of Rome, I scream. You go your way and I'll go mine; I scream When I Cross the Rubicon, I scream I Contain Multitudes, I scream."

Al: I have explored many recent poems of yours. In them, and especially in your nature poems and ones of the commonplace, I find you resting one line (and image) atop another. Have your style and objectives for writing poetry (or the song-poems, for that matter) changed over the years?

Ronee: I don't notice much change technically. Always searching to express and get relief. Of course, as we get older, experience and learning allow us to adopt different perspectives.

Al: The spoken word scene is a vibrant one. Where have you appeared?

Ronee: I began performing my spoken word almost thirty years ago in a coffee club in San Fernando Valley at the invitation of Exene Cervenka and Viggo Mortensen, to appear with them; this led me to Beyond Baroque, the headquarters for poets in Los Angeles, run by Richard Modiano, who booked me there for solo shows and as part of groups brought in by Eve Brandstein, including writers like Anne Beats and Patti Davis; in New York over the years I have read at The Cutting Room, The Other End, and most recently in November at Tibet House on a bill with Anne Waldman to honor Allen Ginsberg, both of whom I have worked with over the years; I am happy to read wherever I am in the world.

Al: Can you tell more about your own film, *I Played It for You*?

Ronee: My feature film debuted at the Venice Biennale; then I went home and recut it so that it was 82 minutes and four-walled it for a week at the Fox Venice to qualify for Academy consideration. I am producer / director / composer / writer / actor, so it is an experimental auteur experience which played around the world at festivals, and was well-reviewed by Sheila Benson of the *L.A. Times* who called it "passionate and brave," and FX Feeny of *LA Weekly* declared it a "valuable document."



TOP: Personal photo of Ronee in her home on Yeager Place in the early seventies, Hollywood
 BOTTOM: Photo Richard Avedon, 1975. Republished in *Vogue Magazine*, Nostalgia Section, article about Ronee Blakely, 1990



Ronee Blakley in her Oscar-nominated role as Barbara Jean in Robert Altman's film, *Nashville* (for which she wrote most of her scenes.) Paramount Pictures publicity photo, 1975.

It's a study of love, of relationships, of the limitations of love, and an intimate view of music and performance, in docudrama style, with fictional vignettes mixed into actual documentary footage. Starring me and Wim Wenders, it was released in a DVD / CD package. It included Paul McCartney's guitar player at age nineteen, Rusty Anderson, and Dylan's violin player, Scarlet Rivera. We were also recording the soundtrack for the Wenders / Ray film *Lightning Over Water* at the same time, at Shangri La Studio in Malibu.

AI: Can you tell us about your current projects, and what you may have planned for the near future?

Ronee: My current plans are to put together a book of memoir and spoken word, a new album of poems, and perform live again. I have a second feature film ready for distribution, *Of One Blood*, but I need to feel it is safe for my actors to release it in view of the attacks upon *Charlie Hebdo* and Mr. Van Gogh in Holland. There is also a soundtrack album for it; it is about a suicide bomber, a feminist poet, in Los Angeles. On the lighter side, painting is also something I enjoy—that, and swimming in warm water.

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 Email: rsbsm@hotmail.com



Ronee as Marge Thompson in the billion dollar franchise, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, 1984. New Line Cinema publicity photo.



Right: Wim Wenders and Ronee Blakley DVD Cover for "I Played It For You"



Middle: Album Cover for "Atom Bomb Baby"



Right: Ronee with her daughter Sarah

[Link to Album](#)

RONEE BLAKLEY

LYRICS BY

ALONG THE SHORE

Along the shore
Boats lay rocking in the waves
Woman rocks the cradle
Soon the day
Of parting must come
All the women are weeping
O, tous les femmes pleurent
Et les hommes, les hommes curieux

See the far horizon calling from the shore
Like a fiery woman, all go back for more...

Now the boat grows smaller through the rain
Moving out to sea

Woman's hand rocks the cradle now
Moving to the tune of a foghorn
O, tous les femmes pleurent
Et les hommes, les hommes curieux

Le grand horizon

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music, ASCAP
Ronee Blakley, Elektra 1972

ANGELA

The criminals are in the court
They're handing down the law
Contempt is coming from the judge
I'm bringing you a hacksaw
You say you were a witness
Can you tell me what you saw
Was it where they practice justice
Or where they practice law
Angela get out of town
Now the law is hunting you down
With its guns and men and dogs
Its dogs and guns and men

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music, ASCAP
From the frontispiece of *The Closing Defence Statement of Angela Davis*, 1971

RONEE BLAKLEY

LYRICS BY

MY IDAHO HOME

Mama and daddy raised me with love and care
They sacrificed so I could have a better share
They fed me and nursed me and sent me to school
Mama taught me how to sing, daddy lived the golden rule

When I think of the children alone and afraid
Abandoned and wild like a fatherless child
I think of my mama and how she could sing
Harmony with my daddy, our laughter would ring

Down the highway, on the beaches
Just as far as memory reaches
I still hear daddy singing his old Army songs
We'd laugh and count horses as we drove along

We were young then, we were together
We could bear floods and fire and bad weather
And now that I'm older, grown up, on my own
I still love mama and daddy best, and my Idaho home.

Mama grew up on the prairies of Kansas
She was tender and sweet
The dust and tornadoes blew round her
But they kept her straight up on her feet

My daddy grew up on his own more or less
His mama died when he was just eleven
He had seven sisters to raise him
But he dreamed of his mama in heaven

His daddy drank whiskey and had a sharp eye
He sold chicken medicine farmers would buy
Together they hunted the fields and the farms
When his daddy died my daddy rested in my mama's arms

Down the highways on the beaches
Just as far as memory reaches
I still hear daddy singing his old army songs
We'd laugh and count horses as we drove along

We were young then we were together
We could bear floods and fires and bad weather
But now that I'm older grown up on my own
I still love mama and daddy best, and my Idaho home.

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music, ASCAP
Welcome, Warner Brothers 1975

RONEE BLAKLEY

LYRICS BY

AMERICAN BEAUTY

Sweet and strong
He's the kind of man I've missed so long
Tall and true
The sun looks like it's climbing through his skin
Even when the night begins
He's an All American boy who knows
His way
It shows
American Beauty, you got me blushing like a rose.

Shy and sweet
I'd like to keep you for awhile
Sleep and dream
The dawn will throw its gentle beams on you
Even leave a gold tattoo
You're an All American boy who knows
His way
It shows
American Beauty, you got me blushing like a rose.

Love has left its mark upon me but it's not the same
With you I feel so easy
When you call me by my childhood name.

Fire and smoke
I'm a person who's got a private joke
New and strong
This daytime couldn't last too long for me
Sweetened by the melody
Of my All American Boy who knows
His way
It shows

American Beauty, you got me blushing like a rose.

(Repeat chorus)

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music, ASCAP
Welcome, Warner Brothers 1975

RONEE BLAKLEY

LYRICS BY

NEW SUN

You sit for the moment
You stay for the day
You live for a lifetime
It passes away
I know you're coming
I know your ways
I live for the moment
It passes away
And I'm glad
Cause I need a new sun rising every morning
And I need a new moon rising every night

I was on the lake at twilight
I saw my skirts in the moonlight
I saw blood red spread the sunset
I saw the full moon rising violet
And I was glad

And while you're working
Sowing your seed
Hauling your harvest
Filling your needs
I know my hunger
I tasted my greed
I own a mountain
It fills my need
And I'm glad

(Repeat chorus)

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music, ASCAP
Welcome, Warner Brothers 1975

RONEE BLAKLEY

LYRICS BY

HE'S GOT A TAPEDECK IN HIS TRACTOR

He's got a tapedeck in his tractor and he listens to the local news
He finds out where the bass are biting while he's plowing to the country blues
He was a cowboy and he knew I loved him well
A cowboy's secrets I'll never tell
No, there's nothing like the loving of a hard working cowboy man

He's got a tapedeck in his tractor and he's plowing up his daddy's land
He's got more horse sense than I ever seen in any man
He was a cowboy and he knew I loved him well
A cowboy's secrets I'll never tell
No, there's nothing like the loving of a hard working cowboy man

On Saturday night we go to town
And all the boys will order up another round
When summer comes, we're waiting for the rodeo
On Saturday night we go dancing in town
And all the boys will order up another round
When he rides saddle bronc
I wait to hear that whistle blow

He's got a tapedeck in his tractor
I can hear him when he coming home
Then he holds me in the rocking chair
And sings me a love song

He was a cowboy and he knew I loved him well
A cowboy's secrets I'll never tell
No, there's nothing like the loving of a hard working cowboy man
No there's nothing like the muscle of a hard driving cowboy man

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music, ASCAP
Nashville soundtrack, UMG 1975

RONEE BLAKLEY

POEMS BY

TAKE ME DOWN

Take me down
Just us two
When the dawn is spread out
Against the dew
Like a child asleep on a sunlit lawn
Like the chrome on a fire truck
Speeding and gone
Take me down to the empty highways
Of blistered holidays
Blinking lights
Sacred nights
Rooms that keep you from going out
To ask what the party was about
Is it time?
Is it now?
Time to get behind the plow
Or resign and bow
When they will say
She can't make up her mind
Your love wears me like the scarab at my throat
Lusty blood runs through my thighs
Smooth green trousers will not disguise
And they will say
But she has hooded eyes

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BILLY COLLINS MORNING

Heavy lidded I
In my little world
Billy Collins on my mind
His kitchen window open wide
Looks out on a familiar scene
Within it finds meaning
I do the same
From where I sit
Papers fall
The stage is lit
Birds have lives they sing about
My cactus grows
Neighbors shout
News blasts into the background
Bombs and horror in the sound
Istanbul opened wide
Where once I climbed
A hill to Hagia Sofia's side
Gold Christ on the wall
Rain on my umbrella
I watched it fall
It was May in the ancient space
It was a time
It was a place

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HBDAY 81 (TO BOB DYLAN)

We can never thank you enough
 For escorting us as we marched into adulthood
 Shepherded us all along the watchtower
 Lighthouse guiding the way through wave and rock
 Voicing our thoughts in symphonic exploding light
 Words in crazy combinations of shadowed noir
 Feelings freshly observed sharp as a sculptor's knife
 Unknown revelations made foreign experiences familiar
 Imagination made whole before our eyes
 We took shape and formed
 Our saint in sinner's garb revisited
 Idol of masses of masses
 Worshipped as soothsayer
 Beside a distant shore lined with temples to you
 And then up close as a campfire
 We never made it official
 Yet walked along the bay together
 Blowing trumpets with poets and dogs
 Lying down with strangers
 We thumbed through ancient towns toward home
 Shown the way by shafts from your flashlight
 Onto a two lane blacktop
 Leading from mountains
 Into a forest in New England
 Beside still and raging waters
 Piercing the darkness
 Where paradise roams

© Ronee Blakley / Sawtooth Music / RBPI

RONEE BLAKLEY

POEMS BY

BOUND AND UNBOUND

Every bound thing becomes unbound
Atoms rip apart
Love is a behavior
Not a feeling
Goodness has many meanings
Intrinsic or
In relation to something else
That which is
Need not be defended
Then what is the meaning of is
Truth is
What is the goal of good
What is the study of love
What is the description of God
What is a goal
What is an end
In the end it won't matter
Matter won't matter
The goal of medical science is health
The end of the science of war is victory
The purpose of soccer is to score
The result of goodness is love
(To do and to be)
To love is to know and experience
The good
God is good Plato said
God is love Jesus said
God is truth Aristotle said
(Roshomon Kurasawa said)
Truth is all you know and all you need to know
A poet said

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THREE THOUGHTS

i

Tulips vanished one by one
 Closed their petals
 Eyelids upon the world
 Shut down their colors
 Having lived and shone
 Given and received love
 Now placed into trash gently
 As if in a burial
 While their giver lay in heather
 Prone upon the heath
 Half way across the world
 Slumbering among the soft hills
 Of Scotland

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iii

This road ends soon
 Lanes merging
 One way street
 Pavement ends in fifty feet
 Look at the moon.
 At waves surging
 See how they meet
 We have to walk
 The rest of the way home
 No pavement left
 Just sand and foam
 And talk.

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ii

Within white marble of Asian antiquity
 Lie secrets of enlightenment
 Arches of baths carefully carved
 Thick veined to lie upon
 Being slapped by muscled women
 Who rub hard with rough cloth
 Washed in softest soap
 With only sounds of water
 Running dripping steaming
 Scrubbed into cleanliness
 As white as the light enveloping you
 Above your eyes as you drift in heat
 A glowing translucent ceiling
 Sculpted for royalty
 Makes your body pure
 Your bare skin in supplication
 To the ravishing stone

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QUINCEAÑERA

blended journey of purity and knowledge
 telltale star glitters to wish upon for grace
 big bang begs us to expand forever
 particles so small even being observed changes them
 but all things are changed when observed
 the hidden camera under the microscope
 the candid camera in sweaty hands
 the documentary of increased heart rates
 the docudrama of artistic conceit
 men's eyes and women's thoughts from truculence to intuition
 the maiden's cheeks at the altar
 the image upside down in lenses and retinas
 negatives enlarged and placed into photoshop alteration
 words manipulated via adobe premiere programs computerized
 nothing can be proven to be real at the ball
 but the vast interior space which implodes
 the dense matter which swallows all magnets
 the vortex into which finally swirl all sounds
 the fury and the clashing of leather and teeth
 the climax of the be all and end all
 still my love for you
 will survive and escape for it is beyond dark matter
 beyond time and quarks
 beyond thought and light
 it is the definition of velocity
 the origin of movement and volume
 the destiny of the species past inertia up the slope
 the meaning of life and vibrations
 laws of the universe which govern the transfer of fluids
 gravity mass and volume
 relativity time and fusion
 helixes genes and chemistry of transfusion of the anti-Kell
 unite in the deathless dream of family flow
 of my blood in your future and beyond your obsessions
 which none can control with an MRI or confession
 cannot observe from the Hubbell or a laparoscope
 a secret hidden from us who will pass from identification
 objectively observed wholly by fate
 whose final destination is unknown

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Free Speak, CD released 2008

RONEE BLAKLEY

POEMS BY

PAST PERFECT

Trapped
Ropes wrapped round
Hands folded stretched against ribs
No sound
Unlubricated brain
Recovers
In faces of fortune tellers
Parties from past
At last you see friends
Tumors inside you
Hide you
Sand dunes
Runes
Color photos
Gurus
Homicidal fantasies imprison
Spinal fluids
Leak out puncture
Juncture between
Past and future
Present is as present does
Unable to move
You contemplate
Past perfect
Perfect love
Easy to suffer
A buffer in the slippery night
Through crunched light
I who was free
See

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GRIEF HOLES 2

Mother, I don't like being here without you
(Today I woke up in my own bed for the first time)
It feels unbearable
It feels impossible
It feels lonely
It feels scary
It feels bad
You knew this day was coming
You tried to prepare us
But nothing could prepare me for the nausea in my stomach
The absolute void
1200 miles of silence
A blank house
Your china and silver reside here now
My sad child is far away
Wearing your jewelry
While I am wracked by sobs
Oh, profound loss!
Oh, wretched night!
You would want us to grieve, mother
To miss you horribly
To long for you
With love and regret
I do, mother
I do

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TOURIST TRAP, SUMMER 2007

I pushed my f***ing walker up the Valley of the Queens
 Over rocks up the hill in the heat, sweat and steam
 Wrapped a shash around my head in the early day
 Set off for Dendara in a veil all the way
 Asala on the tapedeck
 Donkeys on the road
 Workers in the sugar cane just like long ago
 Islam woman where do you hide
 Underneath your veil deep inside
 Mohammed at the wheel
 Two kids and a wife
 All the way to Abydos
 Pilgrim bride
 White cranes in the palms
 Mohammed sing a soft song
 Mohammed fix the tape machine
 Mohammed fix the oud
 No way Mohammed can
 Bring back her muse
 Throw some light on the subject
 Don't stand in the dark
 She preens and poses
 On her way to the ark

On the edge of the sky the gold sun rose
 Dendara appeared then on to Abydos
 Didn't she remember
 She hadn't heard a thing
 About the bloody ambush
 At the Valley of the Kings
 Muslims from the mountains
 Tourists in their sights
 Trapped in the topography Hatshepsut defined
 In a marble bathroom she fell and hit her head
 She ate bad spinach in a Cairo bed
 Insects bit her in the middle of the night
 But nothings could shake her Egyptian birthright
 Beneath the veil none could see her smile
 As they crossed the bridge she looked up at the hill
 She didn't see it coming, she never will
 But then they were upon her
 From the backseat of the car
 Pilgrims bent for Abydos seen from afar
 Her forbears stared at her veiled insides
 All the way to Abydos
 Pilgrim bride

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RONEE BLAKLEY

POEMS BY

GINSBERG

Picture you holding the harmonium
Head lifted slightly
Next to me on the crew bus where I went only to sit by you
To sing with you in the old contraption as we rolled along in the night
You squeezed the little box in your lap in and out
To your blues you crooned
“All the hills echo-ed”
Lines from your long dead pastoral mentor and master
Along with “Little lamb, who made thee?”
You taught me
Tried to save me from myself
You stopped smoking so many times
Ronee! I stopped smoking!
But Allie, you already quit several times
I know but it’s better than never quitting at all—
Lessons
With Peter your companion whose well muscled bare chest was often visible
Especially to Denise
In the cold late autumn of northeastern shores
When we marched alongside rough waves
Your beard long and grey
Until I shaved it on camera so I could see your dear face
Eyes defined by black rimmed glasses in Lowell, Massachusetts
You read “HOWL” to ladies in a mahjong tournament at the Seacrest Hotel
They clapped and gasped
When your soft lips poured words to your mother into their faces
Your direct intensity probed any object
Of your effortless unbiased natural interest
Open lack of judgment was your creed oriented goal as practiced
Treating each with equal focus
Ambitiously professional poet of means and status
Working to support your staff back in Brooklyn
Able to provide medical care to your employees’ family members a concern
Humble modest chanting Buddhist sitting for hours on hard floors
Spreader of gospel according to meditation
Saint behavior
Rapaciously undisguised sexual appetite way back when
Now and then
Anxious to see Johnny Depp at the Viper Room hoping for a hook up
On our last evening together
When you ordered beans and rice from the VIP room which was brought in
Whatever you wanted they said
I got up to sing with the band onstage
You gave me your new book
Inscribed it and drew a picture in it
Of grass growing above a line which was the earth above a skull

(Continued on next page)

RONEE BLAKLEY

POEMS BY

I didn't realize what it meant until my daughter explained it
Then I wondered whether I had been worthy of your friendship
And I couldn't ask because you were gone
I couldn't tell you about the growing child I had brought to meet you
At the Mexican restaurant next to McCabe's when she was three
Couldn't tell you ever again that I couldn't go out because I was sick
Couldn't ask you any more sex questions
About carrots and objects you answered patiently and fully
With no embarrassment
You showed no disappointment
When you and Peter became roadies on The Rolling Thunder Revue
In order to stay on after your portion of the show was cut
Every day picked up our bags from outside the door
Hauled them to the bus running and rushing
You would write, sing and laugh
Teacher, you did not like words ending in "ing"
By your fun voice from the other side of the glass at recording studios
Where you bounced and danced
Inimitable though many try
Your calls and cries in sharp consonants next to pierced vowels
Vocabulary stripped clean to street level
You sang the purist of tunes
Sometimes with me on piano at the Troubadour where I brought Neil
From the balcony we watched
From a wooden bench we listened
To your William Blake heart
Darkened then cleansed
Your beat feet
Your Dylan student
Your Jewish roots
Your disciplined ethic
Your ardent penis
Your thousand poems
Your telephone voice
Your love transfigured mind
Spoke to brains and wills in Bible fashion
Verses memorized for wisdom
Emancipation phrases of despair tinged desire
Enlightened anger unencumbered by restraint
Observed then rendered
Simply pared down bare
I hear your melody in the air
Feel the majesty
Of Homeric sense memory
In your revolutionary
Sagas of dope and hope

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