



# *Blind Boys of Alabama*

## *I'll Find a Way*

### THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA:

Jimmy Carter  
Eric "Ricky" McKinnie  
Joey Williams  
Paul Beasley  
Ben Moore  
Tracy Pierce  
and  
Clarence Fountain

[blindboys.com](http://blindboys.com)  
[sonymasterworks.com](http://sonymasterworks.com)

**MASTERWORKS**



All around, the world was white.  
The snow that winter had fallen in  
Biblical proportions. Into this clean-slate  
landscape stepped four blind men from  
Alabama. They came to sing the Gospel.

Waiting were two midwestern men. Justin Vernon and Phil Cook were boys in a band when they discovered the music of Sam Cooke. Then they discovered Sam Cooke songs about Jesus. But these were not *hymns*. Hereabouts, hymns were measured and staid. In Cooke's music the boys heard the lexicon of faith, but the rhythm - the soul - of something else entirely. From Cooke they moved to the Staple Singers ... Sister Rosetta Tharpe ... Mahalia Jackson ... and one day they discovered the Blind Boys of Alabama.

In time the two men grew up and drew apart. There were wounds in that, although even now they would agree their accumulated hours of darkness had been at worst slightly cloudy. But when the shadows fell, each man turned to the holy blues. And among the most consoling lights that shone on them were the Blind Boys of Alabama. And now these men of the south were finding their way north, passing between bare trees to a snowbound building off a Wisconsin country road.

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The room built to capture sound was cut squarely into the northern soil, solidly sunk below the frostline, embanked in earthen stillness. Upstairs the men stomped their boots clean and prepared to descend. Downstairs, the music - in the form of air yet to be breathed - waited.

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When sustaining legends cross your threshold, you show respect and deference. And then you get to work. The session lasted four days. In the studio, and at the table over bread broken between takes, there were those who believed and those who wondered. But the great miraculous mystery of gospel music lies less in its power over believers and more in its power to move those who believe otherwise, or those who believe not at all. Thus Dr. King addressed a split nation in cadence drawn from pulpit and song. When there is glory in the throat, every listener dares dream of grand transcendence.

One night as the recording went on, there was a knock at the door. Neighbors from up the road. A young girl and her father, the girl on the cusp of her teens. She knew nothing of the Alabamans. She stood in the shadow of a corner and listened. *Please*, sang the man at the microphone, *please take me to the water*, and on the way home, in the dark as snow squeaked beneath the wheels, the girl said, *I will remember this night for all my life*.

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There is a point at the dead center of winter when it is difficult to summon the memory of green. Every branch is black against the sky, and leaves exist only as an article of faith. Imagine then, a photograph of a sweet green tree. The tree is on an island, alone. The encircling water appears white. So white it could be snow. The whiteness leaves the tree skirted in mystery. Rooted in this world, and yet otherworldly. The tree says heaven is nearer than we know. That heaven is recognizable. That there are things to be seen even if we cannot see.

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If you were raised in snow, you know of its pure miracle: On the clearest, coldest days, the crystals pass to vapor with no pause to be liquid. *Sublimation*. From the Latin, meaning “raised up.” When the last song was sung, there were drifts to the door. The four blind men formed a line, each man’s hand on the shoulder of the man before him, and stepped surefootedly into the white.

- Michael Perry  
writer, neighbor

1. GOD PUT A RAINBOW IN THE CLOUD 2:40

*(Reverend Andrew Jenkins, Irene Spain)*

Phil Cook, electric and acoustic pianos

Justin Vernon, electric guitar

Mike Lewis, tenor saxophone, electric bass guitar

Reggie Pace, trombone, tambourine

JT Bates, drum set

2. I'LL FIND A WAY (To Carry It All) 3:44

featuring Shara Worden of My Brightest Diamond

*(Theodore Peter Lucas)*

Shara Worden, vocal

Phil Cook, B3, piano

Justin Vernon, electric guitar

Mike Lewis, tenor saxophone, electric bass guitar

Reggie Pace, trombone

JT Bates, drum set

3. I AM NOT WAITING ANYMORE 3:44

featuring Sam Amidon

*(Christopher Porterfield)*

Sam Amidon, vocal

Phil Cook, piano

Justin Vernon, electric guitar

Reggie Pace, trombone, tuba, euphonium

JT Bates, drum set, snare drum

4. I SHALL NOT BE MOVED 2:48

*(Traditional)*

Phil Cook, piano, electric guitar

Justin Vernon, resonator guitar

Mike Lewis, electric bass guitar

Reggie Pace, percussion

JT Bates, percussion, drum set

5. TAKE ME TO THE WATER 3:26

*(Traditional)*

Phil Cook, piano

Reggie Pace, tuba, percussion

Mike Lewis, upright bass

JT Bates, percussion, drum set

6. I'VE BEEN SEARCHING 2:42

featuring Merrill Garbus of tUnE-yArDs

*(Derrick Seymour Morgan)*

Merrill Garbus, vocal

Joey Williams, electric guitar

Justin Vernon, electric 12-string guitar

Mike Lewis, electric bass guitar

Reggie Pace, percussion

JT Bates, drum set

7. THERE WILL NEVER BE ANY PEACE  
(Until God Is Seated at the Conference Table)

5:22

featuring Casey Dienel of White Hinterland

*(Eugene Record, Barbara Acklin)*

Casey Dienel, vocal

Phil Cook, piano

Joey Williams, electric guitar

Justin Vernon, loops

Mike Lewis, tenor saxophone, upright bass

Tracy Pierce, electric bass guitar

JT Bates, drums, percussion

Reggie Pace, drums, percussion

8. TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE 3:28

*(Charles A. Tindley)*

Phil Cook, piano, electric guitar

Mike Lewis, alto saxophone

Reggie Pace, trombone, tuba, euphonium, percussion

JT Bates, percussion, drum set

9. EVERY GRAIN OF SAND 5:27

featuring Justin Vernon of Bon Iver

*(Bob Dylan)*

Justin Vernon, vocal, acoustic guitar, synthesizer

Phil Cook, piano, acoustic guitar

Mike Lewis, electric bass guitar

Reggie Pace, trombone, euphonium, percussion

JT Bates, drum set, percussion

10. MY GOD IS REAL 4:13

*(Kenneth Morris)*

Phil Cook, B3, piano

Mike Lewis, upright bass

Reggie Pace, vibraphone

JT Bates, drum set

11. JUBILEE 4:25

featuring Patty Griffin

*(Charlie Parr)*

Patty Griffin, vocal

Phil Cook, piano, B3, claps

Justin Vernon, banjo

Mike Lewis, tenor saxophone, electric bass guitar, claps

Reggie Pace, percussion, trombone, claps

JT Bates, drum set, claps

## *Notes from the Producer*

### GOD PUT A RAINBOW IN THE CLOUD

This arrangement is from Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys. Both Ralph and Jimmy Carter sing with a sunny fierceness that personifies how deeply they feel gospel music. The Ry Cooder-esque groove was Phil Cook's idea. Kicks it right along.

### I'LL FIND A WAY (To Carry It All) (featuring Shara Worden of My Brightest Diamond)

We all have deep, toothy questions about purpose and existence. A song like this speaks to the opacity of the line between secular and sacred, and how we search both sides. I am not a religious man. But songs like this – and sung like this – drive and draw me to be a better man.

### I AM NOT WAITING ANYMORE (featuring Sam Amidon)

My friend Chris Porterfield of the band Field Report wrote this song, Sam Amidon transformed it, and Reggie Pace built the sacred trombone choir. But the whole thing stands on the solid rock of the Blind Boys in harmony.

### I SHALL NOT BE MOVED

I first heard this one on a Mississippi John Hurt compilation my Dad bought for me in Chicago when I was thirteen. The image is one I've clung to for sense and purpose – like a tree planted by the water, I stand firm. I am steadfast.

### TAKE ME TO THE WATER

Paul Beasley has long been a gospel singer in his own right. He had only recently joined the Blind Boys, and we didn't know what to expect when he took the lead on this song. One take, and I had tears streaming down my face. Everyone in the control room – engineers, musicians, visitors, the other Blind Boys – was at the same altar.



I'VE BEEN SEARCHING (featuring Merrill Garbus of tUnE-yArDs)

During a long trip in a U-Haul with a jammed stereo, my friend the musician Mike Lewis and I bought a boombox at Wal-Mart. At one point Mike played a reggae love song by Derrick Morgan. I had him play it over and over again, and it came to mind when we were doing this album as a song that could be converted to a gospel tune. We did it in one take with a Joey Williams guitar overdub.

THERE WILL NEVER BE ANY PEACE (Until God Is Seated at the Conference Table)

(featuring Casey Dienel of White Hinterland)

We were struggling to find a few mid-tempo tunes when Charles (the Blind Boys manager) suggested this one, originally written and recorded by the Chi-Lites. It's wonderfully strange, and benefits from the presence of Joey Williams and Tracy Pierce – the two “sighted” members of the Blind Boys band.

TAKE YOUR BURDEN TO THE LORD AND LEAVE IT THERE

This is the sort of Blind Boys song you live to hear. Their vocals are filled with gravity and compassion, but also break out into that raw, ragged joy that makes gospel music so transcendent.

EVERY GRAIN OF SAND (featuring Justin Vernon of Bon Iver)

This song sustained me through one of the darkest periods of my life. To sing it with Jimmy Carter was a great blessing, and turned the darkness into light. It was like living a lifetime in the space of a song.

MY GOD IS REAL

The first thing I noticed about Ben Moore was his bright spirit. Despite having only recently lost his wife of several decades, he was jovial and upbeat. Then he sat down and sang this song. In every note, I could hear his loss. But I could also hear how his belief allowed him to find a place of peace. When I heard Ben sing this song, I thought, “I could believe in this God.”

JUBILEE (featuring Patty Griffin)

Phil Cook and I have turned to Patty Griffin's music time and time again in order to navigate our difficult stretches. When we were trying to figure out a way to send this album on its way, it made perfect sense to unite the power of Patty and the Blind Boys for a gospel song that leaves us filled with hope and ready for hard travelin'. When Jimmy Carter exhorts us at the end I know we are all blessed and ready to roll.

Produced by Justin Vernon

Engineered by Brian Joseph and Zach Hanson

Mixed by Zach Hanson

Mastered by Richard Dodd

Recorded at April Base, in Fall Creek, WI

Additional Recording (Clarence Fountain vocals) at UAB Studio, Birmingham, AL

Engineered by James Beville

A&R: Cathleen Murphy

Photography: Cameron Wittig

Art Direction: Joshua Cheuse

Product Development: Laura Kszan

Management: Charles Driebe, Blind Ambition Management

Sam Amidon appears courtesy of Nonesuch Records

Patty Griffin appears courtesy of New West Records

Shara Worden appears courtesy of Asthmatic Kitty Records

Track 1 published by Mosie Lister (SESAC); track 2 published by Ted Lucas Music LLC (BMI); track 3 published by Songs in the House of Hassle (BMI); tracks 4, 5 and 8 published by April Base Publishing, admin. by Kobalt Music (ASCAP) / BBOA Publishing, admin. by BMG Chrysalis (BMI); track 6 published by Happy Valley Music (BMI) / HOP Publishing (BMI); track 7 published by Unichappell Music Inc. (BMI); track 9 published by Special Rider Music (SESAC); track 10 published by Martin and Morris Music Studio (BMI); track 11 published by Heyday Publishing (ASCAP)