

# The Murfreesboro Post

## Heritage Award winners have played with best

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Norman and Nancy Blake will be honored with the 2010 Uncle Dave Macon Days Heritage Award at the 33rd annual Uncle Dave Macon Days July 9-11. Norman has made music with such acts as June Carter Cash, Johnny Cash, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan.

The 33rd annual Uncle Dave Macon Days are set to honor Norman and Nancy Blake with the 2010 Uncle Dave Macon Days Heritage Award.

“It is an honor for us to receive the heritage award from that camp,” Norman said. “We very much look forward to our participation in Uncle Dave Macon Days.”

Every year the festival honors individuals who have dedicated themselves to the preservation and promotion of old-time music.

“We have really been trying to get them for years and it worked out well for their schedule for them to be able to do this,” Uncle Dave organizer Gloria Christy said. “Norman has been a busy guy the last few years.

“They don’t usually perform in public anymore,” Christy continued. “That says a lot about them trying to be a part of what we’re doing and we are honored to have them.”

Norman Blake quit school at age 16 to pursue a life in music. He played mandolin for The Dixie Drifters on radio and TV before joining banjo player Bob Johnson. Blake and Johnson made some recordings along with guest spots on the Grand Ole Opry.

He formed a bluegrass band while stationed as a radio operator in the Panama Canal after being drafted into the military. Upon returning home, Blake joined June Carter’s road band, leading to recording sessions with Johnny Cash and eventually an invite to join the house band on Cash’s TV show in 1969.

Blake’s time working with Cash gave him the opportunity to lend his talents to Bob Dylan’s “Nashville Skyline” album. He also toured and recorded with both Kris Kristofferson and Joan Baez.

It was Blake’s solo recording debut in 1972, however, that caught the eye of his soon to be wife, Nancy Short. Blake’s “Home in Sulpher Springs,” became a fast favorite of Short.

“I was just so entranced by everything on it,” said Nancy. “I started out as a rocker, so when that came across my ears I thought, wow, this is a relief.”

Short would perform as a cellist for Norman’s opening act at Nashville’s Exit/In roughly a year later, and in 1974 Norman and Nancy began touring together. The two would marry a year later.

More recently, Norman has contributed to multiple film soundtracks produced by “T-Bone” Burnett.

Burnett's Grammy award winning soundtrack for the Coen Brother's "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" featured a performance of "You Are My Sunshine" as well as an instrumental version of "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow" both by Norman.

He has also contributed to Burnett's soundtracks for the movies "Cold Mountain" and "Walk the Line."

"Acoustic Guitar Magazine" quoted Burnett saying, "Norman is a true hero. He's one of a handful of the best acoustic guitar players in the world. He's learned hundreds of country songs, including rags, instrumental tunes and fiddle numbers, knowing the influences and nuance of every one. He should be an absolutely revered musician. I will continue to champion Norman Blake to the end of my days."

Both Norman and Nancy continue to make the music they love and the two are content with leaving it that way.

"It's the music that I want to make," Norman said. "I enjoy playing music with Nancy. When we can do something good that's an accomplishment to me."

The couple have released a combined 37 recordings and collaborated on many more, including seven Grammy- nominated works.

"Norman Blake and Nancy of all the people we have ever selected as our heritage award winners truly are masters of old-time music," Christy said. "Norman is a very versatile musician, he seems to just have a magical way of putting the old and new together and with Nancy's cello work it is a beautiful collaboration. They are some of the best musicians we've ever had."

Murfreesboro's Cannonsburgh Pioneer Village on Front Street will hold Uncle Dave Macon Days July 9-11. In addition to the Blakes' performance, the festival will include music and dance competitions with over \$10,000 at stake.

The festival was established in order to honor Uncle Dave Macon, a banjo player and performer who is considered one of the first Grand Ole Opry superstars. Uncle Dave lived near Murfreesboro, he died in 1952 and was elected, posthumously, to the County Music Hall of Fame in 1966.

"We've admired Uncle Dave all our lives," Norman said. "I listened to him as a small child on the radio, Nancy and I have recorded some tunes we learned from Uncle Dave. Uncle Dave was obviously one of the best entertainers to come down the pike. He covered the gamut, very broad repertoire, nobody has been able to touch him."

Admission is \$5 per day or \$8 for Friday and Saturday with children 12 years old and under getting in free. Admission for Sunday's gospel showcase and community service fair is free.

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