



Norman Blake & Peter Ostroushko **"Meeting On Southern Soil"** Red House Records

When I interviewed Ostroushko in late Y2K following the release of his superb instrumental collection **"Sacred Heart,"** the final part of his *"Journey Trilogy,"* he hinted that his next musical project would *probably* involve a collaboration with his old pickin' buddy, Norman Blake. A mere eighteen months later, the sixteen-song duo collection **"Meeting On Southern Soil"** is a reality. Apart from Norman's guitar and mandolin, and Peter's fiddle, mandola and mandolin, plus their individual vocal contributions to precisely half the tunes, the only other musical contributor is the cello of Nancy Blake, Norman's wife. Ten of the cuts hail from traditional sources, hence an acoustic, old time country feel pervades much of this set. Completing the collection are four numbers penned by Ostroushko, plus the Blake compositions "Blake's Railroad Blues" and the mandolin medley "Caperton Ferry"/"Ruins Of Richmond"/"Valley Head." All of the latter locations possess an American Civil War connection, as does Ostroushko's "Chickamauga" which this son of Minnesota composed following a visit to the Chickamauga Creek in the hills of northern Georgia [located only a few miles from Blake's home]. Chickamauga was the site of one of the bloodiest encounters of the five year campaign and was won by the south, but as Ostroushko points out in the liner notes *"as history shows, they lost the war."* For the record and considering the weapons available at that time it's hard to comprehend that, following two days of battle at Chickmauga, 34,000 lay slain.

You will have deduced by now that half the material is instrumental. In the liner booklet Blake, an acknowledged scholar of traditional folk/country music, makes numerous references to the source of the tune being *"an old 78 recording,"* or *"one that has been handed down through the generations from father to son."* "Oh Death" is probably the best-known traditional song covered by the duo, and features Peter's vocal. Ralph Stanley won a Grammy last year for his rendition of the song, and as a duet, Mary McCaslin and the late Jim Ringer cut a beautifully haunting version for their 1978 album **"The Bramble And The Rose."** Closing this fine set is Ostroushko's wistful "Christmas Eve Is Coming, Anna" which he composed in early December 2000 for his young daughter. It was written in Blake's Georgia home, where he was staying just prior to recording this album.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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