

Blind Boys of Alabama  
*I'll Find a Way*

# THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA

## *I'LL FIND A WAY*

Produced by Justin Vernon of Bon Iver

With Special Guests Merrill Garbus of  
tUnE-yArDs, Justin Vernon, Patty Griffin,  
Shara Worden of My Brightest Diamond, Sam  
Amidon, & Casey Dienel of White Hinterland

Available October 1, 2013 on Sony Masterworks

Sony Masterworks announces the release of the **Blind Boys of Alabama**'s new album, *I'll Find a Way*, produced by **Justin Vernon** (of Bon Iver) and available on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013. A unique collaboration between one of popular music's longest-running acts and one of its fastest-rising stars, it is a powerful collection of gospel and spiritual songs new and old, featuring some of the Blind Boys' most fervent vocals as well as contributions by a new generation of Blind Boys fans - **Sam Amidon, Shara Worden of My Brightest Diamond, Merrill Garbus of tUnE-yArDs, Casey Dienel of White Hinterland, Patty Griffin**, and Justin Vernon himself.

*I'll Find a Way* represents a strong new chapter for the Blind Boys of Alabama, whose career stretches back more than seventy years. Formed in the late 1930s at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind in Talladega, the group has harmonized throughout the turbulent twentieth century and well into the twenty-first: from Jim Crow through Civil Rights and into the Obama era. They have, however, enjoyed some of their biggest and most rousing successes in the last ten years, during which they've won five Grammys, four Gospel Music Awards, and multiple invitations to sing at the White House.

For *I'll Find a Way*, their ninth studio album of the twenty-first century, the Blind Boys of Alabama - which includes **Jimmy Carter, Eric 'Ricky' McKinnie, Joey Williams, Tracy Pierce, Ben Moore**, and newest addition **Paul Beasley** - decamped to the wintry wild of rural Wisconsin to record at Vernon's April Base studio. Known primarily for his work in the indie and folk realms, the Bon Iver frontman proved a perfect fit to work with the Blind Boys, exhibiting a deep knowledge and appreciation of gospel music.

Vernon and old friend and band mate **Phil Cook** (Megafaun, The Shouting Matches) corralled a lively backing band for the album and hand-picked a range of songs for the Blind Boys to sing. Some numbers, such as "Take Your Burden to the Lord And Leave It There," have been sung for nearly a century now, while others, like "I Am Not Waiting Anymore," were penned only a year or two ago. The result of this unique collaboration is a collection of rousing tunes that address life's most desperate hours but also savor the triumphs and reassurances of faith.

One of the band's own stories of trial and triumph involves **Clarence Fountain**, a founding member of the Blind Boys and the group's leader for many decades. Serious health problems requiring weekly kidney dialysis have prevented him from touring with the other members of the group. When he couldn't travel to the Wisconsin sessions, the Blind Boys found a way to include him on the album, recording his robust bass vocals in Birmingham and adding them to the mix.

"That's an important part, that bass under everything," explains Carter, the group's current leader and standout tenor. "He gave those songs a true Blind Boys bottom. We wouldn't want to do a Blind Boys project without including Clarence. He will always be a Blind Boy even if he's not out on the road with us."

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A strikingly and confidently diverse album, *I'll Find a Way* features an array of guest vocalists representing a whole new generation of artists who find contemporary musical inspiration in America's gospel past. The daughter of two musicians who played in a Pentecostal church, Shara Worden of Detroit-based My Brightest Diamond lends her soaring voice to the title track (originally written and recorded by the Motown session musician Ted Lucas). Casey Diemel of White Hinterland sings lead on the Blind Boys' glorious cover of the Chi-Lites' "There Will Never Be Any Peace (Until God Is Seated at the Conference Table)," whose luxuriant string arrangement has been replaced with a stoical beat, quietly ascending keyboard theme, and stirring saxophone solo courtesy of Minneapolis musician Mike Lewis.

In addition, *I'll Find a Way* features cameos by Merrill Garbus of tUnE-yArDs ("I've Been Searching," whose lilting reggae rhythms make it the album's most adventurous track), Patty Griffin (the barn-burning closer, "Jubilee"), and Sam Amidon (a spiritual version of the band Field Report's song, "I Am Not Waiting Anymore"). Another highlight is the cover of Bob Dylan's "Every Grain of Sand," which is recast as a soul-searching duet between Carter and Vernon. "Jimmy and I are coming from such different places," says Vernon, "and yet we're singing about the same thing. There are two perspectives in that song, and they're colliding."

Whether backing up a guest artist or tearing through an old gospel standard, the Blind Boys show their inimitable range throughout *I'll Find a Way*, starting with the very first track, a cover of "God Put a Rainbow in the Cloud." The song is a country music chestnut, best known as a hit for Kitty Wells, yet Carter, an avowed fan of country music, knows the song through legendary bluegrass picker Ralph Stanley. "I Shall Not Be Moved," an anthem during the Civil Rights movement and, in Cook's view, "the trunk of the gospel tree," stomps nimbly, thanks to the Blind Boys' spry vocals and the studio band's crackling country-gospel accompaniment. "Take Your Burden to the Lord And Leave It There," a tune penned by the African American minister and composer Charles A. Tindley, jogs by on a light shuffle, as though newly relieved of all woes and worries. It recounts not the arduous journey to salvation, but the ecstatic relief of finding it.

The centerpiece of *I'll Find a Way*, however, may just be "Take Me to the Water," featuring newest Blind Boy Paul Beasley. Based on a performance by Nina Simone (one of Vernon's favorite artists), this version features a steady pace and a rich bed of harmonies, as Beasley pleads and testifies gloriously in his stately falsetto. Just days before this recording, he had made his live debut with the Blind Boys, but initially had some trouble with this tune. After some encouraging words from Carter, Beasley not only nailed a heart-stopping performance, but reduced everyone in the control room to tears. What you can't hear on the final version is his small audience erupting into shouts and applause on the other side of the glass.

Just as "Take Me to the Water" moved the musicians to tears, so too will this album move the listener. This is the exuberant power of gospel music, which requires its performers to give themselves wholly to the songs. The Blind Boys have been doing that for nearly three-quarters of a century now, and even into their seventies and eighties - despite all obstacles - they don't plan to stop any time soon.

"It's not just singing," explains the 82-year-old Carter. "We're bringing the message to the people, and that message is the good news of God. We sing from the heart, and what comes from the heart reaches the heart. If you have any feeling in you, you will feel the Blind Boys."



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# THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA

## *I'LL FIND A WAY*

### Press Quotes

“Bon Iver has produced the new Blind Boys Of Alabama LP with tUnE-yArDs, Patty Griffin and Sam Amidon guesting. Harmonygasms incoming”

- **The Guardian (UK)**

“Justin Vernon of Bon Iver duets with the Boys’ Jimmy Carter on a stirring cover of Bob Dylan’s “Every Grain of Sand,” and the results of this ambient piano ballad are enough to make your heart burst. In a year that has been filled with beautiful music, this is quite possibly the most beautiful song you will hear.”

- **Glide Magazine**

“They proclaim their reverence in close harmonies and gutsy improvisations that leap heavenward.”

- **The New York Times**

“I’ll Find a Way builds on the minimalist yet emotionally resonant template set by the Blind Boys’ first Grammy-winning album, 2001’s Spirit of the Century, finding new vitality in the alternately modern and deferential sensibilities of Vernon and company.”

- **Billboard**

“Here the iconic Blind Boys of Alabama sound more joyful, jubilant and ready than ever, their faith a source of palpable euphoria... The Bon Iver leader makes *I’ll Find A Way* a progressive, rootsy affair.”

- **Paste Magazine**

“You don’t have to be a believer to appreciate the music of the Blind Boys of Alabama or the message of faith, redemption and devotion they espouse, but it’s also likely that once you listen to their newest opus, I’ll Find a Way, you’ll feel a new surge of spirituality... Ultimately, there’s not a single song here that fails to resonate or emphatically evoke emotions...”

- **American Songwriter**

“Vernon — an admitted nonbeliever — searches for conviction as he trades verses with the Blind Boys’ leader, Jimmy Carter, on a cover of Bob Dylan’s “Every Grain of Sand.” Through deep voices, dreamy piano and sparse percussion, it highlights the album’s best accomplishment — artists from different eras learning from each other with open minds.”

- **Washington Post**

“The Blind Boys of Alabama haven’t lost their spark over their seven-plus decade, and on their new track “Jubilee,” the veteran gospel group finds bliss with Patty Griffin.”

- **Rolling Stone**

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# THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA

New release *I'll Find A Way*, Produced By Justin Vernon (Bon Iver), Out October 1st, 2013

★Winners of 5 GRAMMY Awards (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009)

★Honored with the GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award (2009)

★Gospel Music Hall of Fame Inductees (2003)

★Winners of 4 Gospel Music Association Dove Awards (2003, 2006, 2 Awards in 2009)

★3 U.S. Presidential Administrations have invited The Blind Boys to the White House: President Clinton in 1994, President Bush in 2002 and President Obama in 2010.

★Featured performance on the 2005 GRAMMY telecast with Mavis Staples, Kanye West and John Legend. Other on stage and recording collaborations include work with Prince, Lou Reed, Peter Gabriel, Tom Waits, Bonnie Raitt, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Allen Toussaint, Ben Harper and many more.

★Featured appearances on 60 Minutes, Late Night with David Letterman, The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Late Night with Conan O'Brien, The Today Show, CBS Saturday Morning and Austin City Limits.

★The Blind Boys' version of the Tom Waits song, "Way Down In The Hole", was used as the main title theme for the popular HBO series, *The Wire*.



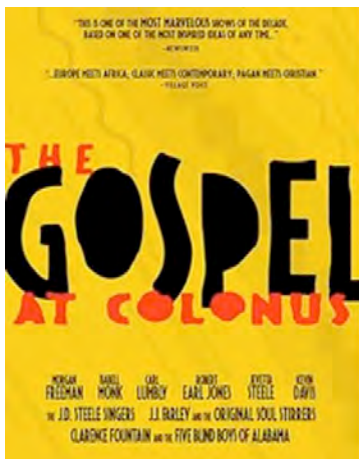
In February 2010, President and Mrs. Obama hosted *In Performance at the White House: A Celebration of Music from the Civil Rights Movement*, featuring The Blind Boys of Alabama, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, The Freedom Singers, John Mellencamp, Smokey Robinson, Natalie Cole, Jennifer Hudson, Yolanda Adams and the Howard University Choir. It was broadcast on PBS and NPR. "The Blind Boys of Alabama gave one of the night's most fiery performances on the old spiritual *I'm Free at Last*." - USA Today

In January 2010, The Blind Boys appeared on *Late Night with David Letterman*, accompanied by Lou Reed. They performed the Velvet Underground classic "Jesus," a collaboration that is also featured on The Blind Boys' 2009 CD, *Duets* and which they previously sang together at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York.

Featured in the film, *Soundtrack For A Revolution*, which screened at the prestigious Cannes and Tribeca Film Festivals. Focusing on the civil rights movement, the film uses updated renditions of the era's songs performed by musicians including The Blind Boys, Richie Havens, The Roots, Harry Belafonte, Wyclef Jean, Angie Stone, John Legend and Joss Stone. Two-time Oscar and two-time Emmy Award winner Bill Guttentag and partner Dan Sturman wrote and directed the film.

In May 2005, Dan Rather presented The Blind Boys of Alabama with The American Foundation for the Blind's distinguished Helen Keller Personal Achievement Award, presented to individuals and organizations that have improved the quality of life for people who are blind, visually impaired or disabled. Past recipients include Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, and Jose Feliciano.

May 2005 also found Her Majesty, Queen Noor of Jordan presenting the Blind Boys the First Niarchos Prize for Survivorship. The Landmine Survivors Network awards the prize to an artist whose life work promotes resiliency and recovery.



*The Gospel At Colonus* featuring The Blind Boys of Alabama was a musical production that transformed Sophocles' classic Greek tragedy (Oedipus at Colonus) into a contemporary, foot-stomping gospel masterpiece. The play was acclaimed as a landmark work of the American Musical theater with years of critical praise, including OBIE Awards for both Outstanding Musical and for Outstanding

Performance by Morgan Freeman who was featured during the play's 1983-84 season. It was also nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award. *The Gospel At Colonus* premiered in New York in 1983 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Over the years, this dazzling production has appeared nationwide as well as in Europe and South America and will return briefly for some rare performances in June 2011.

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## TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

SAGUARO ROAD RECORDS

Much in the world has changed since the original version of the **Blind Boys of Alabama** first raised their voices together. That was in 1939, when the members were just kids at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind in Talladega, Ala. Today, more than 70 years later, founding member **Jimmy Carter** can look back on a career far beyond what he and his colleagues could imagine at that time. The group has won a long list of awards, including Lifetime Achievement honors from the Grammys and the National Endowment for the Arts, entertained around the world, been profiled on 60 Minutes, sung for two Presidents at the White House and been inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

Yet throughout this long adventure, they kept one secret to themselves.

"All my life, I've loved country music," confesses Carter. "I was raised up around it. Back in the 1940s, I remember listening to Hank Williams and so many others. Their voices were great. The writers were great. And every song had a meaning. I still have loads of country music in my home and I play it all the time. As a matter fact,

I've got it on XM radio as we speak."

Though the group has recorded and performed with a few country artists, along with others as diverse as **Ben Harper, Tom Petty, Peter Gabriel** and **Prince**, they never crossed the line and committed to doing a project inspired by the country genre until now, with the release of *Take The High Road* on Saguaro Road Records. This landmark recording draws from modern and traditional country to enrich the group's gospel-rooted sound with fresh and illuminating insight.

For years the Blind Boys had imagined such a project. But it wasn't until they were voted into the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in 2010 that their plans began to coalesce. The catalyst was their meeting rising country music star **Jamey Johnson**, who sang "Down by the Riverside" with them at the induction ceremony in Montgomery. Johnson, whose gifts as a songwriter and performer match his fierce commitment to country music's history and tradition, is a longtime admirer of the Blind Boys. The experience of sharing the stage with him prompted the Blind Boys to seek his services to help bring their dream of doing a country gospel album to life.

They proved a perfect match. "The Blind Boys attract intense, artistically pure people like Jamey," says **Chris Goldsmith**, their producer or executive producer on every album since 2001. (On *Take The High Road*, Goldsmith is a co-producer along with Johnson and Nashville musicians **Chad Cromwell** and **Kevin "Swine" Grantt**.) "Jamey is uncompromising and passionate, and an encyclopedia of music. He became the keeper of the flame on this project."

That meant, first of all, making sure that every song they chose to cut connected with everyone involved. "On other albums, the Blind Boys might be hesitant to try a new song and I would have to make an effort to convince them that the song would be a good one to do," Goldsmith said. "But for this one, we sat in the control room, playing demos or old recordings of certain songs. Jamey would watch the guys, and if they started bobbing their head and tapping their foot, then we would do that one. We'd never done it like that before, and it was a lot of fun."

Johnson was pivotal as well in lining up many of Nashville's top country singers and A-list musicians for the sessions. All it took was a personal call to bring **Vince Gill, Willie Nelson, the Oak Ridge Boys, Hank Williams Jr.** and **Lee Ann Womack** onboard. Each of these guests brought a distinctive perspective into the mix, but according to Carter, aside from being icons of country music, they all had one thing in common.

"When we bring people in to our projects, we look for those that have some soul in their singing," he notes. "All these folks, they bring soul. That's why it sounds so good. That's what it's all about."

There was no pre-production or rehearsal for *Take The High Road*. "Every song found its guest, and every guest found the center of that song," Goldsmith said. "Lee Ann, Vince, Hank, Jamey - everybody just crushed it."

For Carter, recording in Nashville for the first time in his career was another longtime dream finally coming true. Johnson set that ball rolling with a personal tour of legendary Music City hotspots. "I told Jamey, 'I heard about this bar in Nashville but I thought it was a legend. Is there a Tootsies in Nashville?' He said, 'Yes, there is. Would you like to go?' I said, 'I sure would.' I wound up onstage there, singing. That was a great, great moment in my life. And later Jamey took me to the Station Inn, where I sang along with Vince Gill and the Time Jumpers. That was the first time I ever met him."

Johnson also invited some of the city's musical royalty, including "**Whispering**" **Bill Anderson** and the king of country singers, **George Jones**, just to stop by and witness the sessions. They bonded quickly with Carter and the Blind Boys, and the word got out that something special and historic was happening at the old RCA studio.

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The musicians recruited by Johnson were equally touched by the opportunity to record with the Blind Boys. Each is a seasoned professional, yet the intensity of working for the first time with the group went beyond normal routine. Fiddler and mandolin player **Glen Duncan** bluntly stated "I've been recording music my entire adult life, and working with The Blind Boys of Alabama on this record was the most moving experience of my life and career." The celebrated guitarist **Reggie Young** shed tears during an especially emotional moment of music. Johnson confirmed to the New York Times that "there wasn't one person who didn't bawl like a baby or bust their heart open at least once" during the sessions. And bassist Kevin "Swine" Grantt was so moved during the tracking of his own tune, "I Know a Place," that he had to leave the studio and spend an hour collecting himself before he could continue.

That track is but one of many highlights on **Take The High Road**. The hypnotic, waltz-time sway and Jamey Johnson's rough-hewn and reverent vocal on "Have Thine Own Way, Lord," the timbres of Willie Nelson's hushed singing and acoustic guitar on "Family Bible," the Hank Jr. romp through his father's "I Saw the Light" - each performance reveals a different perspective on faith, woven into one testimony and uplifted by the Blind Boys' embrace.

The singers mirrored this deep feeling as they laid their unmistakable, church-inflected harmonies over beds of fiddle and steel guitar. The result isn't just an album that explores the juncture of two great forms of American music; it's an achievement that stands out even in the Blind Boys' storied catalog as a demonstration of how divinely inspired music can transcend the borders of category.

"Out of all the records we've done together, this has been the most natural," Goldsmith insists. "The connection between the material, the Nashville guests, and the Blind Boys felt like destiny. Somewhere in history, these two almost identical styles of music - country and gospel - went their separate ways. This record brings them back together."

Carter puts it this way: "These two traditions are very similar. There's a lot of common ground in all kinds of music, and it keeps getting closer and closer together. That's why we want to involve everybody in our music. We want to sing good music, no matter what kind it is. Most of all, we want to touch people's lives. We want to leave them a message they can feed upon throughout their lives."



*"The fusion of the Blind Boys' Deep South gospel with New Orleans funk, R&B and jazz creates a superweapon of roots-music uplift...will raise goose bumps even on the tatted-up arms of resolutely futurist hipsters."*

Brian Hiatt, **Rolling Stone**

*"Seeing the Blind Boys of Alabama in concert is part living history, part concert, all uplifting experience...the best moments come when the group joins forces for stirring harmonies."*

David Malitz, **The Washington Post**

*"There's no denying the power of spirit that suffuses the legendary gospel quintet's latest disc. Typical gusto, honest, soulful music."*

**Mojo**

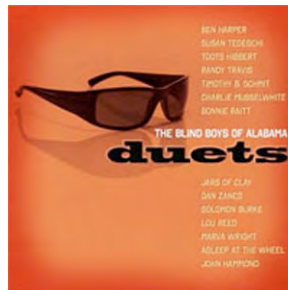
**Festival Appearances:** Festival de Fès (Morocco); New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival; Tour of China; London Jazz Festival; Salzburger Jazz-Herbst (Austria); Montreux Jazz Festival; Pohoda Festival (Slovakia); Stockholm International Jazz Festival; Festival de Jazz de Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain); Copenhagen Jazz Festival (Denmark); Essence Music Festival (New Orleans); Voodoo Fest (New Orleans); Dysart Festival (Ireland); Narcao Blues Festival (Italy); Festival D'Ete International De Quebec; Festival International de Jazz de Montreal; Monterey Bay Blues Festival; Cité de la musique Concert Hall (Paris, France); WOMAD (UK); BBC Radio 2 Cambridge Folk Festival (UK); Stimmen Festival (Germany); Nice Jazz Festival (France); Rome Blues Festival; Hong Kong Arts Festival; Austin City Limits Festival; Fuji Rock Festival (Japan); Byblos Festival (Lebanon); The Helsinki Festival; Playboy Jazz Festival at the Hollywood Bowl; Bonnaroo Music Festival; Boogiewood Festival (Belgium); Glasgow International Jazz Festival (Scotland); International Istanbul Jazz Festival; The Kennedy Center American Music Fest (Washington, DC); Bumbershoot (Seattle, WA) and many more.

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# DISCOGRAPHY

- 2013 I'll Find A Way
- 2011 Take The High Road
- 2009 Duets
- 2008 Down In New Orleans ☆ GRAMMY WINNER
- 2005 Atom Bomb
- 2004 There Will Be A Light (with Ben Harper) ☆ GRAMMY WINNER
- 2003 Go Tell It On The Mountain ☆ GRAMMY WINNER
- 2003 Higher Ground ☆ GRAMMY WINNER
- 2001 Spirit Of The Century ☆ GRAMMY WINNER
- 1997 Holdin' On
- 1995 I Brought Him With Me
- 1992 Deep River
- 1991 I'm Not That Way Anymore
- 1990 Brand New
- 1989 I'm A Changed Man
- 1981 Faith Moves Mountains
- 1978 The Soldier Album
- 1970 Soul Of Clarence Fountain
- 1970 In The Gospel Light
- 1969 Fix It Jesus Like You Said You Would
- 1969 Jesus Will Be Waiting
- 1961 – 1968 Reissues
  - Church Concert In New Orleans
  - It's Sweet To Be Saved
  - Best Of The Blind Boys Vol 1 & 2
  - I Saw The Light
- 1965 Can I Get A Witness
- 1963 True Conviction
- 1963 Old Time Religion
- 1959 God Is On The Throne
- 1959 The Original Blind Boys
- 1958 My Mother's Train
- 1957 I'll Never Walk Alone
- 1954 Marching To Zion
- 1954 Stand By Me
- 1953 When I Lost My Mother
- 1953 Sermon
- 1950 Come Over Here The Table Spread
- 1950 Livin' On Mother's Prayers
- 1950 Sweet Honey In The Rock
- 1948 Can See Everybody's Mother But Mine



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