



## **Blount, Jake** **The New Faith**

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“After humanity’s debt to the planet came due, our ancestors crawled from the wreckage of their sunken cities and out of the deserts where once they had grown food enough for millions. Chance brought 30 survivors together, hundreds of miles to the south of here. Worn down by storms and starvation, they set their sights northward, and followed the coast to find a new home....”

So begins the parable at the heart of Jake Blount’s new album *The New Faith*, a towering achievement of dystopian Afrofuturism and his first album for Smithsonian Folkways (coming September 23, 2022). *The New Faith* is spiritual music, filled with hope for salvation and righteous anger in equal measure. The album manifests our worst fears on the shores of an island in Maine, where Blount enacts an imagined religious ceremony performed by Black refugees after the collapse of global civilization due to catastrophic climate change. Most importantly, it snaps us out of our tragically limited historical vantage point to better understand our actions and culture as they exist in deep time. If singing songs together as a community reminds us of who we are and where we come from, Blount harnesses that power to show us what may be remembered when our connection to our natural environment is severed – when our relationships with Death and each other are transformed into something more beautiful and more horrifying than anything we could have imagined.

Jake Blount’s music is rooted in care and confrontation. He is a scholar of Black American music, speaking ardently about the African roots of the banjo and the subtle yet profound ways African Americans have shaped and defined the amorphous categories of roots music and Americana. His 2020 album *Spider Tales* (named one of the year’s best albums by NPR and *The New Yorker*, earned a perfect 5-star review from *The Guardian*) highlighted the Black and Indigenous histories of popular American folk tunes, as well as revived songs unjustly forgotten in the whitewashing of the canon. Each song Blount plays is chosen for a reason – because it highlights important elements about the stories we tell ourselves of our shared history and our endlessly complicated present moment. The more we learn about where we’ve been, the better equipped we are to face the future.

That future has become Blount’s focus on *The New Faith*. Conceived, written, and recorded during the darkest months of COVID-lockdowns, the album answers the question, “What would Black music sound like after climate change renders most of the world uninhabitable? What gods would this community praise, and what stories would they tell?” Centering the album around radical arrangements of traditional songs, Blount draws connections between the plights of Black Americans and the horrors of enduring the disproportionate burden of the looming climate catastrophe. The songs have origins that span centuries and come from a broad array

of figures: enslaved individuals whose names had been violently stripped from the historical record, civil rights activist and organizer Fannie Lou Hamer, trailblazer and queer icon Sister Rosetta Tharpe, peerlessly expressive gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, and blues paragons Skip James and Blind Willie McTell. Stomps and handclaps form the rhythmic basis for Blount's interpretations, with trance-inducing fiddles, the leaden crunch of electric guitar, textural synthesized sounds, and the ecstatic whirl of the banjo filling out the margins. The bedrock is Blount's voice, channeling the ragged triumph of a people still standing after centuries of continuous confrontations with Death.

Despite their historical origins, the songs Blount has adapted acutely resonate with the contemporary climate crisis. Lead single "Didn't It Rain" tells the story of the Great Flood as the sea rises and overtakes the land, and how one's means dictate their survival: "Brother said, well, your wallet looks a little thin / If you can't pay, you'd better learn to swim." Global leadership's inability to act is alluded to on "The Downward Road": "Now look at my old grasping ruler, thought he was doin' mighty well. / But when he come to find out he done made up a bed in hell." Death is omnipresent, seen as a god walking the Earth, a reminder of every living being's destiny, at times showing mercy on those who ask for it. The very real horrors of climate collapse have been written into the fabric of spiritual doomsday narratives for centuries, almost as if there's a direct link between our spiritual and literal salvations. Blount barely had to change a word.

Still, it is hard to call *The New Faith* a dour album. It may examine the harsh realities faced by these imagined refugees, but its music reaches towards the triumphant and sublime. Rapper Demeanor frequently interjects with a dynamic, liquid flow to give the listener further context and history of the album's main characters – imagining a futuristic form of Black music would be impossible without incorporating hip-hop's rich artistry and storytelling tradition. These are songs of resilience, their bones imbued with the spirit of survivors – the ancestors who endured slavery, Jim Crow, police brutality, the impacts of a pandemic that has disproportionately affected communities of color – and their strength is the music's lasting impression. Blount, like his heroes Octavia Butler and N.K. Jemisin, uses parables of the future as a lens to investigate the present with a brutal but affecting honesty. *The New Faith* contains many prayers, but one of the most moving is a simple address to one's own kin: "My brother, don't you give up the world."

## Musicians

<b>Brian Slattery</b>	Percussion
<b>Demeanor</b>	Rap
<b>Jake Blount</b>	Vocals, Percussion, Banjo
<b>Mali Obomsawin</b>	Bass

## Tracklist

1.	Take Me To The Water/Prayer M: Traditional	03:35
2.	The Downward Road M: Traditional	03:36
3.	Didn't It Rain M: Traditional	03:06
4.	Tangle Eye Blues M: Traditional	03:51
5.	Parable M: Jake Blount	02:20
6.	Death Have Mercy	03:00

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	M: Traditional	
7.	City Called Heaven	04:52
	M: Charles Tindley	
8.	They Are Waiting For Me	04:27
	M: James D. Vaughan	
9.	Psalms	02:54
	M: Jake Blount	
10.	Just As Well Get Ready, You Got To Die	03:08
	M: Traditional	
11.	Give Up The World	04:09
	M: Traditional	
12.	Once There Was No Sun	04:21
	M: Traditional	