

Coming home from Nashville

By PETE OPPEL

Ronee Blakley once sang at Carnegie Hall with \$5,000 stuffed inside her underwear.

"It was back in 1970," Miss Blakley said during a stop in Dallas last week. "I was in New York for a gig at Carnegie Hall and I was supposed to leave for the Bahamas the next day to meet Graham Nash and David Crosby. They called me that day and told me they had run out of money so I spent the afternoon going to different banks trying to score up the dough. And I came up with \$5,000.

"Now I was nervous about carrying that much money around with me — \$5,000; that's a lot of money. I couldn't find anyplace safe enough to put it. I didn't want to stuff it under the piano. I mean anyone could come in and find the money hidden under there and walk off with my \$5,000.

"SO I STUFFED it in my underwear. It was funny. I was bulging out all over the place right there on the stage of Carnegie Hall."

The next day Miss Blakley, who played country singer Barbara Jean in the motion picture "Nashville," flew to the Bahamas to go sailing with Crosby and Nash.

"David is really an excellent captain," she said, "but there was this one lighthouse that was out and we got stuck on a sandbar on the way to Kingston. We almost foundered right then and there. We were stuck on that sandbar for a long time."

When the three of them finally arrived in Kingston, Graham called Joni Mitchell and asked her to meet them in Jamaica. That's when Miss Mitchell and Miss Blakley met.

"We've been very close friends ever since," Miss Blakley said.

RONEE BLAKLEY has written several songs dedicated to Joni Mitchell. She included one on her latest album, "Welcome." The song is called "She Lays It On The Line."

"She lays it on the line

She treats things like a work of art
Like her house and her friends
Like her man, she works from the heart."

If there is one universal emotion from "Nashville," it's the surprise as



Dallas News Staff photo by Lee Langsom.

Ronee Blakley: "I've always had lusty blood."

the credits roll at the end of the film and the audience learns that the songs sung in the film were written by the artists themselves.

But Miss Blakley has always considered herself a songwriter first, a singer second and an actress third. In addition to her performance at Carnegie Hall five years ago — a performance featuring one of the first Moog synthesizers — she has studied at Juilliard and paid some dues in small sa-

loons from Idaho to California and back to New York.

She recorded her first album in 1972, but it did not receive any attention at all. Her current LP is selling moderately well because of her appearance in "Nashville" and because it contains two of the songs she sang in the picture, "Tapdeck" and "My Idaho Home."

Miss Blakley says all the songs she writes (she composed all the songs on

both albums) come from her personal experiences. But some of them seem contradictory. In a song like "Nobody's Bride," she'll sing of a woman's independence and in another like "I Was Born To Love You," she'll sing about the necessity of a woman having a man in her life.

"But if they come from my own experiences — if they're a part of my life — they can't be contradictions," she says, lighting another one of the filter cigarettes she chain smokes.

"I have one feeling at a time," she said. "I've lived with two men but there's been others before and in between and after and those account for the differences in my feelings.

"IN ONE OF MY SONGS I say 'And when I go there'll be a smile on my face.' It's not 'If I go,' it's 'And when I go.'"

"I always approach these relationships with the basic assumption that it's going to have to end," she said. "I just can't see myself in a lasting relationship. I guess I have a 'Get It while you can' type of attitude.

"Oh, I believe in love — lasting love. My mother and father have always been in love."

Miss Blakley also makes three distinct references to blood in the album — almost as if she were preoccupied by the subject.

"It's in my subconscious, I guess. Maybe it's my way of referring to passion. Nietzsche said anything worth writing is worth writing in blood. Maybe that has something to do with it. I've always had lusty blood and I can't stand to have blood taken.

"I REMEMBER when I was a little girl — I was 6 at the time — and I caught on fire and I had to have plasma pumped in me for days. My father wouldn't let us have firecrackers on the 4th of July, but those couple of days after the 4th me and the boy next door — Nathan — we snuck out to this fort in a vacant lot between our homes and played with sparklers. I put a sparkler on his shirt and burned it a little and we laughed. And then he touched me and we laughed again. We thought it was great fun.

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"My hair started catching on fire."

Blakley wants to pay dues

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but then I caught on fire."

She stood up from the table and paced around the room.

"I tried to run home when my clothes caught on fire, but I couldn't make it. My legs wouldn't move." She simulated running in slow motion. "The fire climbed around my neck and got to my chin. My hair started catching on fire. You wouldn't believe how fast fire spreads. It just tries to eat you up. I tried to get my clothes off, but my hands were on fire. I was too young to realize I might have to sacrifice my hands to save my life.

"BUT A NEIGHBOR saw me and wrapped me up in her husband's coat and put the fire out."

Miss Blakley was involved in the one violent scene in "Nashville" — the controversial assassination scene that closes the picture.

"It was a crime of passion," she said. "We discussed the motives behind it. We discussed it as a combination of things: woman hatred, he was somebody who had trouble with his mother and had an unhappy homelife and he shot Barbara Jean as she was singing about her homelife. He came to Nashville to commit murder. Why he killed Barbara Jean I don't know.

Assassins must believe, I think, that they can become as important as the person they assassinate. I didn't find the scene unlikely or improbable as some people thought it was."

Miss Blakley admits she has not been exactly flooded with offers since "Nashville." She will begin work in December in another Robert Altman production that Alan Rudolph will direct starring Susannah York, Keith Carradine and Harvey Heltel. It will be about a dairy farming family in California.

BUT MISS BLAKLEY seems more concerned about paying some more dues in the music business. She's a woman who knows that one starring role in a major motion picture is not enough to warrant instant stardom in another medium.

"I am trying to line up a concert tour for November — I've set aside the last two weeks of this month for rehearsals and the month of November for the tour," she says. "I'm not going to headline the tour. What I'd like to be is the opening act for someone like Michael Murphey or The Eagles. It would just be for the exposure. The people would come to see the name act and hopefully they would like my music, too."