



Advance Program Notes

Martha Redbone

Roots Project

Friday, November 30, 2018, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Martha Redbone *Roots Project*

Martha Redbone, *lead vocal and percussion*

Aaron Whitby, *piano and organ*

Rocky Bryant, *drums*

Charlie Burnham, *violin and harmonica*

Alan Burroughs, *dobro, electric guitar, and background vocals*

Fred Cash Jr., *bass*

Marvin Sewell, *banjo and acoustic and electric guitars*

Program to be announced from the stage

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Martha Redbone is one of today's most vital voices in American Roots music. A multi award-winning musician, the charismatic songstress is celebrated for her tasty gumbo of roots music, embodying the folk and mountain blues sounds of her childhood in the Appalachian hills of Kentucky mixed with the eclectic grit of her teenage years in pre-gentrified Brooklyn. With the power of her gospel singing African-American father's voice and the determined spirit of her Cherokee/Shawnee/Choctaw mother, Redbone broadens all boundaries of Americana. Her latest CD, *The Garden of Love—Songs of William Blake*, produced by Nitty Gritty Dirt Band founder and Grammy winner John McEuen, is an unexpected twist. "[A] brilliant collision of cultures" (*The New Yorker*) features Redbone's magnificent voice, Blake's immortal words, and a masterful cornucopia of roots music (folk, country, Piedmont blues, gospel, bluegrass, soul, and traditional Southeastern Native American).

Redbone and her long-term collaborator, pianist/composer Aaron Whitby, are called the "little engine that could" by their "band of NYC's finest blues and jazz musicians" (Larry Blumenthal, *Wall Street Journal*). From grassroots beginnings in the singer-songwriter bars of New York City and at powwows across Indian Country performing her debut album, *Home of the Brave*—"Stunning album, the kind of woman who sets trends" (*Billboard*)—Redbone has built a passionate fan base. Her sophomore album *Skintalk* is described as the soulful sound of "Earth, Wind and Fire on the Rez" (*Native Peoples Magazine*) and is recognized as an example of contemporary Native American music in the Library Collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

Returning to the music of her childhood in the mountains with *The Garden of Love—Songs of William Blake*, the Redbone/Whitby team continued to explore her family's roots in the Appalachias for inspiration and, when commissioned by Joe's Pub/National Endowment for the Arts for their New York Voices program, the team wrote a song cycle, *Bone Hill—The Concert*, which is the journey of a woman returning to her homeland in Black Mountain and the coalmines of Kentucky, where her family has dwelled for centuries. As a contemporary multi-racial Cherokee/Shawnee and African-American family, they are permanently bonded to their culture, identity, and the mountain, despite its violent past and the ever-changing laws of the land that attempt to extinguish them. This piece is currently touring nationwide. Redbone and Whitby are recipients of the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) National Theater Project Creation and Touring Grant and National Performance Network Creation Fund and Lincoln Center. Redbone is a 2015-2016 fellow of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation.

The Martha Redbone *Roots Project* concert is a celebratory event. Redbone's music is congregational and infectious; audiences will be invited to join in and sing along, clap, dance, and be uplifted in song! The songs of the *Roots Project* are drawn from two sources: original compositions and settings from *The Garden of Love—Songs of William Blake* and classic protest songs that also speak to today's current events.

Alongside her career as a recording artist and songwriter, Redbone has maintained a steady involvement with causes she believes in. Redbone is contracted by the Department of Indian Education in Louisiana's LaFourche Parish and teaches Southeastern traditional singing workshops for the United Houma Nation's Bayou Healers Cultural Enrichment Camp program. Redbone guest lectures on subjects ranging from Indigenous rights, the role of the arts in politics, and Native American identity at many institutions such as New York University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, to name a few. Redbone includes workshops and motivational talks with grade school children as part of her touring schedule on numerous reservations, including in Red Lake, Minnesota; Cherokee, North Carolina; Yuma, Arizona; and Menominee, Wisconsin, among others.

An exemplary ambassador for both Native and African-American youth for the National HIV/AIDS Partnership, she was awarded the Red Ribbon Award for Outstanding Leadership presented on World AIDS Day at the United Nations in 2005. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita ravaged the communities of the United Houma Nation on the Gulf Coast, Redbone singlehandedly helped generate publicity that raised over \$30,000. She also performed with Bonnie Raitt and the late Floyd Red Crow Westerman and helped raise over \$130,000 in scholarships for the Heart of the Earth Foundation, where 12 outstanding Native American students who have

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overcome adversity receive full tuition to study in higher education. Currently Redbone is an advocate for WhyHunger.org's Artists Against Hunger and Poverty program, raising awareness of poverty and hunger in the United States, with her personal attention to the Appalachian region.

Redbone is on the advisory board of the ManUp Campaign, the global youth movement to eradicate violence against women and girls, for whom she served as the indigenous affairs consultant and North American Indigenous creative advisor. She is particularly proud of her accomplishment in having the campaign's board of directors include an Indigenous North American contingent (independent of the U.S.A.) to the roll call of 50 countries taking part in their Youth Leadership Summit, held at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Redbone is currently an advisory board member of the Carlisle Indian School Project.

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AARON WHITBY, *piano/organ*

London-born and -raised Aaron Whitby, the co-creator of *Bone Hill* and producer, composer, songwriter, and pianist mentored by Walter "Junie" Morrison of Parliament Funkadelic and Ohio Players, is best known for the multiple award-winning albums he has written and produced with longtime collaborator Martha Redbone. Whitby also tours with wife Redbone, whose band he leads. He engineered Natalie Cole's Grammy Award-winning single *Living for Love* and has recorded and/or performed with George Clinton, Randy Brecker, Lisa Fischer, John McEuen, Raul Midon, Nona Hendryx, Vernon Reid, Omar Faruk Tekbilek, Mino Cinelu, Snehasish Mozumder, and Keith Secola, among many others. Whitby is currently working on his own CD release, *Cousin from Another Planet*, a jazz/funk exploration of his more esoteric musical vocabulary, featuring Charlie Burnham, Keith Loftis, Fred Cash, Jerome Harris, Gary Fritz, and Rodney Holmes. *Bone Hill—The Concert* is Redbone and Whitby's first foray into musical theatre, sparked by a New York Voices commission from Joe's Pub/The Public Theater and the National Endowment for the Arts. Since then, the team has also been commissioned by the New York Theater Workshop for the *Plurality of Privacy* project in partnership with the Goethe Institute, and they are contributing composers for *Primer for a Failed Superpower*, a new work directed by Rachel Chavkin of *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* and *Hadestown*. Redbone and Whitby are composers for the Gung Ho Theater Company production *The Liangshan Project*, a collaboration with Chinese artists from the Yi indigenous community and diverse American artists, to premiere in China in autumn 2018.

ROCKY BRYANT, *drums*

Native of New Jersey, Rocky Bryant's diverse drumming abilities have kept him on stage and in the studio with some of the best names in music. Bryant has performed and/or recorded with Dianne Reeves (Grammy-award winning CD), Branford Marsalis and Buckshot LeFonque, Lalah Hathaway, Peter Frampton, Maxwell, Cyndi Lauper, David Sanborn, Faith Hill, Brandy, Daryl Hall, Paula Abdul, and Billy Joel, to highlight but a few. Bryant started taking drum lessons when he was in the fifth grade. While being taught in a somewhat classical style, he was also moved by the popular R&B of bands like the Ohio Players and Sly & the Family Stone. Bryant involved

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himself in every musical situation he could find, including orchestra, jazz ensemble, and marching band. He auditioned for and landed a position in the New Jersey All State Orchestra in the sixth and seventh grades. As a junior in high school, he did his first recording with actor/singer Joe Morton. After high school graduation, Bryant attended the Drummers Collective in New York to study vibraphone. Soon after, he began touring and continued recording with a host of artists from the New York area.

CHARLIE BURNHAM, *violin and harmonica*

Brooklyn-born and -raised, Charles Burnham is a singular, versatile, and virtuosic American violinist and composer, whose highly imaginative improvisational style crosses bluegrass, delta punk, free jazz, blues, classical, and chamber jazz. Worldly and other-worldly sounds can be heard from Burnham's soulful voice. He has graced the recordings of many, including Cassandra Wilson, James Blood Ulmer, Steven Bernstein, Susie Ibarra, Peter Apfelbaum, Henry Threadgill, String Trio of New York, Ted Daniel, Medeski, Martin & Wood, Living Colour, Queen Esther, John Zorn, Steve Swell, Rufus Wainwright, Krishna Das, Kenny Wollesen, Norah Jones, Billie Joe Armstrong, Jason Kao Hwang, The Woes, Hem, and Elysian Fields, among others. Burnham also performs on harmonica and mandolin and is a highly regarded singer.

ALAN BURROUGHS, *dobro, electric guitar, and background vocals*

Chicago native Alan Burroughs, a recording artist of jazz and blues in his own right, has both recorded and toured with Martha Redbone since 2000. Burroughs hails from an esteemed musical heritage; his great uncle was the legendary bandleader Fletcher Henderson, known as one of the founders of jazz and the band that launched the great Louis Armstrong. Burroughs is one of the most in-demand guitar players worldwide, known for his versatility of styles. From blues, jazz, rock, reggae, soul, and funk, Burroughs plays and sings it all effortlessly. He has recorded for film and TV and worked with such artists as Miles Davis; Art Porter; Philip Bailey of Earth, Wind and Fire; The Dells; and the Captain Sky Band, among others.

FRED CASH JR., *bass*

Chicago native Fred Cash Jr. has recorded and toured with Martha Redbone since 2000. Cash attended the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. He hails from a musical family; his father is Fred Cash Sr. of the legendary vocal group The Impressions. Cash Jr. is one of the most in-demand bass players around. He has recorded for film and TV and, in addition to Redbone, has worked with such artists as Alicia Keys, Nona Hendryx, George Clinton, Henry Butler, Jean-Paul Bourelly, India Arie, Jerry Butler, Toshi Reagon, Michelle Dorrance, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Barbara Streisand, and Marika Hughes, among others.

MARVIN SEWELL, *banjo and acoustic and electric guitars*

Chicago-born and -raised, Marvin Sewell learned how to play the guitar with many Chicago basement bands and was exposed to a variety of musical styles, including blues, gospel, soul, rock, and fusion. Sewell has played with many famous Chicago musicians, such as Von Freeman, Ramsey Lewis, Billy Branch, Big Time Sarah, and Barbara La Shore. He studied composition at Roosevelt University in Chicago. Residing in Brooklyn since 1990, Sewell plays with various bands of different genres, both acoustic and electric. He has performed and/or recorded with Jack DeJohnette, Diedre Murray, Fred Hopkins, and Gary Thomas. In 1993 Sewell played in Hannibal Peterson's composition *African Portraits*, an opera in collaboration with the St. Louis Symphony, New Music Symphony, and the Westchester Symphony Orchestra. He has also worked with David Sanborn, Marcus Miller, Greg Osby, George Benson, Sekou Sundiata, Cassandra Wilson, Regina Carter, and a host of many other esteemed musicians, including his own band, the Marvin Sewell Group.

Engagement Events

Friday, November 30, 2018

SCHOOL-DAY PERFORMANCE: MARTHA REDBONE

Traditional Southeastern Tribal Songs and Dances

Martha Redbone delivered a performance for students in third through sixth grades in public, private, and homeschools from Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, and Roanoke counties, as well as the cities of Radford and Roanoke.

Special thanks to Veronica Montes

Go Beyond

In a 2018 interview with Richard Mitnick of the website MusicSprings, Martha Redbone defined “Americana” and described its history in the following way:

“Americana starts with the first people. It starts with the land, and then from there it starts with the people brought here, and who have been here. In many ways what we think of as Americana is actually Native and Black, and that’s why I’m here. This is why I do it. That’s where it begins. The foundation is in the land and the people who were connected to this land. And Americana is also the sound of the colonizers. That’s included in it as well.

“I call our music ‘mountain music’ because I’m all these things, I’m not just Black and Native, I’m also Irish and English, and that’s also there in those mountains. I’m made of all those people in those mountains.

“It’s interesting how the music began and then morphed and kind of got claimed—blues became Black and country music became White, and it didn’t used to be that. They used to just call them string bands. But because of Jim Crow things got segregated, and the music got segregated. There became a knee-jerk reaction to this mountain music because it’s connected to colonization and slave ownership, so of course to Black people today it immediately feels like racist and KKK music. But it isn’t. Bluegrass, for example, actually comes from African music. The banjo’s African. And I think that people of color need to claim this instrument that came from our people, to claim it and make it our own.”

How does Redbone’s illustration of “Americana” compare with the genre as you’ve understood it? How is this multi-faceted definition embodied in Redbone’s performance?

In the Galleries

SWARM

Talia Greene, Don Maynard, Björn Schülke, Leah Sobsey, and Marina Zurkow

Wednesday, October 24-Saturday, December 15, 2018

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery, Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception Gallery, and Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor

A selection of works from emerging and established artists explore bodies that converge to occupy, invade, or even dominate our airspace. From insects to birds, planes to drones, SWARM presents an array of digital, sculptural, and site-specific art works that portray the wondrous, delightful, ominous, and even unnerving imagery of objects and beings en masse, in flight, all around...

Featured here is a detail of Talia Greene's *Cross Pollination*, a wallpaper installation teeming with digitally-composed honeybees and comb constructed of dried flower stems and stamen, insect parts, and human hair.

GALLERY HOURS

Monday-Friday, 10 AM-5:30 PM

Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu.