



“A delightful surprise...terrific album” ROBERT SIEGEL, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED



“In a brilliant collision of cultures, the powerful blues and soul singer Martha Redbone has recorded an album called “The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake,” which was produced by John McEuen, of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. In it, the mystical, humanistic words of the eighteenth-century English poet are fused with the melodies, drones, and rhythms of the Appalachian string-band music that Redbone absorbed as a child from her grandparents, in Black Mountain, Kentucky.” THE NEW YORKER



“Poised to be Americana's next superstar.” THE VILLAGE VOICE



“Martha Redbone is a charismatic indie-soul diva whose sound is a just-right mix of retro and modern.” TIMEOUT NEW YORK



“This woman is a true original; the kind of artist who sets trends, as opposed to following them.” BILLBOARD MAGAZINE



“A truly hypnotic and eloquent roots Americana exploration.” ALLMUSIC GUIDE



“A perfect slice of Americana.” NO DEPRESSION



“An organic, gorgeous feast for ears and mind.” DUSTY WRIGHT, HUFFINGTON POST



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June 29, 2018

Martha Redbone Roots Project transforms the words of William Blake into modern American music

By Jamie Ludwig @unlistenmusic

If you were looking for compelling source material for an album of 21st-century Americana, you might not start with poems written in England at the tail end of the 18th century. But the 2012 debut album by Martha Redbone Roots Project, *The Garden of Love—Songs of William Blake* sets the words of the English writer, artist, and visionary to arrangements that blend elements of Appalachian folk, gospel, soul, blues, and Native American music. Born in rural Kentucky, Redbone has a family tree that includes African-American, European, Cherokee, and Choctaw ancestors, and she grew up learning about the various musical traditions of her people. Though she's found success in New York and London, she's never left her roots behind; in the 2000s she mixed gospel and R&B with Native American influences on three releases, including 2004's *Skintalk*, for which she won an Independent Music Award for best R&B album. She's also led educational workshops for children on Native American reservations across the country and used her prominent platform to advocate for civil rights, nonviolence, and equitable treatment of indigenous people—her desire to create connection as well as to thread together past and present are part of what inspired her to make *Garden of Love*. Her honey-toned voice, the intimate production by John McEuen (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band), and Blake's evocative verses about love, nature, compassion, and liberation combine to make the songs feel timeless and universal—and they seem especially poignant in their yearning for freedom and happiness, now that engaging with the wider political world is so draining and disheartening. 📖



Burning bright at the Freight with Martha Redbone's Roots Project

By Andrew Gilbert, Jan. 18, 2019, 10 a.m.



Soul powerhouse Martha Redbone brings her Roots Project to Freight & Salvage on Wednesday, singing music from her celebrated album "The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake." Photo: Fabrice Trombert

All too often musicians performing American roots music barely scratch the surface, relying on shallow affectations rather than digging deeply into the soil that nurtured blues and spirituals, sacred chants and field hollers, work songs and cautionary ballads. And then there's Martha Redbone, the singer and songwriter who spent her childhood in Kentucky's Harlan County before moving to hardscrabble Brooklyn in her teenage years. Drawing on her mother's Native American heritage (Cherokee/Choctaw) and her father's African-American culture, she's become one of the most powerful voices in American music with a striking repertoire that marries ecstatic poetry to soul-girded melodies.

She launched the Roots Project with her creative partner, music director and husband, pianist/keyboardist Aaron Whitby, as a vehicle to dismantle tired clichés about the cultural homogeneity of Appalachia, "all that stuff about coal mining, rednecks and hillbillies," says Redbone, who returns to Freight & Salvage on Wednesday for her first Bay Area gig in five years.

"What people don't know is that it's a huge melting pot of many different cultures and nationalities," she says. "All the clichés are a small part of what Appalachia is about. What I wanted to do with the Roots Project is tell a bigger truth, celebrating the concept of mountain music by including the sounds of all the folks who came to mountains, the Irish and Scottish, the freed slaves who brought gospel and the banjo, the Native Americans already in the region."

In many ways the Roots Project builds on a sound that Redbone and Whitby introduced on her powerhouse 2001 debut album *Home of the Brave* (Blackfeet Records). They'd spent years in London writing and producing stripped down soul for savvy UK audiences, and the album established her as both the most exciting new voice in Native

American music and a fiercely intelligence soul singer with a glorious sound.

Her subsequent albums more than lived up to the promise of her debut, but nothing really prepared the way for 2012's *The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake* (Black Feet), which features the mystically charge verse of the Romantic poet and artist set to an array of American roots idioms. Produced by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's John McEuen and David Hoffner, a veteran musician, composer and producer, the album is an enthralling soul landmark.

While Redbone co-wrote the songs, she credits Whitby with the ingenious notion to combine William Blake with rhythm and blues. "We have the Blake books here in our library and he said, 'Let's look through these. We could probably do things with them,'" she says. "They just sparked all these melodies. It was very organic and quick, just amazing how fast and easy it was. It felt like they had always been meant for these melodies."

They selected some four-dozen poems and ended up releasing 12 on *The Garden of Love*, often finding echoes of Appalachia in his imagery. "He talked a lot about rolling hills," she says, "a really similar countryside."

One reason the Roots Project is such a powerful vehicle for the Blake songs is that the band draws on a stellar roster of New York players steeped in jazz and blues. The Freight band includes the brilliant guitarist Marvin Sewell, who's recorded with elemental singers Cassandra Wilson and Lizz Wright, and bassist Fred Cash, a groovemeister who can be found with the likes of Toshi Reagon, Marika Hughes and India.Arie. Rounding out the quintet is violinist Charles Burnham, a prolific improviser and studio musician best known in jazz circles for his galvanizing work with guitarist James Blood Ulmer and Cassandra Wilson.

"Martha is a joy to work with," says Burnham, who recently released an album with Berkeley-reared tenor saxophonist Tony Jones, *Pitch, Rhythm and Consciousness Quartet* (Reva Records). "She brings it every night, full blast."

Anyone interested in delving more deeply into Redbone's fascinating family saga can catch her production *Bone Hill* at Sonoma's Green Music Center on Thursday, Jan. 24. She describes the show as "a concert with storytelling in between." She's also working on a musical that's being incubated to Joe's Pub that expands on *Bone Hill*, taking the story into the present. "When you do a story about Native Americans we're always depicted in the past," she says. "This version we really wanted to put it in the present time."

No matter what the setting, Redbone finds a way to turn performances into a communal celebration. "At the root, this music is congregational," she says. "We really appreciate a style of call and response. We don't have the luxury of being on Top 40 radio where they play your song seven times a day. We do story telling. You have to paint a picture of who you are. We welcome them into the music, and try to recreate church wherever we go."



Martha Redbone's *Bone Hill* concert sounds especially timely in light of the recent protests at the Standing Rock reservation. **Courtesy of Loft Entertainment**

Martha Redbone's Music Explores Her Deep Appalachian Roots

STEVE JANSEN | APRIL 12, 2017 | 7:00AM

When American roots singer-songwriter Martha Redbone first started working on *Bone Hill – The Concert*, she set out to tell her distinctive family story. The more she presented staged readings of the interdisciplinary production that features William Blake's poetry set to Appalachian mountain music, the more she realized she was telling the stories of so many other family histories.

“We spoke to people from all over the world who had remembered stories that their grandparents told them, stories from when they came from Italy in the beginning of the century or when they came after the war. There was a family who came from Delhi in the 1990s,” Redbone tells the *Houston Press* in a phone interview from her home in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn. “It’s what it means to be from the foundation of America.”

Redbone spent her pre-teen years in the Black Mountain region of Kentucky, an area stacked with coal, coal and more coal. Redbone, who comes from Cherokee, Shawnee, Choctaw and African roots, had family members, including a grandfather and uncle, who worked in the mines.

In eighth grade, Redbone moved to New York City, where she has basically lived ever since. When her family members and town elders from Black Mountain started leaving the planet for the next realm, she sought a way to pay tribute. She eventually scored a commission from Joe's Pub at the Public Theater, whose "New York Voices" program helps artists create musical theater pieces.

A fully realized three-act musical by Redbone and her husband/musical collaborator Aaron Whitby is in the works, but the theatrical version of *Bone Hill – The Concert* features Redbone's long-running Bone Hill Band telling the story of four generations of a family during and following the aftermath of the Indian Removal Act, which was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson in 1830.

The communal narrative and music, ranging from traditional Cherokee chants and bluegrass to country and funk, chronicles the Trail of Tears, the federal government's followup efforts to oppress Native Americans and African-Americans in the Mid-Atlantic states and the coal-mining industry that took off in the early 1800s.

"Most people don't associate Appalachian mountain music with people of color, let alone people of color living in Appalachia," explains Redbone. "We thought there would be an interesting story to share with everybody, since my family had been there since the beginning of time. It's a story that's always been there but nobody knows."

Politically, *Bone Hill* has proved timely. As Redbone and her collaborators developed and presented the piece, news about the Dakota Access Pipeline protests at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota exploded on social media.

"It's exactly the same story 200 years ago in and around Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina, but only back then it wasn't oil, it was coal. The people were driven off the land by federal laws and state legislation, which forced Indian removal over the period of 70 years," says Redbone, an activist for Native American and African-American initiatives who received a Red Ribbon Award at the United Nations.

"They systematically moved tribes and forced them to relocate to an unknown territory on foot," she adds. "It was a form of systemic genocide, and there was nothing that people could do back then to fight it."

REVIEW: From Harlan County, Kentucky to Brooklyn: Martha Redbone raises the roof at National Sawdust

📁 Gig Reviews, News 🔖 Martha Redbone

The spirit of Jean Ritchie – recently celebrated with a [Square Roots concert at London's Green Note](#) with Dan Evans and Virginia Thorn and in [Albany, New York](#) with Peter Pickow, Susan Trump and David Massengill – hovered benevolently over another event this week: a concert by [Martha Redbone](#) at [National Sawdust](#), opened six months ago in Williamsburg, Brooklyn's hottest locale. One of three evenings curated by Redbone but the only one at which she actually performed, it featured the singer's settings of William Blake inspired by the music of her Appalachian heritage in Harlan County, Kentucky.



Featuring Aaron Whitby on keyboards, John Caban on guitar, Charlie Burnham on fiddle, Fred Cash on acoustic bass, and Tony Mason on drums, the concert raised the roof, Redbone exhorting the audience to 'make this our church'. Evoking the life lived by her Cherokee forebears in Black Mountain, where strip mining disfigured the landscape and poisoned the water, she offered rousing and powerful performances not only of the Blake settings (written with Whitby and recorded as [The Garden of Love](#)) but also by pioneering Carolina-born bluegrass pioneer [Ola Belle Reed](#) ('Undone in Sorrow'), [Peter La Farge](#) ('Drums') and [Johnny Cash](#) (a remarkable reworking of 'Ring of Fire').

Redbone talked passionately about the fate of the [Native Americans, taken from their parents and sent to boarding schools](#) established by the American government in the 19th and 20th centuries to 'civilise and christianise' the young charges – 'kill the Indian, save the man' was the grim philosophy. La Farge, a Cherokee like Redbone, was a contemporary of Bob Dylan in 1960s Greenwich Village and wrote songs on Native American issues. He died young in 1965 and in 2010 the Smithsonian issued a tribute album, [Rare Breed](#), on which Redbone featured.


The movement for Native American rights and recognition grew out of the black civil rights movement so it was fitting that Redbone closed the concert with a performance of 'Keep Your Eyes On the Prize', singer and audience engaging in exhilarating call and response.



Martha Redbone Roots Project: 10 January 2014 - New York

BY CHRISTIAN JOHN WIKANE ([HTTPS://WWW.POPMATTERS.COM/U/CHRISTIAN_JOHN_WIKANE](https://www.popmatters.com/u/christian_john_wikane))

21 Jan 2014

 Twitter

What happened when Martha Redbone brought the spirit of Black Mountain, Kentucky to the Apollo?

On a recent January evening, the soul and spirit of Appalachia visited 125th Street in Harlem. The Martha Redbone Roots Project filled the Apollo Music Café with the poems of William Blake and music inspired by Redbone's childhood home in Harlan County, Kentucky. The centerpiece of the concert was *The Garden of Love: Songs of William*

Blake, Redbone's critically acclaimed album that features production by John McEuen (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) and David Hoffner. Joined by a five-piece band, plus a fiddler and two guest vocalists, the Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter brought the Apollo to Black Mountain, delivering a rousing set that will certainly be remembered long past 2014. Perhaps host Lisa Yancey said it best at the outset of the evening: "Sister Martha is about to light this stage on fire".

"The Garden of Love" furnished the first spark, with Redbone wailing the opening line -- "I laid me down upon a bank / Where my love lay sleeping" -- like a shout from a countryside hill (or Morningside Park, to reference a nearby New York location). An air of suspense encircled Redbone's voice before the band locked into a steady beat. The rhythm churned through Redbone's hands as she stomped her feet, standing tall and commanding. Enchanted by the imagery of Blake's words, she seemed to have momentarily transported herself to "the heath and the wild" of Blake's poem.

Greeted by the first of many thunderous ovations, Redbone "returned" to the Apollo stage from her musical reverie. "It's an honor to come here," she said. "A dream come true. The reason why many of us are musicians is because of the music that happened in this building."

Redbone and her band continued *The Garden of Love* experience with "A Poison Tree" and "Hear the Voice of the Bard". The singer explained that, while reading an anthology of Blake's poems, she was struck by how the lines in "A Poison Tree" conjured the sound of a preacher testifying from behind the pulpit: "I was angry with my friend; I told my wrath, my wrath did end". "That sounds like my family all right," she quipped.

MARTHA REDBONE ROOTS PROJECT (/TAG/MARTHA-REDBONE-ROOTS-PROJECT/)

City: New York

Venue: Apollo Music Café

DATE: 2014-01-10



Indeed, the parallels between Blake's poems and the experiences of Redbone's family in Kentucky are more than coincidence. They illustrate the deep roots of a community whose way of life has been perilously disrupted by strip mining and other industrial hazards. With original music written by Redbone, Aaron Whitby, and John McEuen, "A Poison Tree" is like a tonic for those ailments. From the band's crystalline harmonies to gripping solos by Whitby on keys and Alan Burroughs on guitar, the live rendition of "A Poison Tree" only underscored the greatness of the studio version. Similarly, the jaunty "Hear the Voice of the Bard" was no less thrilling. For a moment, the Grand Ole Opry met the Cotton Club: drummer Gene Lake deployed some jazz cadences on the skins, Fred Cash played a loping bass solo, and Redbone surprised the audience with an interlude of vocal scatting.

Redbone invited musician/author Lonnie Harrington onstage for "A Dream". Harrington contributed a Seminole chant to *The Garden of Love*. Unlike the album version, Harrington began "A Dream" with the chant and led Redbone in an *a cappella* call-and-response. The band joined in, stoking the intensity of the music. Harrington's voice, resonant and robust, hardly needed amplification as it rang throughout the Apollo. Just over two minutes on the album, the band extended "A Dream" to spotlight the full might of its power.

Throughout the process of selecting William Blake poems for the album, Redbone discovered "The Fly", a somewhat whimsical meditation on what she calls the "finality of life." She explained to the audience that at the time she found the poem, a lot of elders in Black Mountain passed away. By the time she reached the mixing stage of the album, both her mother and her aunt had died. In concert, Craig Judelman's fiddle added delicate textures to the music box-type melody of the song. Judelman remained onstage for "On Another's Sorrow", which complements the "The Fly" as evidence of Blake's sensitivity towards all sentient beings. Here, the lyrics contain what Redbone called "little reminders of compassion for each other". The song's refrain -- "Oh no, never can it be" -- was one of the most memorable hooks of the evening.

"Why Should I Care For the Men of Thames", which featured evocative narration by Carl Hancock Rux ("the hardest working man in New York City", said Redbone), was bookended by two inspired covers. The first one celebrated Ola Belle Reed, the late folk singer who brooke new ground for women in bluegrass. Redbone honored their shared Appalachian heritage with Reed's "Undone in Sorrow", one of more than 200 songs Reed wrote in her lifetime.

Redbone turned to her Shawnee-Cherokee ancestry on "Drums", a song written by Peter LaFarge that details the U.S. government's forced assimilation of Native Americans from



their tribes into boarding schools. Most notably, Johnny Cash recorded the song on *Bitter Tears: Ballads of the American Indian* (1964). More than 40 years later, Redbone joined John Densmore (The Doors), Floyd Westerman, Keith Secola, and Dave Roe (Cash's former bassist) for a contemporary recording of "Drums" that appeared on *Rare Breed: The Songs of Peter LaFarge* (2010). "It was so profound that we now include it in our shows," Redbone explained to the audience. Redbone departed from the song's familiar melodic lines and steeped the lyrics in a more foreboding atmosphere. The effect accentuated the reality of lines like "In our losing we found proudness, in your winning you found shame". Redbone and her band powerfully recast a song that remains timely and relevant 50 years after it was first introduced to listeners.

Though there were no shortage of reasons to see Martha Redbone in concert, one song made the price of admission all worthwhile -- "Skin". Taken from the singer's *Skintalk* (2004) album, Redbone transformed the song's edgy funk-rock into a breakneck barnstormer of a performance, replete with Teddy Kumpel's masterful banjo. It was simply a wonder to watch Redbone and her band deliver such a wildly different variation on "Skin", taking nothing away from the original but instead finding an exciting new musical context for one of Redbone's strongest compositions.

After "Skin" set the Apollo ablaze, Redbone's two closing numbers added more fuel to the fire. A blistering rendition of "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" detoured briefly to Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love", wherein Redbone stepped out of Appalachia and channelled her inner rock goddess. However, it was "I Rose Up at the Dawn of the Day" that literally summoned people to their feet. Redbone and all her musicians amplified the joyous, rollicking spirit of the studio version. It punctuated an evening that showed why the Martha Redbone Roots Project was among the busiest touring acts of 2013. Doubtless, the embers Redbone left behind at the Apollo on that January evening are still smoldering.

All photos by Craig Bailey/Perspective Photo.



MORE *GARDEN OF LOVE* REVIEWS

"Martha Redbone's journey back to the source of American music — and to her own heritage — has conjured up an artistic triumph. The *Garden Of Love* poignantly reveals a musician at the top of her game, vocally, intellectually, and spiritually. One not only hears the voice of the Bard, in this case William Blake's legendary prose arranged and phrased brilliantly, but also the very origins of American music arising from the blend of American Indian, African American, and English folk music traditions. It's the dawn of a new day for this fascinating artist, and we're all the beneficiaries of her confident, and yet sensitive, quest." **TIM JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE; NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**

"Blake is always less obscure in Songs of Innocence and Experience mode, and between Redbone's lucid, subtle force and the modernized Appalachian settings she fits to the poet's stanzas, she's created a new body of folk song by a lyricist who compares favorably to, well, Bob Dylan....A major find..." **ROBERT CHRISTGAU, MSN MUSIC**

"The deep woods twang of Appalachian music lives in the vocals of Martha Redbone." **JIM FARBER, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS**

"Once described as Aretha Franklin of Indian Country, [Martha] has a blues-soul voice that's the right blend of depth and gentleness to fit the indelible words and the graceful string-band music." **JON BREM, MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE**

"Turns out the words of the 19th-century English Romantic poet are a perfect fit with the Appalachian string-band sound Redbone heard as a child in Black Mountain, Kentucky. The arrangements (written with Aaron Whitby and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's John McEuen), Blake's language, and Redbone's voice - sometimes a mountain holler, sometimes a sweet caress - add up to something genuinely new and exciting." **PAMELA ESPELAND, MINNPOST**

"The *Garden Of Love: Songs Of William Blake* isn't quite like anything you've ever heard. Filled with rustic Americana charm, the album offers up visions of coal mines, simple living and her Shawnee and Cherokee ancestors living at one with the land." **POLLSTAR**

"Whether you're a fan of William Blake or a guy who barely scraped through Lit 101, any appreciator of good Appalachian blues needs to run out and buy a copy of Martha Redbone's "*Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake*." It is a rare album that works on all level, appealing to the literary mind, the audiophile, and the person who just wants to sit back and listen to something soothing to wind down from a busy day." **CHRIS GRIFFY, EXAMINER**

"Visionary...definitely one of the best folkroots albums of 2012." **PIETER WIJNSTEKERS, POPMAGAZINE HEAVEN (THE NETHERLANDS)**

"John McEuen & Dave Hoffner executed a spotless job in producing the entire disc while the recording work of Hoffner, Nick Sevilla, and Aaron Whitby is exquisite, not layered as one might expect but wondrously holistic, a miniature world. Redbone's voice is here gospelly serious and joyous, there whispery and filigree gentle, elsewhere exuberant, gamboling in the fields and meadows Blake so loved, though she's transplanted the English acreage to American plains and bayous. Nor does she miss the tones of the alternately genteel and wrenching plaints Blake indited, his constant métier." **MARK S. TUCKER, ACOUSTIC MUSIC**

"...startling...lovely." **JOHN SCHAEFER, WNYC'S SOUNDCHECK**

"Well, I just heard an angel singing...gracious!..." **BOB EDWARDS, SIRIUS SATTELITE**

"For music lovers, discovering hidden gems like this album is the equivalent of finding a winning lottery ticket on the street." **SAM GAZDZIAK COUNTRY UNIVERSE'S TOP ALBUMS OF 2012**

"Redbone's unique concept is chillingly beautiful. The incorporation of truly American instruments from many cultures is seamless, and with Redbone's tremendously lush and powerful voice driving these haunting poems, she paints a vivid landscape of Appalachia, as if the trees, rivers and mountains were all singing with one, aching, all-knowing voice. Produced by Grammy-Award winning John McEuen, this is such a thorough, thoughtful and heartfelt album, I'm truly floored by the talent behind it, and the enchanting grace that pervades every note. You simply must get this album." **BRENT FLEURY, THE BOLD**

“...nothing short of genius....” **YVE LEPKOWSKI, THE AQUARIAN WEEKLY**

“The manner in which Martha Redbone has stamped her own personality all over Blake’s work is both masterful and courageous and should really make her name synonymous with the old cockney proponent of the American revolution for as long as people make music and read poetry.” **TIM MERRICKS, AMERICANA UK**

5 STAR review! “‘The Garden of Love’ has pleasing radiance. You can’t ask much more than to have your music served up raw, rootsy and full of such emotional depth.” **JOE ROSS, ROOTS MUSIC REPORT**

“Apart from the fact that this is a remarkable recording in terms of Redbone’s liquid vocals and the harmonious blend of McEuen’s instruments (banjo, guitar, dobro, fiddle, mandolin, autoharp, dulcimer), the combining of music with William Blake’s “songs” is an amazing achievement. It is as though this 18th century poet’s work has been quietly waiting for Martha Redbone. After all, Blake always called his poems “songs,” suggesting that they were meant to be sung. Here they are then! After over two centuries, finally, exquisitely complete.” **GARY CARDEN, SMOKY MOUNTAIN NEWS**

“Martha Redbone’s new collection The Garden Of Love sings of the earth, skies of blue & grey, hard birth & easy death. It sings a poem of prophecy whispered by the oldest tree in the farthest corner of the valley. It sings of leaving & returning & of the equanimity of Angels. Martha’s voice itself is the very sound of the dreams of hills and rivers- Homebound & Restless; interpreting the hauntingly lovely words of William Blake with the power of a storm & the gentleness of a breeze.” **VERNON REID-Living Color, Spectrum Road**

“Martha invites us on her powerful new odyssey where poetry, folk and soul meet naturally. Here in The Garden of Love-Songs of William Blake she bares her soul...wide open, simple and vulnerable; it’s everything she truly is.” **MINO CINELU - Legendary Jazz Percussionist & Multi-Instrumentalist, Miles Davis, Sting, Weather Report**

“I am impressed by how well the minor keys and elegiac tones bring out the darker shadows in Blake’s songs” **SUSAN J. WOLFSON, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**

No 1 in BEST ALBUMS of 2012 “Brilliant fusion” **TED GIOLA**

“...one of 2012’s under-the-radar gems.... a gorgeous mélange of sounds, influences, and textures that represents not only Redbone’s multicultural heritage, but also the numerous influences found in American folk and roots music.” **JULI THANKI, ENGINE 145**

“A thick, satisfying stew of Americana” **PETER CHIANCA, WICKED LOCAL**

“A must-listen” **ABOUT.COM**

“A revelation” **JEFFREY SISK, DAILY NEWS (PA)**

“one of those wonderful meetings of minds and culture that comes along once in a while that literally takes your breath away.” **RICHARD MARCUS, BLOGCRITICS**

“masterfully crafted and performed with near perfection.” **DAN HARR, MUSIC NEWS NASHVILLE**

“The Garden of Love - Songs of William Blake is a landmark album that should propel her to the forefront of the folk scene.” **HANS WERKSMAN, HERE COMES THE FLOOD**

“It’s easy to see why folks are drawn to Martha’s music. She’s genuine, she’s real, and she’s also genuinely and really talented. Beautiful music from a beautiful heart. Top pick.” **BABY SUE**

“It is a call to the individual soul, a call that connects an eighteenth century Englishman with nineteenth century Americans and a twenty-first century woman artist: Martha Redbone...” **DANIEL GARRETT, THE COMPULSIVE READER**

“...simply gorgeous....If you’re into Americana, you should have this in your collection.” **STEPHEN CARRADINI, INDEPENDENT CLAUSES**

“..this is truly American music at its best...This album is both something audaciously new and comfortingly old, and an artistic risk that has paid off big-time. A CD for the ages.” **KEVIN SCOTT HALL, EDGE NEW YORK CITY**

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Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine | July 23, 2013 | by Bruce Sylvester

MARTHA REDBONE ROOTS PROJECT **The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake** Blackfeet Productions 93001

With the knife guitar slashes' ominous undertones that open this disc, we know that long-ago London's bard, artist and mystic William Blake (1757-1827) might have found a home in the rustic hollows of Appalachia. Blake never visited the New World but still could write:

Tho born on the cheating banks of Thames

Tho his waters bathed my infant limbs

The Ohio shall wash his stains from me

I was born a slave but I go to be free.

An excerpt from "Why Should I Care for the Men of Thames," which Redbone opens and closes with Native American chanting.

Folkies have repeatedly turned to Blake's free-spirited poetry. Back in 1965, the East Village's erudite neopunks The Fugs did two of his pieces on The Fugs' First Album. A collaboration with Peter Schickele (AKA P.D.Q. Bach), Joan Baez's 1967 Baptism brought baroque backup to "London" and, on its expanded CD reissue, "The Angel." Greg Brown devoted Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1986) to Blake's work.

Yes, his poetry is on the Internet, but still it was thoughtful of Martha to include a lyric sheet on her Blake CD, where musical arranger John McEuen takes a multitude of string instruments far deeper into the back woods than he went during his years with Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.

Part black and part Native American, Redbone calls on her ancestors' styles – especially gospel – in her interpretations, shifting from sweet soprano on one poem to gutsy alto on another. When she lingers and quavers on the final line of "A Poison Tree," an intriguing possibility crosses my mind: Could Ralph Stanley too do William Blake?

– Bruce Sylvester



ENTERTAINMENT



By Robert Christgau | May 31, 2013 6:02AM

Listen to the words

Martha Redbone Roots Project:
The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake (Blackfeet Productions)

Produced by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's John McEuen, and for once that's a good thing. Where on Allen Ginsberg's weird old Blake album a tuneless hippie chorale rendered Blake's lyrics over finger cymbal, flute, and harmonium that cried out for a round of oms, Afro-Cherokee Redbone claims Blake for British balladry, where he belongs. Traditional lyrics are worth marveling and puzzling over. But I know of few as powerful and strange as "The Garden of Love," "I Rose Up at Dawn of Day," or "The Fly," to name three that went unannotated when I marked up my complete Blake at 19. Blake is always less obscure in Songs of Innocence and Experience mode, and between Redbone's lucid, subtle force and the modernized Appalachian settings she fits to the poet's stanzas, she's created a new body of folk song by a lyricist who compares favorably to, well, Bob Dylan. Not every track takes it home. Nothing is that automatic. But a major find nonetheless. **A MINUS**

<http://social.entertainment.msn.com/music/blogs/blog--martha-redbone-roots-project-the-handsome-family>



AllMusic.com Review by Jonathan Widran

A truly hypnotic and eloquent roots Americana exploration, *The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake* beautifully and unexpectedly matches two powerful voices, two centuries, continents, and cultures apart. The mastermind is Martha Redbone, an Independent Music Award winner renowned for blending Native American vibes from her Cherokee and Choctaw background with R&B grooves, blues, and dashes of Appalachian folk. Her muse is the compelling poetry of English Romantic (and pre-Romantic) poet William Blake, who died in 1827. One of the fullest expressions of her stark and powerful, stripped-down aesthetic, Redbone — working with producer John McEuen of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band — pits her vocal incantations and harmonic textures against a swampy ambient acoustic guitar background on the title track. Her vocal modulation is interesting, as tunes like "Hear the Voice of the Bard" and the rollicking "I Rose Up at the Dawn of Day" feature urgent gospel-influenced shout-outs, while others like the lyrical, swaying singalong "How Sweet I Roamed" and the easy-rolling "A Dream" and sparsely eloquent "Sleep Sleep Beauty Bright" feature a sweeter, more romantic approach. Appropriate for its subject matter, "I Heard an Angel Singing" is a haunting, ethereal piece with chamber music instrumentation. The overall effect is that listeners who were not English majors will experience some of the most enchanting and emotionally rich poetry ever penned, while also having the opportunity to get to know all of the folk and gospel-driven influences that drive Redbone's unique, ever evolving muse.

<http://www.allmusic.com/album/the-garden-of-love-songs-of-william-blake-mw0002441532>



Singer Martha Redbone's journey bends cultures, genres "Garden of Love" wraps William Blake's poetry in her mountain, Indian and African roots.

Heather Salerno, The (Westchester County, N.Y.) Journal News 7:56 p.m. EDT May 9, 2013

When indie singer-songwriter Martha Redbone began working on her latest project six years ago, the plan was to focus on the Appalachian music of her childhood, spent partly in the coal-mining region of Harlan County, Kentucky.

So she and her husband, British musician Aaron Whitby, started putting together original songs, until a collection by 18th-century English poet William Blake caught their attention. The book fell open to *A Poison Tree*, considered one of Blake's finest works, and the couple immediately saw how it could be turned into a mountain tune. Before long, they'd decided the entire record, *Garden of Love*, would be Blake's poetry set to Redbone's blend of R&B, funk, soul and string-band rhythm and blues.

"The songs ended up writing themselves," she says. "The melodies came to me instantly. It was just a natural flow."

Redbone, fresh from playing the New Orleans Jazz Festival last month, will take her signature eclectic sound across New York this spring, starting with the Nimham Mountain Music Festival in Kent on Saturday. The event benefits the Daniel Nimham Intertribal Pow Wow, an annual festival that honors a Native American chief who fought in the Revolutionary War.

Redbone has long been a champion of Native American causes: Her late mother, whose family has been rooted for generations in the mountains of Kentucky and Virginia, was a mix of Cherokee, Shawnee and Choctaw; her late father was an African-American from North Carolina. That diverse upbringing meant she grew up listening to everything from church hymns to country music, and she was raised on Tanya Tucker as much as the Jackson Five.

When Redbone was 11, she and her family moved to Park Slope, Brooklyn, and she realized just how much her musical education differed from her peers.

"I was the only 11-year-old in our neighborhood who knew who Conway Twitty was," she says.

Redbone still lives in Brooklyn, with Whitby and their 4-year-old son, Zach. She was lucky enough to take a six-year recording break before releasing *Garden of Love* last year, riding on the success of 2006's *Future Street* and 2004's *Skintalk*.

"We got wonderful reviews so we were able to get on the road and tour ... for quite some time," she says.

Redbone also got the opportunity of a lifetime in 2009, performing at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's Native Nations Ball to celebrate the first inauguration of President Barack Obama.

She reprised that honor this year for Obama's second swearing-in, watching the ceremony from the museum's rooftop across from the Capitol before hitting the stage later on at the gala.

"It was magical," she says. "Tribal leaders from almost every one of the 566 federally recognized tribes attended the ball dressed in everything from black tie to traditional regalia."

She's reveling, too, in how well her new album has been received, especially since it's the first time she allowed someone else to produce: John McEuen, one of the founding members of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.

"It was kind of nice being in the back seat for awhile," she says, with a laugh. "And it came out great."

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<http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2013/05/09/martha-redbone-garden-of-love/2148831/>

EUR on the Scene: 44th Annual New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival | April 29, 2013

Now in it's 44th year, the festival presents a smorgasbord of hundreds of bands on twelve different stages

By Ricky Richardson

<snip>

Another great joy of Jazzfest is the new discoveries. Martha Redbone Roots Project was a wonderful gem of an artist who performed a superb set of original tunes on blues, gospel, soul coupled with Native American sounds of North Carolina Appalachian Folk music and Piedmont blues. She performed "Don't Forget Me," "Garden of Love," "Earth Return," "Drums," and "A Poison Tree." Her latest CD is entitled The Garden of Love.

<snip>

<http://www.eurweb.com/2013/04/eur-on-the-scene-44th-annual-new-orleans-jazz-heritage-festival/>



Gambit Weekly

Sunday at Jazz Fest

POSTED BY WILL COVIELLO ON SUN, APR 28, 2013 AT 8:59 PM

The Martha Redbone Roots Project performed at the Fais Do-Do stage early in the day. She sang several songs off her recent album of William Blake songs. Redbone is of Cherokee, Shawnee, Choctaw and African-American ancestry, and her band is a southern Appalachian string band, with a guitar, banjo, fiddle and stand up bass. And Blake's poetry suited her vocals and the band's picking. Off the album she sang "Garden of Love" and "A Poison Tree." She also sang "This Train" (or "This Train is Bound for Glory"), which was popularized as a religious tune and later adapted into a folk anthem. But the highlight of the set was Redbone's beautiful and haunting version of "Drums," Native American singer Peter LaFarge's song about holding onto Native American heritage and pride in spite of assimilation into a culture that essentially viewed them as vanquished. Johnny Cash recorded a notable cover. (Older video of Redbone singing "Drums" after the jump.)

<snip>

<http://www.bestofneworleans.com/blogofneworleans/archives/2013/04/28/sunday-at-jazz-fest>

MY SPILT MILK

Jazz Fest Day 3: It's Raining Again

The rain and soupy grounds signaled the real start to Jazz Fest Sunday.

Martha Redbone Roots Project's Garden of Love is relatively free from the preciousness that often takes place when music meets poetry, in this case written by William Blake, and her performance at the Fais Do-Do Stage underscored why. First, the band - upright bass, fiddle, organ, drums - played string band music that could have come from any time about any subject. On top of that, Redbone's vocals were as much holler as singing, making the pieces all about the voice and the humanity that accompanies it. (by Alex Rawls)

<http://myspiltmilk.com/jazz-fest-day-3-its-raining-again>

Blogs

Global Fest - Webster Hall - 1/13

By Carol Cooper Mon., Jan. 14 2013 at 1:27 PM

<snip>

Which of the night's showcases impressed me the most? I'd have to say it was a tie between the two Native American performers: the Canadian deejay crew A Tribe Called Red, and the Kentucky-born alt-bluegrass singer Martha Redbone. Both have found fresh ways of asserting and defending an aboriginal identity using mainstream musical forms. Redbone is a singer/songwriter with black, red, and Appalachian roots. Her core instrumentation reflects all three: drum and rattle, banjo, fiddle. She has put music to the poetry of William Blake, and some lines excerpted from the Navajo Blessing Way. She reminds me of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, only I think I like her songs better. Standout live moment? Funk-a-billy versions of "This Train" and "Drum".

http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2013/01/review_global_fest.php?page=2



REVIEW: Martha Redbone Roots Project "Garden of Love - Songs of William Blake"

A meeting of minds becomes a blending of cultures

Tim Merricks | Tuesday, 13 November 2012

When the poetry of William Blake is set to a style of music which combines Fairport Convention and Guy Clark by a lady of Native and African American background then you can't help but wonder how it will all turn out. You can hear every influence infused within 'The Garden of Love-The Songs of William Blake' without trying. And that is perhaps the highest tribute I can pay.

Redbone has been performing and making records for over ten years, largely unrecognized outside of her own fiercely loyal fanbase. But she shouldn't let that worry her too much, after all, so was Blake in his day. What matters is the product and Redbone has no concerns on that front.

The opening and title track takes the lead in incorporating the best of Redbone's rich tapestry and then she starts to meander. Next up is the Clark-esque Texas country twang of (wait for it) 'Hear the Voice of the Bard' and I'm pretty sure Redbone's version would've gone down a storm in the honky tonks of Stratford upon Avon. The medieval fair maidening of 'How Sweet I Roamed' Takes us back further still and Redbone's voice swoops and soars to her timeless melodies. Similarly the vocal skills are the star of 'The Fly', another enchanting ode, in the spirit of a Donovan, Cat Stevens or McCartney's 'Blackbird'. There is gospel- 'I rose up at the Dawn of Day', Delta Blues - 'Poison Tree', celtic, soul....you get the picture....all with the underlying rythmns of the Native American prairie.

I you're going to plagiarise then you might as well do it from the best, and the name William Blake has stood the test of time. The manner in which Martha Redbone has stamped her own personality all over Blake's work is both masterful and courageous and should really make her name synonymous with the old cockney proponent of the American Revolution for as long as people make music and read poetry.

Reviewers' Score : 8 of 10

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<http://www.americana-uk.com/reviews-cd-live/latest-cd-reviews/item/martha-redbone-project>



Martha Redbone Roots Project
The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake

Label: Blackfeet Productions 93001

Genre: Folk

Rating: ★★★★★

Review by Joe Ross

English poet, painter, printmaker William Blake (1757 – 1827) is considered a seminal figure in the arts of the Romantic Age. Scotland’s national bard Robert Burns also lived around that same time, and many of his poems became truly memorable when put to music. With that in mind, singer-songwriter Martha Redbone and songwriting partner Aaron Whitby (who also plays some keyboards on the project) joined forces with multi-instrumentalist John McEuen to infuse a mountain ethos into some of Blake’s poetic words. Redbone provides expressive, rhythmically enticing vocals. Besides arranging the music and co-producing (with keyboard and hammered dulcimer player David Hoffner), McEuen plays seven different stringed instruments on 'The Garden of Love: Songs of William Blake.' Others assisting include Mark Casstevens (guitars, harmonica), Byron House (upright bass), Debra Dobkin (percussion), and several others.

House’s bowed bass is especially effective for a mournful “I Heard an Angel Singing,” vocalized with interpretive twists from Redbone, who also offers up traditional chants and rattles in other spots on the album. That cut is followed by a bluegrassy “I Rose Up at the Dawn of the Day” and then an enchanting and bluesy “A Poison Tree.” Redbone also doesn’t shy away from a sweetly wistful remembrance rendered a cappella in “The Echoing Green,” a sentiment of nostalgia and life’s passing. The song’s genesis flows smoothly to a rawboned arrangement of “The Fly,” featuring fingerpicked guitar and sweeping strokes on the autoharp.

All of the genres that serve as platforms for Blake’s lyrics can be traced to the mountains and hills. Put to delicate melodies and arranged properly, the poems make sturdy, self-assured, convincing music. We don’t hear repeating choruses that many mountain folk songs are known for, but we do hear occasional background vocals, calls and responses, and lines given special emphasis on tracks like “On Another’s Sorrow” and “Hear the Voice of the Bard.” A short recitation of “Why Should I Care for the Men of Thames?” features the avuncular voice of Jonathan Spottiswoode. Redbone then closes the album with an a cappella lullaby “Sleep Sleep Beauty Bright,” known as “A Cradle Song” in Blake’s canon of songs and ballads.

This album gives us stripped-down allure and accessibility. Spare settings lend immediacy to Blake’s inspiring poems, even though they were written centuries ago. The results are beautifully melancholic moments, reverently devout soul-stirrers, evocative mood pieces, and some lively spirited numbers. For those who enjoy well-recorded contemporary acoustic sounds with old-fashioned messages still relevant today, 'The Garden of Love' has pleasing radiance. You can’t ask much more than to have your music served up raw, rootsy and full of such emotional depth. (Joe Ross, Roots Music Report)

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<http://www.rootsmusicreport.com/index.php?page=reviews&search=single&id=526>

Singer-songwriter Martha Redbone merges Native American roots with William Blake

OCTOBER 30, 2012 BY: JIM BESSMAN

Award-winning Native American singer-songwriter Martha Redbone was all set to begin working on an album of songs from her childhood in Black Mountain, Kentucky, in the coal-mining region of Harlan County.

The album would be the followup to the Brooklyn resident's last album *Skintalk*, which in 2006 won the Independent Music Award for Best R&B Album and the Indian Summer Music Award for Best Pop Album.

But Redbone, who blends funk with the Appalachian folk and Piedmont blues of her roots, has taken a detour with her actual followup, *Garden Of Love--The Songs Of William Blake*.

"I had just started touring the last album," recalls Redbone. "My grandmother passed away, and we were losing a lot of our elders, so I wanted to do music from our childhood."

But she also wanted a banjo player—and couldn't find one in Brooklyn.

"I started stewing a little bit, and started writing some tunes," she continues. "Fast-forward to a couple years ago: I was on tour in L.A. at the Hard Rock Café and John McEuen was at the show. It was just me and my writing partner Aaron Whitby on piano, and he liked what he heard."

McEuen also liked that they all lived in New York.

"He was generous enough to invite me to sit in on a few of his gigs, and I said that I wanted to do a record and maybe he could be the producer," says Redbone.

"I started collecting classic coal-mining songs and working on them, and then I was at home and going through books of poetry and pulled a William Blake collection off the shelf. It dropped open and on 'A Poison Tree,' and I picked it up and read it and right away the words read to me like an old bluegrass tune: 'I was angry with my friend/I told my wrath, my wrath did end/I was angry with my foe/I told it not, my wrath did grow.' That's a mountain song!"

She put Blake's words to music and thought she might put the resulting song "into the mix" of the childhood song project—and then she started reading more of his poems.

"William Blake is so amazing, I thought he deserved more than just one song--and I didn't want to include just one with the other stuff," Redbone says. "I looked at his imagery and the messages about religion and poverty and they were so relevant to today, and out of 150 poems I picked out a bunch that reminded me of Appalachia."

The rest was "like magic," she relates.

"Every time I looked at something that spoke to me, the melody just came out. I ran to the studio and threw myself in front of a mic and ran the tape and literally wrote eight songs in the time it took to read each page! It all came naturally: I had all the melodies and started defining the chords, and called John and said, 'What about doing this record first?' and he said, 'Cool!'"

Garden Of Love, which McEuen co-produced with Nashville musicians prior to winning a Grammy for producing Steve Martin's *The Crow: New Songs For The 5-String Banjo*, essentially became a tribute to Redbone's roots anyway.

"Inspired by Blake's poems, we started looking back to my family and found out my great-great-grandmother was Cherokee/Shawnee, and married an Englishman," says Redbone, whose mother was Cherokee/Shawnee and also part Choctaw, and father was African-American and part Sioux. "That would have been at the time Blake's poetry could have come to America. What if these poems were just laying around in the attic in the house, and my great-great-grandmother hummed along to them?"



Blake's "archaic" language and religious themes, Redbone feels, would also seem like a natural fit with the post-Civil War lifetime of her great-great-grandmother. But she also relates the Garden Of Love project to her mother.

"She passed away a year ago—during the final mixes of the album," she says. "I spent a lot of time back home with her, and returned in the spring for the ceremony for the ones who passed. As I was driving there I could see barren land where we used to have ballgames against teams that aren't even there anymore: Every time they blast a mountain or strip-mine, it removes a town and they just put up a sign that says 'Appalachia.'"

So Redbone also sees Garden Of Love as a means of bringing awareness "to what's going on in the region."

"Water gets contaminated after strip-mining and people have to leave—but we've been in the Smoky Mountains to the Clinch Mountains to Black Mountain for hundreds of years and have nowhere to go," she says.

Even with a "soft" summer release for Garden Of Love, indie artist Redbone (her album, credited to Martha Redbone Roots Project, is out via Blackfeet Productions) has landed it on Billboard's Heatseekers chart while achieving media exposure on outlets like NPR's All Things Considered.

Redbone is now set to play the annual GlobalFest world music festival at Webster Hall in New York on Jan. 13, 2013. A week later she'll perform in Washington, D.C., at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's Inaugural Ball.

She's also working with WhyHunger's Artists Against Hunger & Poverty program, "to provide food sustenance programs to poverty-stricken areas like ours," she says.

As for her postponed coal-mining songs project, "that music is timeless, and I can do it any time—even when I'm 70 years old--and it will still be relevant," says Redbone.

Meanwhile, Skintalk is part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian as an example of contemporary Native American music.

"I know I'm getting old," Redbone concludes, "but I didn't think I'd become a museum piece this soon!"

#