



Walton Arts Center

Performance Guide



Martha Redbone

Photo Credit: Martha Redbone Roots Project (photo by Craig Bailey / Perspective Photo)

Martha Redbone, a leading singer-songwriter of American roots music, blends elements of funk and the blues with those from her Native American heritage. Described by The New Yorker as “a brilliant collision of cultures,” her album Skintalk is part of the permanent collection at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. This concert will include Native American traditional music, call and response along with Martha’s distinctive cross cultural sound.

Ideas for Curriculum Connections:

Arkansas Learning Standards: Fine Arts Standards

Music: P.6.5.3; CRA.SL.1; R.7.5.3,R.7.6.3, R.7.7.3, R.7.8.3; R.8.6.1; R.8.5.1, R.8.6.1; R.8.7.1, R.8.8.1; R.9.5.1, R.9.6.1, R.9.7.1, R.9.8.1; CN.10.6.1, CN.10.7.1, CN.10.8.1; Cn.11.6.1, CN.11.7.1, CN.11.8.1, CN.11.6.2, CN.11.7.2, CN.11.8.2; P.6.MA.2; R.9.MA.1. Music Appreciation: P.4.MA.1; P.5.MA.1; P.6.MA.2; R.7.MA.3; R.9.MA.1, CN.11.MA.3, CN.11.MA.4, CN.11.MA.5



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The Artist

Martha Redbone was born and raised in Kentucky. Her Cherokee/Choctaw mother had roots in the Appalachian Mountains and her father was a funk, gospel musician from North Carolina. She went to school for art and design and started her singing career recording background tracks for P-Funk in 1996. In 2002, Redbone was awarded Debut Artist of the Year at the Native American Music Awards. Her album, *Skintalk*, is recognized as contemporary Native American music in the Permanent Library Collection at the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. *Skintalk* was also awarded Best R&B Album at the 2007 Independent Music Awards.

Facing inequality due to her mixed heritage, Redbone uses her voice to educate people. She believes messages can be given through music to encourage peace and compassion among human kind.

The Performance

Martha Redbone's Native American roots lie in the Southeastern region of the United States, home to the Cherokee, Choctaw and Shawnee tribes. The traditional music of these tribes is centered upon songs that accompany dances that continue to be performed at pow wows and other social gatherings. The songs feature short sections of lyrics, often sung in call and response, accompanied by drums, rattles, whistles, pipes, and flutes. All of these instruments have spiritual significance and are made from natural elements: For example, gourds

become rattles, and logs become water drums. Starting in the 1700s, Native American music was altered by the arrival of British traders who introduced the fiddle, and by African influences shared throughout the South.

The Art Form

A leading singer-songwriter of American roots music, Martha Redbone blends elements of funk, blues and gospel music with the traditional sounds of her Cherokee, Shawnee and Choctaw heritage. American Root Music is similar to Folk Music and incorporates a broad range of musical genres. At the beginning of the 20th Century, the term "folk music" was used by scholars to describe music made by whites of European ancestry, often in the relatively isolated rural South. As the century progressed, the definition of folk music expanded to include the song styles - particularly the blues - of Southern blacks as well.

In general, folk music was viewed as a window into the cultural life of these groups. Folk songs communicated the hopes, sorrows and convictions of ordinary people's everyday lives. Increasingly, music made by other groups of Americans such as Native Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Cajuns came under the umbrella of "folk music." It was sung in churches, on front porches, in the fields and other workplaces, while rocking children to sleep, and at parties. The melodies and words were passed down from parent to child, though songs - and their meanings - often changed to reflect changing times.

Learning Activities

Opening Discussion

Music is written for many different occasions and purposes. One particular class of music is called roots music, which is music that is written with a specific story or tale in mind. Sometimes the composers write their own story for the music, or write music for other peoples' stories. In this activity students will listen to a piece of music and then write or draw a story that fits with what happens in the music. For instance, if there is a big crashing sound, that could be someone falling down who was trying to dance.

Activity

1. Arrange the students into small groups.
2. Let the class listen to some Martha Redbone songs (available on Spotify).
3. Once they have heard the songs, each group will draw a series of pictures to tell the story of the song they chose.
4. Ask students to develop pictures that the music seems to tell, being as descriptive and detailed as possible. If they think the story is about a girl, what color is her dress? If the music is about a dance, where is the dance? is the room bright or dim? Are the people in dress clothes or street clothes?

5. After each group has finished their story pictures, have each presenter describe the group's story pictures to the class.
6. When each presenter has told their group's story, listen to the musical piece again.

Closing Discussion

What elements of the music influenced the students' decisions about the content of the story? How did students make compromises to decide on what to draw when each individual probably had different ideas about the what the music was "saying"?



Photo Credit: Martha Redbone

Post Performance Learning Activity

Students will listen to a variety of music and design an appropriate dance presentation. This activity encourages students to appreciate, and examine different styles of music as well as create dance presentations that are specifically related to the music.

Dance Party

1. Play a piece of music and ask students to listen to it carefully, think about what it's about and how it makes them feel.
2. Play the music again and ask students to move to the music. If the music is fast, encourage them to move fast.
3. At the same time, ask students to show you how the music makes them feel. If it is happy, then there should be smiles on their faces.
4. Continue through the whole song.
5. Play another piece of music and repeat the thinking process. After the music is finished ask three or four students to come up to the front of the class.
6. Play the music again and ask them to dance to the music appropriately. This time instead of asking them how they should dance, point out how they are dancing, ie: "Oh, I see that Tammy is stomping her feet because the music is really loud and strong..."
7. Repeat the process until everyone has had a chance to dance in front of the class.



Photo credit: Martha Redbone

Reflect and Assess

Ask the following questions. Record the group's answers on the board and discuss.

- What did you notice about the performance?
- What instruments did you see?
- What did you learn about the instruments that they played?
- What do you notice about their rhythms?
- How did they work together during the performance?
- What are some of the similarities you notice between the songs?
- What are some of the differences you notice between the songs?
- What did you learn during the Q&A? What stood out to you about their answers?
- What further questions do you have?

Learn More Online

Official website of Martha Redbone

www.martharedbone.com

PBS: American Roots Music. Into the Classroom: *Tapping the Roots of American Music: A Teacher's Guide*

www.pbs.org/americanrootsmusic/pbs_arm_itc_historical_background.html

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Learning & Engagement

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