

SYMBIONT



JAKE BLOUNT

MALI OBOMSAWIN

sybiont

Jake Blount & Mali Obomsawin

1. Prelude (feat. Jeanne Meserve) :50

ACT I: TO DEATH AND FIRE

2. What's You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire 3:12

Arr. by Jake Meserve Blount/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP-Mali Obomsawin/Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI-John Trudell/Poet Tree Publishing, ASCAP. Includes excerpts of the 1980 Thanksgiving Day Speech by John Trudell, courtesy of John Trudell Archives

3. No Hiding Place (feat. Sidy Maïga) 3:19

Arr. by Bessie Jones-Alan Lomax/Global Jukebox Publishing, BMI

4. My Way's Cloudy (feat. Joe Rainey) 3:20

Arr. by Jake Meserve Blount-Mali Obomsawin/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP-Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI

5. Mother 4:28

Soni Moreno-Primeau/Machequi Music, ASCAP. Includes audio sample derived from "Mother" by Ulali, from the album "Heartbeat, Voices of First Nations Women" (SFW40415), courtesy of Carmen Caballero Moreno. (p) 1995. Used with permission.

6. Stars Begin to Fall (feat. Taylor Ho Bynum) 3:45

Arr. by Jake Meserve Blount-Mali Obomsawin/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP-Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI

Produced by Jake Blount & Mali Obomsawin

ACT II: THE GREEN ROAD

7. The Green Road 2:59

Arr. by Alan Lomax—John A. Lomax, Sr./Ludlow Music, Inc., BMI, administered in the US by Global Jukebox Publishing, BMI—new words & music by Jake Meserve Blount/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP—new words & music by Mali Obomsawin/Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI

8. Live Humble 4:16

Arr. by Alan Lomax/Global Jukebox Publishing, BMI—Jake Meserve Blount/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP—Mali Obomsawin/Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI. Includes the arrangement of the song "Live Humble" used with permission of Global Jukebox Publishing

9. In the Garden 4:18

Charles Austin Miles

10. Come Down Ancients 2:59

Arr. by Jake Meserve Blount-Mali Obomsawin/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP—Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI

11. Old Indian Hymn 3:19

Arr. by Jake Meserve Blount-Mali Obomsawin/Rusting Earth Music, ASCAP—Cunt Punk Publishing, BMI

Featuring Magdalena Abrego, *Artemisia absinthium*, *Aloe barbadensis*, *Ocimum basilicum*, Taylor Ho Bynum, Joseph DeJarnette, *Epipremnum*, Sidy Maiga, Joe Rainey, and Windborne

introduction

Jake Blount and Mali Obomsawin

symbiont is a dialogue with the ancient and anterior. We believe that the worlds envisioned in ***symbiont*** are near enough to our present reality that the listener need not stretch their imagination too far to grasp our concept — and we hope, through honing into permutations, discrepancy, and intercepted messaging, that our audience will follow us down paths to possible futures.

symbiont had to be ceremonial, frightening, comforting, and ecstatic in turn — sometimes simultaneously. We let the concept guide us toward our desired soundscape. The process entailed stitching together multiple traditions from each of our cultures and giving certain significant plants a compositional role through modular synthesis. We combined shape-note hymns, spirituals, Caribbean banjo tunes from the late 17th century, sequenced beats and synthesized drones, screaming electric guitars and more to create both the album ***symbiont***, and the “chthonic ones” for which it is named (Haraway 2016, 2).

Folk musicians describe or imply more conservative versions of our production process using a variety of terms: the folk process, oral tradition, aural tradition, and more. It might be one form of what Donna Haraway calls “string figuring”: “passing on and receiving, making and unmaking, picking up threads and dropping them... [and] becoming-with each other in surprising relays” (2016, 3). The word most widely used in this modern era is one that folk musicians, with our nostalgia and self-conscious aspirations to rurality, have generally shied away from: remix.

The term “remix” is typically associated with hip-hop, rap, and electronic dance genres. John Egenes (2010) and Giancarlo Frosio, however, have argued that today’s remix culture is merely a continuation of age-old communal artistic practices. Frosio goes so far as to claim that “for most of human history, remix practices dominated the creative process” (2021, 19). Jazz legend Sidney Bechet offers an example of remix in Black vernacular music in his 1960 autobiography *Treat It Gentle*, using his once-enslaved grandfather Omar as a reference point:

"It was Omar started the song. Or maybe he didn't start it exactly. There was somebody singing and playing the drums and the horns behind Omar, and there was somebody behind that.... All the good musicians have been singing that song ever since, changing it some, adding parts, finding the way it has to go.... It was the long song, and the good musicianers, they all heard it behind them.... It was the feeling of someone back there — hearing the song like it was coming up from somewhere.... No matter where it's played, you gotta hear it starting way behind you. There's the drum beating from Congo Square and there's the song starting in a field just over the trees. The good musicianer, he's playing *with* it, and he's playing *after* it.... No matter what he's playing, it's the long song that started back there in the South." (Bechet 1960, 202)

“Remix is a way of linking past to future possibilities. It is a way of reconnecting narratives of the past or present and shifting to a new narration/creation, which is a new way of describing the connection. This is, or could be, described as another narration of the past. This narration does not remain in the past, however, because it anticipates further remix.

Because remix anticipates remix, new trajectories are indicated. This suggestiveness is generative. Combined with an activist mindset or an ethic of future care, it supplies a critical playground for further interrogation.”
(Markham 2017, 237-238)

symbiont is a remix album. The works included here synthesize instruments, songs, teachings, and oratory from different traditions with modern literary, political, and compositional sensibilities (and even a dash of “hard” science). The interactions between these disciplines give rise to the musical, ideological, and spiritual synergisms that undergird ***symbiont*** — and also to points of intense conflict. This record reflects not only the natural harmonies that exist between our individual and cultural perspectives, but also an arduous process of reconciliation through remix. ***symbiont*** is a precisely honed sound mythology born from the same process it champions: the cultivation of a shared future through care, respect, and sacrifice.



SONG SOURCES

A Voyage to the Islands

by Hans Sloane

Published in 1707

Hans Sloane, a British doctor and natural historian on temporary assignment in Jamaica, authored this text. It includes transcriptions of three to five tunes (in one case, multiple tunes may have been included under a single title) played by enslaved African musicians on instruments resembling early banjos, as well as detailed accounts of Black music-making and celebration. Although published under Sloane's name, the transcriptions themselves were made by a freed African musician named Mr. Baptiste in 1687 (Gaddy 2022; Lingold 2023).

Indian Melodies

by Thomas Commuck

Published in 1845

Indian Melodies is cited as the first published music written by a Native American author. Commuck (Narragansett/Brothertown) began his life in a community heavily influenced by the Methodist Episcopal Church with the tradition of singing shape-note hymns. He spent seven years collecting its songs in the Narragansett Indian Tribe and later at Brothertown Indian Nation, a community composed of Christian Indians who removed to Wisconsin to resist colonization. The Brothertown nations of origin (Narragansett, Mohegan, Pequot,

Montauk, Tunxis, and Niantic) are among many named in his songs which he explains “assume the names of noted Indian chiefs, Indian females, Indian names of places...as a tribute of respect to the memory of some tribes [and] also as a mark of courtesy to some tribes whom the author is acquainted” (vi).

Slave Songs of the United States,
edited by William Francis Allen, Charles
Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison
Published in 1867

Slave Songs of the United States was the first published collection of songs from enslaved people. The editors collected songs mainly in South Carolina and Georgia, and largely from Gullah Geechee people. They also, however, included transcriptions obtained in other locations and from friends (Southern 1997, 152; Allen, Ware & Garrison 1867).

Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro,
edited by R. Nathaniel Dett

Published in 1927

Begun in 1874 with the work of Thomas Fenner, this collection — revised and republished at least five times in subsequent editions — focuses on works sung at the Hampton Institute (less than 30 miles from the Blount family home in Smithfield, VA). Fenner, who focused on repertoire from formerly enslaved people, rendered “the most characteristic of the songs” as accurately as he could,

and introduced new harmonies and arrangements to those which he felt suffered too much in translation from their original context to the concert stage (Dett 1927, v). This version, compiled by Black Canadian-American composer R. Nathaniel Dett, opens with a fiery defense of Black vernacular music, and includes more works than the previous versions.

American Ballads and Folk Songs

by John and Alan Lomax

Published in 1934

A print collection of songs recorded by the renowned (and often-criticized) father-son folklorist duo John and Alan Lomax was published in 1934. Many of the songs included are what the Lomaxes called “composite ballads”; John and Alan combined verses collected from different sources if they judged the song to be the same (xxix). While the Lomaxes did extract all of the book’s contents from folk musicians, the remixed versions of the songs that appear in this collection may never have existed in their entirety outside of it.

“What’s You Gonna Do When the World’s on Fire” by Lead Belly and Anne Graham

Recorded in 1941

Huddie William “Lead Belly” Ledbetter was born on a Louisiana plantation in the late 19th century. He was a musician from childhood, and his craft bore him through a life punctuated by encounters with carceral institutions and music industry figures and institutions who have, at times, been cast as predatory. A member of both the Blues Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Lead Belly was arguably amongst the most influential musicians of the 20th century (Britannica 2023). Anne Graham was a

“In the Garden”

by Sister Rosetta Tharpe

Recorded in 1952

songwriter and performer of traditional spirituals. She performed several songs with Lead Belly on a WNYC radio broadcast in 1941, but information about her life is otherwise scarce.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe, born in Arkansas in 1915, grew up in the musically adventurous Church of God in Christ (COGIC) denomination. She lived in Chicago, Miami, and New York City over the course of her life. Tharpe made waves performing Pentecostal hymns in nightclubs on an electric guitar, and became a worldwide sensation. Nevertheless, she died poor, and was buried in an unmarked grave in Philadelphia. Tharpe was among the first innovators of the music we now call rock ‘n’ roll and is an important forerunner for queer and Black musicians today. Her friends gave her a headstone, and modern-day disciples like Jake visit her regularly (Wald 2007).

“1980 Thanksgiving Day Speech”

by John Trudell

Recorded in 1980

Born in 1946 and a citizen of the Santee Dakota Sioux Nation, Trudell was a poet who gave voice to the Red Power and American Indian Movements. His work as spokesperson and theorist of Indigenous resistance began at the Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, a 19-month protest by Indians of many nations against federal

policies meant to thwart Indigenous self-determination and land retention. Trudell’s 1980 speech, colloquially known as “We Are Power,” promotes socialist revolutionary Indigenous ideas broadly supported across the Red Power Movement (“John Trudell: Biography”).

Heartbeat:
Voices of First Nations Women

Published in 1995

Smithsonian Folkways released this compilation with the aim of showcasing prominent contemporary Indigenous women musicians. “Mother” (by Ulali) has been an anthem in Indian Country since its release.

Get In Union by Bessie Jones
& The Georgia Sea Island Singers

Published in 2020

Bessie Jones was born in 1902 to a musical family in Smithville, Georgia. Growing up in close proximity to guitarists, banjo players, and formerly enslaved family members, Jones amassed a sizable collection of stories and historic repertoire at a young age. After some years as a migrant farm worker, Jones married and moved to

St. Simons Island, where she became involved in the COGIC denomination. She made the acquaintance of folklorist Alan Lomax in the 1950s, and began touring and performing shortly thereafter. She continued to travel and sing into her 70s ("Bessie Jones," National Endowment for the Arts).

references

Allen, William Francis, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, eds. 1867. *Slave Songs of the United States*. New York: A. Simpson & Co.

Bechet, Sidney. 1960. *Treat It Gentle*. London: Cassell.

"Bessie Jones." n.d.. National Endowment for the Arts, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage/bessie-jones>.

Commuck, Thomas, and Thomas Hastings. 1845. *Indian Melodies*. New York: G. Lane & C.B. Tippet, for the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Dett, R. Nathaniel, ed. 1927. *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro*. Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute Press.

Egenes, John. 2010. "Commentary: The Remix Culture; How the Folk Process Works in the 21st Century." *PRism* 7, no. 3. <https://www.prismjournal.org/uploads/1/2/5/6/125661607/v7-no3-c1.pdf>.

Floyd, Samuel A. Jr. 1996. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Frosio, Giancarlo. 2021. "A Brief History of Remix: From Caves to Networks." In *The Routledge Handbook of Remix Studies and Digital Humanities*, edited by xtine burrough, Owen Gallagher, and Eduardo Navas, 19–35. New York: Routledge.

Gaddy, Kristina R. 2022. *Well of Souls: Uncovering the Banjo's Hidden History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Graham, Anne, and Lead Belly. 1941. "America Tells Its Stories: Anne Graham and Lead Belly." *American Music Festival*, WNYC radio (February).
<https://www.wnyc.org/story/america-tells-its-stories-ann-graham-and-lead-belly/>

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

"John Trudell: Biography." 2023. johnrudell.com, accessed January 1, 2023.
<https://www.johnrudell.com/biography>.

"Lead Belly." August 23, 2023. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed December 2, 2023,
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leadbelly>.

Lingold, Mary Caton. 2023. *African Musicians in the Atlantic World: Legacies of Sound and Slavery*. New World Studies. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Lomax, Alan, and John A. Lomax. 1934. *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. New York: Macmillan.

Markham, Annette N. 2017. "Remix as a Literacy for Future Anthropology Practice."
In *Anthropologies and Futures: Researching Emerging and Uncertain Worlds*, edited by
Juan Francisco Salazar, Sarah Pink, Andrew Irving, and Johannes Sjöberg, 225–41. New York:
Bloomsbury Academic.

Sharp, Cecil. 1907. *English Folk Song, Some Conclusions*. London: Simpkin & Co.
<https://archive.org/details/englishfolksongs00shar/mode/2up>.

Sloane, Hans. 1707. *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*. London: Printed by B.M. for the author.

Southern, Eileen. 1997. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. 3rd ed.
New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Wald, Gayle F. 2007. *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe*. Boston: Beacon Press.

TRACK CREDITS

1. Prelude - Monologue by Jeanne Meserve

Jeanne Meserve, voiceover;
Jake Blount, synthesizers, *Epipremnum*
and *Aloe barbadensis*, synthesizers

2. What's You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire

SOURCE: Lead Belly & Anne Graham;
monologue by Mali Obomsawin.
Additional material from: "Old Indian
Hymn," from *Indian Melodies* by
Thomas Commuck; "1980 Thanksgiving
Day Speech," by John Trudell.

Mali Obomsawin, bass, vocals;
Jake Blount, guitar, percussion,
synthesizers, vocals; John Trudell,
samples; *Ocimum basilicum* and
Aloe barbadensis, synthesizers

3. No Hiding Place (feat. Sidy Maïga)

SOURCE: Bessie Jones &
the Georgia Sea Island Singers.

Mali Obomsawin, bass, vocals;
Jake Blount, percussion, synthesizers,
fiddle, banjo-ukulele, vocals;
Sidy Maïga, percussion

4. My Way's Cloudy (feat. Joe Rainey)

SOURCE: *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro*, ed. R. Nathaniel Dett.

Jake Blount, percussion, synthesizers, gourd banjo, vocals; Mali Obomsawin, percussion, bass, vocals; Joe Rainey, vocals; *Aloe barbadensis*, synthesizers

5. Mother

SOURCE: *Heartbeat Voices of First Nations Women*, recorded by Ulali.

Jake Blount, synthesizers, percussion, fiddle; Mali Obomsawin, vocals, bass; Magdalena Abrego, guitar; Joseph DeJarnette, bass; *Ocimum basilicum*, synthesizers

6. Stars Begin to Fall (feat. Taylor Ho Bynum)

SOURCES: "Stars Begin to Fall," from *Slave Songs of the United States*, ed. William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison; "In Dat Great Gittin'-Up Mornin'," from *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro*, ed. R. Nathaniel Dett. Additional material from "Koromanti," from *A Voyage to the Islands* by Hans Sloane.

Jake Blount, banjos, guitar, percussion, synthesizers, vocals; Mali Obomsawin, bass, vocals; Taylor Ho Bynum, cornet, conch trumpet

7. The Green Road

Monologue by Jake Blount; “Deep River” from *American Ballads and Folk Songs* by John and Alan Lomax.

Jake Blount, vocals, synthesizers;
Mali Obomsawin, vocals; *Epipremnum*,
synthesizers

8. Live Humble

SOURCES: *Religious Folk-Songs of the Negro*, ed. R. Nathaniel Dett; Bessie Jones & the Georgia Sea Island Singers. Additional material from: "Occum," from *Indian Melodies* by Thomas Commuck; "Koromanti," from *A Voyage to the Islands* by Hans Sloane.

Mali Obomsawin, bass, vocals;
Jake Blount, percussion, synthesizers,
guitars, banjos, vocals

9. In the Garden

Dedicated to Doris Mae Delk Blount
(1931–2022).

SOURCE: Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

Jake Blount, percussion, synthesizers,
vocals; Mali Obomsawin, vocals, bass;
Magdalena Abrego, guitar

10. Come Down Ancients

SOURCE: "Let God's Saints Come In,"
from *Slave Songs of the United States*,
ed. William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard
Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison.

Jake Blount, gourd banjo, synthesizers,
vocals; Mali Obomsawin, bass, vocals

11. Old Indian Hymn

SOURCE: *Indian Melodies*
by Thomas Commuck.

Jake Blount, synthesizers, percussion,
vocals; Mali Obomsawin, percussion,
vocals; Windborne, vocals; *Artemisia*
absinthium, synthesizers



credits

Produced by Jake Blount and Mali Obomsawin

Recorded at our homes

Mixed by Joseph DeJarnette at Studio 808a

Mastered by Mike Monseur at Axis Audio

Annotated by Jake Blount and Mali Obomsawin

Cover collage created by Lokotah Sanborn

Photos by Abigail Lank

Executive producers: Maureen Loughran and John Smith

Production manager: Mary Monseur

Production assistant: Kate Harrington

Editorial assistance by Carla Borden and James Deutsch

Art direction, design, and layout by Caroline Gut

Smithsonian Folkways is: Sophie Abramowitz, digital marketing and distribution specialist; Paloma Alcalá, sales associate; Cecille Chen, director of business affairs and royalties; Logan Clark, special projects and content manager; Toby Dodds, director of web and IT; Will Griffin, licensing manager; Kate Harrington, production assistant; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Maureen Loughran, director and curator; Mary Monseur, production manager; Sahara Naini, inventory coordinator; Jeff Place, curator and senior archivist; Sophie Sachar, marketing and promotions assistant; Laura Shanahan, social media coordinator; Sayem Sharif, director of financial operations; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, associate director; Jonathan Williger, marketing manager; Brian Zimmerman, mail order manager, sales and customer service specialist.

Special thanks to Cathy Fink, Peluso Microphone Lab, Seeders Instruments, Pete Ross, and Moog Instruments.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In this way, we continue the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the production, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Folkways, Arhoolie, A.R.C.E., Blue Ridge Institute, Bobby Susser Songs for Children, Collector, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Educational Activities, Fast Folk, Folk Legacy, Mickey Hart Collection, Monitor, M.O.R.E., Paredon, Right on Rhythm, UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music, and Western Jubilee Recording Company recordings are all available through:

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings Mail Order
Washington, DC 20560-0520
Phone: (800) 410-9815 or 888-FOLKWAYS (orders only)
Fax: (800) 853-9511 (orders only)

To purchase online, or for further information about Smithsonian Folkways Recordings go to: www.folkways.si.edu. Please send comments and questions to smithsonianfolkways@si.edu.



SYMBIONT

PRODUCED BY JAKE BLOUNT & MALI OBOMSAWIN

From the first notes of **sybiont**, the radical new collaborative album and document of Black and Indigenous futurism from Jake Blount and Mali Obomsawin, the listener is met with rising tideswaters, massive droughts, and the appearance of an iconoclastic uprising amidst the world's indifference. Questions of future or present tense swirl around the music as the duo unspools the intertwined threads of racial and climate justice. Amid rumbling synthesizer drones, the thrum of banjo, and the thwack of drum machines, a whisper of truth can be heard: this crisis has been unfolding for centuries.

1. Prelude (feat. Jeanne Meserve)

ACT I: TO DEATH AND FIRE

2. What's You Gonna Do When the World's on Fire
3. No Hiding Place (feat. Sidy Maiga)
4. My Way's Cloudy (feat. Joe Rainey)
5. Mother
6. Stars Begin to Fall (feat. Taylor Ho Bynum)

ACT II: THE GREEN ROAD

7. The Green Road
8. Live Humble
9. In the Garden
10. Come Down Ancients
11. Old Indian Hymn

Featuring Magdalena Abrego, *Artemisia absinthium*,
Aloe barbadensis, *Ocimum basilicum*, Taylor Ho Bynum,
Joseph DeJarnette, *Epipremnum*, Sidy Maiga,
Joe Rainey, and Windborne

LC 9628



SFW CD 40265

Washington, DC 20560-0520 folkways.si.edu ©2024 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

• Smithsonian



JAKE BLOUNT

SYMBIONT

MALI OBOMSAWIN

SFW CD 40265