



The Whitetop Mountaineers, are

a young duo, **Martha Spencer and Jackson Cunningham**, that hail from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Steeped in the mountain music traditions, their shows are a combination of country duet singing, fiery instrumentals, and high energy Appalachian dancing. Their love of music and their region are evident in their performances; Mountain Ears Magazine says of the Whitetop Mountaineers: "they hold a deep historical respect for their past and a healthy appetite for the old time creaks, weeping strings, fiddling, banjo picking, and traditional bluegrass of their forefathers. Whilst their sound is technically perfect, there's also real personality and attitude mixed in there which makes it all highly believable

and heartfelt with such emotion emanating from every pluck, twang, and vocal outburst."

Martha and Jackson first began playing together after meeting at a local festival in Whitetop and since then have performed at festivals, venues and workshops across the USA as well as toured in the UK, Ireland, and Australia. Both Martha and Jackson also play in the Whitetop Mountain Band, which is a long-running, old time family band that has origins back to the 1940's. The band is a very popular dance band in the Blue Ridge and has been featured in many documentaries, books, tv shows, radio programs and articles including "A Hotbed of Musicians", "Strings of Life", "In Good Keeping", "A Guide to the Crooked Road", "The Keepers", PBS, and CMT.

The Whitetop Mountaineers have released two, highly acclaimed albums, "Home on the Mountain" and "Go Away With Me"; both combine a mix of traditional numbers (many learned from local musicians and sources) with originals written by Martha as well. Several of the songs such as "I Can't Sit Down", "Jenny Jenkins", and "Let Me Fall" are done in a call and response style that showcase their vocals and have a playful, uplifting tone to them. Other numbers like "You Don't Tell Me You Love Me Anymore" are done in a classic country duet style that invokes sounds of Porter and Dolly, or Johnny and June, with Martha and Jackson trading off on leads and harmony parts. Jon Lohman, Virginia state folklorist, says in review of their album: "Whether they are performing a honky-tonk duet, an old time ballad or traditional fiddle tune, they always attend to their craft with obvious passion, exuberance, and soul".

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Notable performances:

- Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington DC
- National Folk Festival, Richmond, VA; Butte, MT
- National Folk Festival, Canberra, Australia
- Lowell Folk Festival, Lowell MA
- Woodford Folk Festival, Woodford, Australia
- World Music Institute NYC, NY
- Merlefest Wilkesboro, NC
- Bristol Rhythm and Roots Festival, Bristol, VA
- NCTA: Crooked Road Mountain Music Tour, Western and Eastern US States, 2007 and 2010
- Tamworth Country Music Festival Tamworth, Australia
- Open House Festival, Belfast Ireland
- Cornish Bluegrass Festival, Cornwall, England
- Linlithgow Folk Festival, Linlithgow, Scotland
- San Francisco Bluegrass and Old Time Festival, CA
- Didben Center for the Arts, Johnson, VT



Quotes:

"Martha and Jackson play the kinds of songs I like, the way I like to hear them played.

Martha, quite simply, pours her heart out into every note, and connects with audiences in a manner quite rare among today's performers. Jackson provides the perfect vocal complement, and is also fast becoming one of my most favorite mandolin players. Together they create a sound that is fresh yet familiar, and their live performances are, above all else, one heck of a good time." **-Jon Lohman, Virginia State Folklorist**

"From the first note of their show, I was left in no doubt that Martha Spencer and Jackson Cunningham are the real McCoy when it comes to Old Timey music. I imagined their high lonesome mountain voices and tasteful guitar, claw-hammer banjo, fiddle and mandolin accompaniment could have come straight out of Appalachia 80 or 90 years ago." **-Stephen Loss, Whitetop Mountaineers at Woodford**

"The Whitetop Mountaineers are one of my favorite groups. I've known them for a quite a few years, and have been privileged to watch them develop as artists. They come from a background as rich as the red Appalachian clay, and whether you're a fan of bluegrass music or not, they offer an intimate look at music that represents a culture and region that is rarely exposed to people unfamiliar with its heritage. Everyone who attended their performance left with eyes opened wider and a two-step just itching to break free. Many of my regular attendees have told me that it was their favorite of the entire House Show Series. - M. Branin, House Concert host

"Martha and Jackson sing in a classic duet sound with voices and phrases blending beautifully.

Both have strong voices, and when Martha belts it out it is powerful." **Alice Gerald, Old Time Herald Magazine**

"They are from one of the most musical spots on earth, and are keeping a very rich family tradition. Martha has many well-known old time musicians and instrument makers in her family, such as fiddling father, Thornton Spencer, banjo picking mother, Emily Spencer, and late uncle Albert Hash, a beloved fiddler and violin maker. Jackson, using the woodworking skills his father taught him, is working with Albert's daughter and luthier, Audrey Hash Ham, in carrying on the violin making tradition of Whitetop. Martha plays one of Jackson's handmade fiddles on the album. This recording 'Go Away With Me' is a wonderful collection of songs that invites you to experience these deep rooted traditions of Southwest Virginia." **-Joe Wilson, National Council for Traditional Arts**