

# Redbone

**Redbone** is a Native American rock group originating in the 1970s with brothers Pat and Lolly Vegas. They reached the Top 5 on the U.S. *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in 1974 with their No. 4 hit single, "Come and Get Your Love". The single went certified Gold selling over a million copies. Redbone achieved hits with their singles "We Were All Wounded At Wounded Knee", "The Witch Queen of New Orleans", "Wovoka", and "Maggie" in the United States, although these singles were more successful overseas. Redbone is known and accredited in the NY Smithsonian as the first Native American rock/Cajun group to have a No. 1 single in the United States and internationally.

## History

Born in Coalinga, California, near Fresno, brothers Patrick (bass and vocals) and Candido "Lolly" Vasquez-Vegas (guitar and vocals) moved to Los Angeles in 1959 and played for 10 years in Clubs under the name of Pat and Lolly Vegas. Pat won the first ever singing competition held by Coca-Cola in 1958 at the age of 17. Pat had also won a recording contract which he put off to move to Los Angeles with his brother Lolly. They performed at local clubs on Hollywood and Sunset Blvd, such as Gazzari's, while writing and playing on records by Tina Turner, Sonny & Cher, James Brown, Little Richard, Elvis, among other legendary recording artists.

The word "redbone" is a Cajun term for a mixed-race person, which the band adopted to signify their own mixed blood ancestry. Patrick and Lolly Vasquez-Vegas were a mixture of Yaqui, Shoshone, and Mexican heritage. The band often alluded to Cajun and New Orleans culture in their lyrics and performing style. The brothers began by performing and recording surf music as the Vegas Brothers, "because their agent told them that the world was not yet ready to embrace a duo of Mexican musicians playing surfing music". First as the Vegas Brothers, then later as the Crazy Cajun Cakewalk Band, Pat and Lolly performed throughout the 1960s at venues on the Las Vegas Strip.

Before forming Redbone, Pat and Lolly released an album in the mid-1960s entitled *Pat & Lolly Vegas at the Haunted House* (Mercury MG 21059/SR 61059). Of the twelve songs on the album, six were originals by the Vasquez-Vegas brothers which earned them some early success. Pat and Lolly also appeared on the 60's hit show *Shindig!* repeatedly, becoming regular performers. They also released several singles from 1961 to the mid-1960s. One of them was titled "Robot Walk" / "Don't You Remember" (Apogee Records A-101) and more making a name for themselves in early years. In 1967 P.J. Proby recorded his only Top 30 hit "Niki Hoeky" by Jim Ford, Lolly Vegas, and Pat Vegas. The next year, Bobbie Gentry performed the Cajun-influenced song on *The Summer Smothers Brothers Show*. Pat Vegas also wrote songs for legendary names like Aretha Franklin amongst others.

According to Pat Vegas, it was Jimi Hendrix, himself part Cherokee, who inspired the musicians to form an all-Native American rock group. They signed as the band "Redbone" to Epic Records in 1969. The band then consisted of Pat Vegas, Lolly Vegas, Peter DePoe and Robert Anthony Avila, a Yaqui-Mexican American, better known by his stage name Tony Bellamy. Their debut album *Redbone* was released in 1970.

Redbone played primarily rock music with R&B, Cajun, blue-eyed soul, funk, country, tribal, and Latin roots. Their first world commercial success came with the single "The Witch Queen

of New Orleans" that peaked at No. 21 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and followed by the single "Maggie" from their second album, *Potlatch*. "Come and Get Your Love" followed as a smash No. 5 hit for Redbone and remained on the chart for 24 weeks being certified gold by the R.I.A.A. on April 22, 1974. Redbone was also the opening act introducing the very first Earth Day to the world in Philadelphia along with Senator Edmund Muskie. Their opening song was "Chant 13th Hour" from the *Potlatch* album.

Redbone's music was characterized by the Leslie rotating speaker effect that Lolly Vegas used for his electric guitar amplifier and a "King Kong" style of drumming developed by drummer Peter DePoe (born 1943, Neah Bay, Washington).

The first self-titled album by Redbone was released as a double album in North America. In Europe it was released both as a double (EPC 67242) and as a single album (BN 26280) on the Epic label.

Their third album, *Message from a Drum*, was released in Europe (except Spain) with the title *The Witch Queen of New Orleans* and different cover than the one released in the U.S. and Canada.

In 1973, Redbone released the politically oriented "We Were All Wounded at Wounded Knee", recalling the massacre of Lakota Sioux Indians by the 7th Cavalry Regiment in 1890. The song ends with the subtly altered sentence "We were all wounded 'by' Wounded Knee". It charted in several European countries and reached the No. 1 position in The Netherlands but did not chart in the U.S. where it was initially withheld from release due to lyrical controversy and then banned by several radio stations due to its confrontation of a sore subject. DePoe had left this band in 1972. He was replaced by Arturo Perez (1939- ), but later by Bellamy's Filipino-Chicano cousin, Butch Rillera around that point. Following this the band achieved much of their commercial success. Tony Bellamy (guitar, piano and vocals) left the band in 1977, with Rillera leaving shortly after.

The band's current remaining membership is led by Pat Vegas, although an array of new members have joined Redbone since then due to Lolly Vegas suffering a stroke that left him unable to tour with the band. No member has been official other than Pat Vegas after the original members were not present. A proposed reunion tour in 2003 did not occur. There is evidence that suggests the existence of an "imposter band" (one of many who try to gain recognition) who was illegally touring the United States and posing as Redbone under the name (or alias) "Denny Freeman". Freeman - who Pat Vegas confirmed to be unaffiliated with Redbone in an interview with the *Montana Standard* - defrauded the county fair board of the Butte Silver-Bow County Fair in Butte, Montana, under pretenses of being a co-founding member of Redbone, yet he was never a band member.

On December 25, 2009, Tony Bellamy died of liver failure at a hospital in his hometown of Las Vegas. Less than three months later, Lolly Vegas succumbed to lung cancer at his family home in Reseda, California, on March 4, 2010.

Redbone has had some limited activity in recent years in the major public eye, but Pat Vegas continues to tour in the United States and Canada in support of his solo albums, *Ambergris*, *Peacepipe*, and *Speed of Sound*.

## Awards and accolades

Redbone was inducted into the Native American Music Association Hall of Fame in 2008, as well as the legendary NY Smithsonian in 2013. They were also honored with vein painted on the largest mural in the U.S. in Fresno, California. On August 30, 2014, Pat Vegas was honored with the Lifetime Achievement "Legend" Award from the "West Coast American Indian Music Awards."

In 2014, "Come And Get Your Love" experienced a resurgence in popularity when it was featured in the Marvel Studios film *Guardians of the Galaxy* as one of the songs on a mixtape made for the protagonist, Peter Quill.<sup>[18]</sup> It was also included on the film's soundtrack album, which reached the top spot on the Billboard 200 chart.

In 2015, "Come And Get Your Love" was used as the intro theme to Netflix produced cartoon series *F is for Family*.

## Members

### Current members

- Pat Vasquez-Vegas – bass, vocals (1969–1977, 1997–present)

### Former members

- Lolly Vasquez-Vegas – guitars, vocals (1969–1977, 1997-2010; his death)
- Tony Bellamy – guitars, vocals (1969–1977, 1997–1998, 2008<sup>†</sup>; died 2009)
- Peter DePoe – drums, percussion (1969–1972)
- Arturo Perez – drums, percussion (1972–1973)
- Butch Rillera – drums, percussion (1973–1977)
- Tracy Lee Nelson - guitar, vocals (1975–1977)
- Jack White – drums, percussion (1977-1978)

## Studio Albums

- *Redbone* (1970)
- *Potlatch* (1970)
- *Message from a Drum* (1971)
- *Already Here* (1972)
- *Wovoka* (1973)
- *Beaded Dreams Through Turquoise Eyes* (1974)
- *Cycles* (1977)
- *One World / Peace Pipe* (2005)