

Folk Tales Podcast

Episode 5: Emerging Media Makers

Audio Transcript

[00:00] **Intro (spoken by several consecutive voices over upbeat music):** Every summer, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival brings voices together, honoring the traditions we carry forward. This podcast is the un-hosted open mic for the Festival's tradition bearers, creatives, and storytellers. Culture isn't preserved in glass cases—it's lived, breathed, and passed forward. Here's the story.

[00:31] **Amalia Córdova:** A lot of people are watching media, but they're watching seconds. Maybe a minute and a half. The youth are showing us ways to break up the kind of predetermined media that we're all getting.

[00:41] **Gillian Bui:** Filmmaking allows me to explore everything about the world that I love about it most.

[00:46] **Rameshwar Bhatt:** We have a lot of intellectual memory, trust, strength, cultural memory, artistic memory; all that put together, we have powerful source of expression.

[00:58] **Madison Childs:** For us, it's having the place to talk about what we wanna talk about.

[01:03] **Chloe Barnett:** We don't really care if people are gonna tell us no. We're gonna keep pushing and pushing and pushing.

[01:19] **Córdova:** My name is Amalia Córdova, and I'm supervisory museum curator here.

The Folklife Festival emerged at 1967 at a time when many other organizations that were based on civil rights movements were also emerging and were reclaiming certain kinds of practice from distinct communities. All those people who founded those movements are coming of an age where they have to pass the torch to the next generation, and the next generation brings the awareness and the idea of continuity. It is overarchingly a moment of refreshing, and especially with new technologies, there's a digital gap between what the founders of certain organizations know and can manage and the new tools that the next generation is bringing in and is conversant with.

For the 2025 program, we had a series of youth media projects in residence. I took the groups that Michelle had reached out to and, working with them and with Michelle and her team, we developed a schedule of screenings, workshops, and other kinds of presentations.

Emerging media, for me, includes all kinds of media. It can be film; it can be video; it can be also work that's made just for social media. And in terms of the emerging media makers, they can be people who are young, but also I think it encompasses folks that are having their first engagement, that have not studied formally to be filmmakers but are taking on some kind of media making as a practice.

I've always been interested in radio. Early on, when I started at the National Museum of the American Indians' Native American Film and Video Festival in New York, we did live radio broadcast as part of the film festival opening night or closing night. So, I was very invested in the idea of radio, and I feel that radio people understand the time-based nature of our work as festival creators.

[03:22] **Betto Arcos (speaking in an indoor Festival narrative session):** Hello, hello. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Betto Arcos, and we're going to talk about the art of radio.

[03:30] **Córdova:** When the programming team mentioned that there would be a radio station from Louisville, Kentucky, I was very open-minded about it.

[03:38] **Arcos (in narrative session):** I want to try to make this into a kind of a radio show. So, we're gonna see how, if that's possible, to create a little radio show for you. So, imagine yourself, you're somewhere at home, maybe in the car, maybe listening far away, and you tune in, **[sounds of radio static]** and then you find WXOX.

[04:02] **Córdova:** When they got here, I was very impressed at the level of deep community engagement that they were doing at home and how they were bringing in their best practices.

[04:10] **Max Cash Selby (in narrative session):** You are listening to WXOX-LP Louisville. My name is Max Cash.

[04:14] **Córdova:** They brought in a flexibility about drawing in participants from other stages, from other programs, bringing them into the building and having them interviewed, even in other languages and recruiting people to interpret.

[04:26] **Selby (in live broadcast):** Live from the Folklife Festival, today we are blessed to be joined by Carlos Orellana. That's Andes MC. Hello, Carlos.

[04:36] **Andes MC (in live broadcast):** *Hola, hola.* Hello. Hello, guys. Hey. Hello. Hello, everybody.

[04:39] **Córdova:** It was really important that, when you see the radio activated, somebody's on the other end listening.

[04:46] **Selby (in narrative session):** My mother did radio in college, but unfortunately her station was bought out—her college station—and that kind of put a stake in her heart.

So, in Louisville, she was invited to set up a radio station at this TED Talk-type festival and broadcast that. And she sat down with the founder of the festival and planned out her idea and was all ready, and she goes, "Okay, when does this start?" And the guy goes, "Two weeks." So, she had two weeks to set up a remote radio station.

We were founded in two weeks, essentially. We were online for a couple years, and eventually an FM frequency opened up, an application pool. We sent in an application as a nonprofit station, and we got the license, and ever since, the rest has been history. Now, we have a station in downtown Louisville, where we have, like, 130 volunteer DJs. It's sort of a family, and it's great. I love it. I've grown up under the soundboard.

[05:44] **Arcos (in narrative session):** Great. Lila, tell us about what you do and how you started doing radio.

[05:49] **Lila Marie Hayden (in narrative session):** Ever since fifth grade I've been doing speech competitions, so I have a lot of practice doing in-person, public speaking, and I have also been playing violin. And through this classical music radio show, I was able to combine classical music as well as public speaking. Radio is an appreciation for community members. In my classical music show, we play recordings from a local music school called the Louisville Academy of Music, and so students are able to hear themselves on the radio.

Six years back when I was younger, my violin was broadcast on 97.1, and it was super exciting for me to hear myself on the radio and giving these opportunities back into the community, keeping it local, showcasing local musicians as well as, of course, international ensembles, which is. Everywhere on the spectrum is a really special opportunity.

Getting to explore the medium of radio has been really exciting to reach audiences across the world and share music.

[07:07] **Córdova:** We knew that radio was transitioning into an internet broadcast kind of medium and reaching therefore communities way beyond the local. Coming in with that working knowledge that radio can be transnational and can be intergenerational was something that I was very excited about. We incorporated groups that were working locally in journalism, such as the Deanwood journalism program.

[07:31] **Childs (in narrative session):** Hello, my name is Madison Childs. I'm here with Deanwood Radio Broadcasting and Edward Tolsen. We're a program located in D.C. on Ward Seven, which is across the river. We're predominantly Black neighborhoods, so in my program it's mostly Black students, and we're able to use our voice for interviewing sports people, politicians. We are just learning from them as well as taking their knowledge and using it for our own in journalism.

Podcasting is like a form of radio, and you have the ability to basically take your radio with you wherever you go and make it what you want it to be. Our podcast is partnered with the Congressional Award, and students have the ability to earn community service hours and work towards medals from Congress.

[08:17] **Edward Tolsen (in narrative session):** When it comes to podcasts in general, I feel like everyone has their own niche. So, when it comes down to it, rather you feel like you have something to say or not, there will always be someone that's open to listening in reference to what you have to say.

[08:28] **Childs (in narrative session):** Our radioing is different 'cause we are really just hitting the issues. The people we're talking to is a part of the change we're making and how we're standing.

[08:37] **Tolsen (in narrative session):** When it comes to people and their opinions, I feel like everybody's open, so whenever you feel enticed or you ever feel like you have something to say, start a podcast.

[09:00] **Córdova:** There are many ways to come into filmmaking, and there are different reflections that you can have. These filmmakers, they've decided that that's their career path. That's what they're doing. They are creating stories in their own vernacular.

We had a group called Ghetto Film School that works in several cities. Ghetto Film School brought a diverse group of youth, a lot of them first-generation.

[09:22] **Bui:** It's a thirty-month filmmaking fellowship, and we had a collaboration with the Huntington library to make documentaries shot on 16mm film.

My name is Gillian Bui. Something that drew me to the program was a teacher who said, "We're not here to teach you guys how to make films. We're here to teach you guys how to be good people." And that really resonated with me because filmmaking isn't just about knowing how to pick up a camera; it's about learning to view the world through a curious and empathetic lens, and it's a tool for connection.

[09:54] **Córdova:** Their work, I would say, was more experimental and personal.

[09:58] **Bui:** Growing up, I always loved storytelling, but I really loved everything, and I discovered that filmmaking was this intersection between all areas of the world, between technology and humanities and culture and art.

But getting to share my film, which is a documentary on my grandma who was an actress during the Vietnam War, has been very special. My grandmother used her performance as a means for comfort and survival while the world around her was violence and war. My grandma is a really big part of my life, and seventeen years ago, a documentarian knocked on her door asking to make a documentary on her, and she declined. When I heard that, it really made me sad because she's a lot of insecurities, and she hasn't been on camera for fifty years.

So, I approached her, and I explained why I thought it was important to preserve her story because I have family and cousins who are five years old who live in France and who have never met her. So, I wanted to use this film as a way to share her story with them, and I think I've done that 'cause now they get to see their grandmother on film and know part of the family history that otherwise would've never been told.

Filmmaking is a way for me to not only continue my legacy but the legacy of my family and my people and my community, and that sense of interconnectedness is what makes film such a special medium.

[11:46] **Córdova:** There are people who have a more independent and individual trajectories. We worked with a few filmmakers that started very young. It's valuable to show the workshop folks what it's like for an independent filmmaker who's working on solo. I also think it's really healthy for the independent filmmakers to look at works that are made with multiple perspectives in mind. They really are complimentary to each other.

Chloe Barnett is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker. As a young woman, she started making films, and she's looking through the lens of both women's stories and native connection to land and therefore land protection.

[12:27] **Barnett (in narrative session):** I grew up in South Florida, so I've just been in the Everglades basically my entire life. My mother's also Costa Rican, so I come from a background of being conscious of our environment. Nature has always been a way of finding my peace. When I found out that it wasn't being taken care of properly and there are certain things that people are doing to harm it, I thought that it was my place, you know; if I love something so much, it's also my job to protect what I love.

[12:50] **Córdova:** She's very impressive. At seventeen, she already was getting awards, and so we featured her work. Most of the work we had were short films, but we showed her feature narrative documentary.

[13:00] **Barnett (in narrative session):** My parents were filmmakers. They've been in it for as long as I've been alive, but I initially did not wanna get into filmmaking. I had no interest in it. I thought I was gonna be a marine biologist. And then I just started working with my dad. He just needed an assistant on set, and I was like, "Yeah, I'm free. I'll help." And I absolutely fell in love.

I love that I get to talk to people. I'm planning to predominantly focus in nonfiction work and documentary filmmaking 'cause I truly just love people and culture and just learning all these new things. I also love that I don't have to be behind a desk all day if I don't want to. I get to travel, and I get to see so many wonderful things.

Women of the Watershed initially started out just as a student project. We're like, "We're gonna make this a six-minute thing." We started that my junior year of high school when I was sixteen years old, and then we realized that there's a rich history of women in conservation since the 1900s, early 1900s, in South Florida, and we realized this is a story that we really want to share with everyone and put it on a bigger platform and share these stories. One thing that for me was that we wanted to see more women in environmental sciences being represented.

Being able to be around all of these women, asking them questions—it made me feel very empowered knowing that I have the power to not just share their stories but share my own. I know sometimes it can be intimidating trying to start something and feeling like, "Oh, well, I dunno what I'm doing." That's okay. Half the time, people don't know what they're doing, and it's learning along the process. Just trust yourself, and if you plan to do good work, you're gonna do good work.

[14:38] **Córdova:** We had a filmmaker called Rameshwar that was on the roster. He shoots in India, where he's from. He had been making films from when he was thirteen years old, and he's clearly gifted filmmaker and communicator. I really enjoyed his presence because he's such an active filmmaker.

[14:57] **Bhatt:** I first came to the Smithsonian in, if I'm not wrong, 2016, and I began as an intern. I was making films on my phone before that, and that's the first time I got my hands onto DSLR lenses, microphone, tripod—all the paraphernalia of media making.

I've always felt comfortable being behind the camera, and I've been myself the most when I'm off screen and making sure that things look good on screen.

Smithsonian Folklife Festival is very dear to me because I get to engage with musicians, dancers, food makers, chefs, muralists, authors—like all kinds of media.

I'm very active about what I do and what I intend with what I do, so I don't want to make media that involves me being on a chair. It can be either on the edit table or on the director's chair. I want to be in the circumstance.

The kind of films I make are spontaneous. Everything has to happen in spontaneity. I work with natural sound, ambient light, natural light. I work with non-actors. The stories I end up filming have come to me, and it's not a controlled production. So, I need to be intentional creatively as well. Over the years, I've spent time training my creative impetus to, in the moment contemporaneously, understand and make sense of the sounds. Where do you place your subject? All that has to happen in spontaneity, so I have to be intentional with all of my aesthetics as well.

I see my films as an ambassador. They represent a reality that you may not have been able to see otherwise.

[17:12] **Córdova:** There are new worlds, new media worlds, that are emerging, and you need to have the people who are conversant with those media worlds activating those spaces.

[17:21] **Barnett:** We didn't know what's happening across the world, but now we do, and that's given us a platform to do something to make it a better place.

[17:27] **Bui:** I envision a world of interconnectedness, spaces that bridge gaps between communities and generations.

[17:35] **Córdova:** New generations are gonna always question the status quo, but they're gonna bring their own identity. They're creating spaces for their own concerns.

[17:42] **Childs:** It is important for people like us, our youth, to know that our voices do matter and that we should be able to share them.

[17:49] **Córdova:** *Youth and the Future of Culture* is the youth being able to sift through what has already happened and what they wanna bring with them and to the world that they wanna build.

[17:57] **Bhatt:** It's a phenomenal virtue to be a youth that is making media. We are going to be the ones who will shoulder the future as well as the past.

[18:07] **Tolsen:** Thank you all for tuning in today. It's Edward Tolsen, and I would like to sign off. Please continue to tune in, and enjoy the rest of your day.

[18:36] **Shauri Thacker:** *Folk Tales: Youth and the Future of Culture* is a production of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Sebastian Barajas produced this episode.

Media makers capture anything and everything, including the parties and skate parks we frequent. Next up, we're talking about all things street culture.