

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
FESTIVAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLIFE

July 1-4, 1967

America's grass roots culture provides abundant material for the four-day Festival of American Folklife presented by the Smithsonian Institution on the National Mall over the July 4th weekend. More than doubling previous peak attendance at the Smithsonian for this holiday weekend, the first program in July, 1967 attracted 431,000 spectators, according to National Park Service figures. The exceptional public response to this first event has lead the Smithsonian to establish the Festival as an annual Independence Day tribute to our folk heritage.

Fifty-eight traditional craftsmen and thirty-two musical and dance groups from throughout the United States demonstrated and performed at the first open-air event. Mountain banjo-pickers and ballad singers, Chinese lion fighters, Indian sand painters, basket and rug weavers, New Orleans jazz bands and a Bohemian hammer-dulcimer band from east Texas combined with the host of participants from many rural and urban areas of our country to weave the colorful fabric of American traditional culture.

The entire event was free to the public, the expense of the production having been borne by the Smithsonian aided by numerous civic and cultural organizations, business enterprises and State Arts Councils. It marks the inception of a fresh attempt at the evaluation, documentation and celebration of this heretofore unrecognized area of vigorous American expression. Most of the traditions have survived from the era of pre-industrial society whose ways have all but disappeared from the American scene with the advent of mass media and rapid transportation.

Seeking the participation of the scholar as well as the layman, the Smithsonian sponsored an international inter-disciplinary conference at which a dynamic approach to folklore research and field work in this country was explored in the light of foreign accomplishment. Strong support was expressed for the inception of a national program to chart, analyze and encourage traditional culture in America.