

Appreciating and Protecting Our Nation's Rich Cultural Variety

I would be less than candid about this year's program were I not to admit to a degree of personal satisfaction in seeing at the Festival both my own home state of New Jersey and the people among whom I have done graduate study abroad and domestic folklore field research in Louisiana – French and French-Americans. To all New Jerseyans and to speakers of French from all climes, we wish a hearty welcome and *bien venue*. The fact that 1983 marks the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Paris, which was ratified in Princeton, New Jersey, and which formally marked the end of the American Revolutionary War, testifies to the depth of our friendship with our ally and to the historic importance of the Garden State.

But seeing "one's own" represented at the Festival is only a small part of what we are about. The idea that shapes this year's program – and any year's program, for that matter – is the Smithsonian Institution's abiding commitment to cultural conservation. The traditions you see represented have been brought to the National Mall not only for your enjoyment and intellectual edification, but also as a statement to the people who keep the traditions, to their communities and to the great American public that these cultural traditions are more than the artistic flowering of a healthy community. They are often the very roots of a group's cultural identity, community feeling, and shared sense of style and, as such, are crucial to its well-being and productivity. They are certainly among those worthy of our interest and support.

A concern for the continued existence of folk traditions has motivated the Festival project since it began in 1967. It has also served as the basis of our cooperation with the Folk Arts program of the National Endowment for the Arts, a cooperation that resulted last year in a Festival program honoring the recipients of NEA's National Heritage Award. This year will see a similar program, and we hope that future years will as well.

The bicentennial of manned flight, aptly turning our attention to France once again, gives us occasion to recognize the occupational folklife traditions that have grown, even as the technology of flight has evolved. These traditions help aviation workers give meaning to their occupational lives and ultimately serve us all by helping them perform with a sense of unity and purpose.

We hope you find entertainment in the beautiful and significant traditions presented at this year's Festival and that you come to understand their importance in the lives of the performers and their communities. We also hope you will join with us in making our nation an environment in which myriad cultural traditions can flourish.

Ralph Rinzler,
Festival Director;
Director, Office of Public Service
