

The Festival of American Folklife: Building on Tradition

Richard Kurin

This summer marks the 25th annual Festival of American Folklife. Over the years more than 16,000 musicians, dancers, craftspeople, storytellers, cooks, workers, and other bearers of traditional culture from every region of the United States and every part of the globe have come to the National Mall in Washington to illustrate the art, knowledge, skill and wisdom developed within their local communities. They have sung and woven, cooked and danced, spun and stitched a tapestry of human cultural diversity; they have aptly demonstrated its priceless value. Their presence has changed the National Mall and the Smithsonian Institution. Their performances and demonstrations have shown millions of people a larger world. And their success has encouraged actions, policies and laws that promote human cultural rights. The Festival has been a vehicle for this. And while it has changed in various ways over the years, sometimes only to change back once again, the Festival's basic purpose has remained the same. Its energy and strength is rooted in the very communities and cultural exemplars it seeks to represent, and in small, but sometimes significant ways, to help.

The First Festival

The marble museums of the Smithsonian Institution are filled with beautiful hand-worn things made long ago by forgotten American craftsmen. Nostalgic reminders of our folk craft heritage, the museum exhibits are discreetly displayed, precisely labeled, and dead.

But the folk craft tradition has not died. Yesterday it burst into life before the astonished eyes of hundreds of visitors on the Mall. (Paul Richard in *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1967, on the first Festival of American Folklife)

Mary McGrory, then a reporter for *The Evening Star*, wrote,

Thanks to S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, thousands of people have been having a ball on the Mall, watching dulcimer-makers, quilters, potters and woodcarvers and listing to music. "My thought," said Ripley, "is that we have dulcimers in cases in the museum, but how many people have actually heard one or seen one being made?"

During the mid-1960s the Smithsonian Institution re-evaluated its approach to understanding and interpreting American culture and its attendant institutional responsibilities. Secretary Ripley reported his initiative to mount the first Festival to the Board of Regents, the Smithsonian's governing body, in February, 1967:

A program sponsored by the Smithsonian should reflect the Institution's founding philosophy and current role. Although it has the world's largest collections of American folk artifacts, the Smithsonian, like all museums in our nation, fails to present folk culture fully and accurately. Through the Bureau of American Ethnology, it has pioneered the collection, archiving, analysis and publication of American Indian cultural data, [but] neither the Smithsonian nor any other research institution has employed the methods of cultural anthropology in an extensive fieldwork program in American folk cultures.

The lack of museum expertise and the absence of adequate field programs in American folklife studies has resulted from a general ignorance of the abundance of our traditional cultures. Related to the collections and based on the philosophy of the Smithsonian, an exposition of the



Dejan's Olympia Brass Band from Louisiana performs on the National Mall at the first Festival in 1967. Festival stages have generally remained small, encouraging intimate audience interaction. Photo Smithsonian Institution

folk aesthetic on the Mall accompanied by a seminar would be provocative.

A program presenting traditional craftsmen and dancers as well as musicians would convincingly demonstrate the vigor of our folk traditions. At an interdisciplinary seminar, individuals with mutual interests who are not ordinarily in communication — including scholars, government and foundation representatives as well as concerned laymen — will explore the significance of the traditions displayed.

Secretary Ripley also envisioned the eventual formation of an American Folklife Institute that would establish “standards for research and interpretation of our folkways” and “enable the Smithsonian to provide the basis for a total view of American culture.”

James Morris, then Director of the Smithsonian's Museum Service, Ralph Rinzler, coming from the Newport Folk Foundation as an applied folklore consultant, and others took up the task and the leadership of the project. Morris became Director of the newly constituted Division of Performing Arts, Rinzler became the

Festival's Director and Marion Hope became the project assistant and then Festival coordinator and assistant director.

Some in the U.S. Congress felt that Ripley's plans for the National Mall — which in addition to a Festival of American Folklife included a carousel, outdoor evening concerts at the museums, and a kite-flying contest — were frivolous, that they would turn the Mall into a “midway.” But Ripley and his supporters prevailed. Ripley thought it made sense for the Smithsonian to go outdoors and establish what some members of Congress termed “a living museum.” Education could be fun. Serious purposes could be accomplished on the nation's front lawn, historically known as “Smithsonian Park.” The Civil Rights marches had already dramatically demonstrated this.

Professors and scientists had their universities and publications; fine artists had their art galleries and museums; fine musicians had their symphonies and operas. The work of popular and commercial artists was proclaimed in the mass media of television, radio, recordings and magazines. Where could the voices of “folks back home” be

heard so they too would contribute to our sense of national culture, wisdom and art? Simply, the National Mall provided just such a platform for people to speak to the rest of the nation. Through the Festival, everyone could be represented; it made good sense as part of the national museum charged with presenting the story of human accomplishments. Members of Congress understood this meant that their constituents, the people, the folks back home, would have a place in the cultural life of the nation. Texans and Ohioans, Mississippians and Hawaiians, Anglo-Americans from Appalachia and American Indians from the Plains, new and older urban immigrants, children and elders, miners, cowboys, carpenters and many others would all have a place — a special place — to represent their cultural contributions.

The first Festival included a variety of musicians and craftspeople from across the country — Bessie Jones and the Georgia Sea Island Singers, Moving Star Hall Singer Janie Hunter and coil basketmaker Louise Jones from South Carolina, dulcimer maker Edd Presenell from North Carolina, Dejan's Olympia Brass Band from New Orleans, Navajo sandpainter Harry Belone, Acoma Pueblo potter Marie Chino, the Yomo Toro Puerto Rican Band and an Irish Ceilidh Band from New York, cowboy singer Glenn Ohrlin, bluesman John Jackson, Libba Cotton, Russian Glinka dancers from New Jersey, King Island Eskimo dancers from Alaska, and country blues singer Fred McDowell among many others.

The first Festival represented a convergence and distillation of several ideas. The name, "folklife" was taken from the Pennsylvania Folklife Festival and Don Yoder's scholarly adoption of the European term. The Festival's juxtaposition of musical performance with crafts, narrative sessions, foodways and sales came from Rinzler's pioneering experience at the Newport Festival. The dominant idea — that of a festival combining art, education and the struggle for cultural recognition — came from Rinzler through the influences of ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger, social activist and educator Myles Horton, and folklorist A. L. Lloyd.

From its inception, the Festival was to have a strong scholarly base. Festival presentations would indicate the cultural and social history of featured traditions. It would represent them accurately. Concurrent with the first Festival was an American Folklife Conference, organized by Morris, Rinzler and Henry Glassie, then state folklorist for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Conference participants included Smithsonian cura-

tors, folklorists D. K. Wilgus, Richard Dorson, Roger Abrahams, Austin Fife, Archie Green and Don Yoder, anthropologist Ward Goodenough, cantometrician Alan Lomax, cultural geographer Fred Kniffen, architect James Marston Fitch, record producer Moses Asch, historians, educators and other scholars from Mexico, Ireland, Canada, and Switzerland. The conference addressed topics of American and international folklife studies, the relationship between folklife and history, applied folklife, and folklife in schools, museums, communities and government agencies.

In the first Festival and Conference, several important ideas emerged. The study of grassroots traditional cultures was a multidisciplinary project; factors affecting the survival of cultural traditions in contemporary life had to be addressed; the study and presentation of cultures, through schools and other institutions was an essential part of public education; the Festival provided a collaborative means for scholars and culture bearers to discuss and present their understandings of particular traditions and communities.

The Festival and Conference project was viewed in 1967 as part of a larger strategy to study, present and conserve traditional grassroots cultures. The last session of the conference was devoted to planning for a National, or American Folklife Institute. The Institute would sponsor intensive scholarly fieldwork on American folk cultures, stimulate and preserve folk traditions through economic and educational assistance, produce an annual festival, encourage regional festivals and seminars, publish scholarly monographs and seminar proceedings as well as more popular works, produce documentary films, maintain an archive, compile resource guides for folk culture, disseminate educational materials to schools, advise other government agencies on cultural conditions related to their programs, and develop proposals for a national folk performance company and a national folklife museum.

The first Festival was indeed a public success, with more than 431,000 visitors attending. As Alan Lomax said,

In affairs like this we realize our strength. We realize how beautiful we are. Black is beautiful. Appalachia is beautiful and even old, tired, Washington sometimes is beautiful when the American people gather to sing and fall in love with each other again.

At the Festival people do talk, meet, and understand something of each other as they easily cross social boundaries usually not negotiated in their everyday life. And through the Festival,



Ernie Cornelison from Bybee, Kentucky, demonstrates a Dutch American pottery tradition, preserved in his family for generations, at the 1968 Festival. Crafts processes demonstrated at the Festival typically invite close observation and questions. Photo by Robert Yellin, Smithsonian Institution

tradition bearers enlarge the measure of cultural pride they brought with them to the Mall and bring it back home, energized by the experience of presenting their traditions in a national context. While not all of the suggestions developed in the 1967 American Folklife Conference have been realized, most of them have indeed come to pass.

Festival Benchmarks

It is difficult, if not impossible, to summarize all the milestones, all the accomplishments of the Festival of American Folklife. Key benchmarks merely signal its scope and contributions to scholarship, museology, government policy and the life of cultural communities themselves.

Community Involvement and Staffing

The Festival was intended to help present and interpret in a direct, public way the sometimes overlooked artistic creations of America's diverse, grassroots cultural communities. Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, the Festival was to provide a means whereby many Americans could tell their story and exhibit their aesthetics, their knowledge, their skill and their wisdom to the rest of the nation. Crucial to this process was the involvement of community members, not only as performers, but also as audience and as curatorial and professional staff.

In the late 1960s, the Smithsonian museums attracted very few visitors from minority communities and had only one minority curator. Following the first Festival, Rinzler met with civil rights activist, singer and cultural historian Bernice Reagon, Anacostia Museum Director John Kinard,

writer Julius Lester and others to develop programs through which African Americans in Washington might see the Festival and the Smithsonian as worthy of their participation. Similar efforts were directed toward other communities traditionally left out of Smithsonian museums and activities.

These efforts led to the appointment of Clydia Nahwooksy, the first Native American professional at the Smithsonian, and to the establishment of the Festival's American Indian Awareness program. Portions of the 1968 Festival were held at the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum. An African Diaspora Advisory Group was formed in 1971 to develop programs on African-derived cultures, foster community involvement, and engage scholars in finding solutions to questions of cultural representation. Gerald Davis, Reagon, James Early, Worth Long, Roland Freeman, and many others became involved. Over the years, the Festival played an important role of bringing scholars and cultural thinkers to the Smithsonian from previously unrepresented or underrepresented communities. Many, such as Reagon, Early, Manuel Melendez, Alicia González, Rayna Green, Fred Nahwooksy have held positions of increasing responsibility and scope within the Smithsonian.

The Festival also provided an opportunity for networks of minority scholars to develop. Freeman, a documentary photographer, and Long, a civil rights community organizer, teamed up in 1974 to survey and document the folklife of Mississippi's Black communities for the Festival; over the years they have collaborated on many projects, and are working together again this year.

The Festival has long attempted to provide research, training and presentational experience to members of minority communities. This has served two purposes. On one hand the Festival has helped enhance community self-documentation and presentation. On the other, the discourses of the Festival, the Smithsonian and a broad public have been enriched with the perspectives of minority professional and lay scholars

on their own community's cultures and on broader issues of social and cultural history.

This kind of involvement has become a regular feature of the Festival. Field research conducted to help select traditions and participants for the Festival is typically done by trained and lay scholars from the studied communities themselves. When Hawaiians, Virgin Islanders, Senegalese, or members of a deaf community are presented to the public at the Festival, scholars from those communities usually frame the presentations with background information. When this is not possible, presentations are done by scholars who, though not of the community, have collaborated closely with local scholars.

This ongoing commitment to cultural dialogue took the form of a Summer Folklore Institute in 1989 and 1990. Hundreds of lay scholars work in communities across the United States documenting, preserving and presenting their community's traditions without benefit of professional training, institutional networks or adequate human and financial resources. The Institute, organized around the Festival, exposed fellows, most from minority backgrounds, to techniques and methods used within the field. It also provided a means whereby they could meet one another as well as academic and museum scholars and interested public officials whose help they might draw upon. The Festival provided a fertile field for discussing, illustrating and examining questions of cultural documentation and presentation for the Institute's fellows. Just as the Festival has, the Institute has assisted community-level work on local cultures by encouraging its practitioners.

The Program Book

At the 1968 Festival, a program book accompanied Festival presentations. Noted scholars from a variety of disciplines addressed general issues of folklore and folklife and the specific traditions illustrated in the Festival in a writing style accessible to public audiences. In 1970 the Festival program book included many documentary photographs, recipes, statements by and interviews with craftspeople and musicians. It attempted to bring the many voices of the Festival event to its printed publication. Over the years, the program book has included seminal and informative articles on traditions and issues presented by Festival programs. The contents of the 24 program books provide a compendium of multidisciplinary and multivocal folklore scholarship, with articles on regional American culture, American Indian culture, the cultures of African Americans and of other peoples of the diaspora,

on ethnicity, community musics, biographical profiles of important musicians, verbal arts, deaf culture, material culture, vernacular architecture, foodways, communities and community celebrations, occupational folklife, children's folklore, the folklore of the elderly, the cultures of other countries, and issues of cultural policy. Several articles have focused on institutional practice and reflected on the production of the Festival itself — the ideas used to develop programmatic themes, to decide on who is to be represented and how and why. Program books are broadly distributed to the general public every year and used in university classrooms for teaching about American cultural traditions. Many states and locales have reprinted articles for use in their schools.

Featured State and Region

First in 1968 and then in ensuing years, the Festival adopted and in some cases developed innovative categories for understanding and presenting folklife traditions. In 1968 the Festival began its ongoing concern with the regional cultures of America with a distinct, "featured state" program about Texas. The program illustrated that regional culture often crosses ethnic communities and provides a particular cultural identity and aesthetic style. At the same time, regions generally host considerable cultural variation and diversity. Since then, Festival programs have been produced for every region of the United States and for 17 states and territories.

Regional and state programs have been important in projecting to the American public a knowledge of the talents, sensibilities and values of their fellow citizens and neighbors. John Waihee, Governor of Hawaii, eloquently spoke of this at the 1989 Festival.

It is with joy that we bring what is special about Hawaii to you, which is the spirit of aloha. Because we are more than wonderful weather, or beautiful beaches or powerful volcanoes. We are a people. We are people from many different backgrounds, and yet one, in the middle of God's Pacific, based on our native Hawaiian heritage, which binds us together in a spirit of love and pride, and built upon those who came later for a better life, reaching out so that their children's future would be secure. All of this we bring to Washington. To you, from the community of communities, to the nation of nations, we bring our spirit of aloha.

State and regional programs at the Festival have also been important in generating lasting institu-



Horsemen race down the Mall for the Oklahoma program featured at the 1982 Festival. The Festival's presentations attempt to contextualize performances and skills, sometimes through large-scale structures, often through directed attention to a particular individual. Photo by Jeff Tinsley, Smithsonian Institution

tional effects back home. Working in concert with the Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, the Festival has provided a useful means of encouraging folk arts programs within various states.

Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon spoke of this impact at the 1978 Festival:

This is a national Festival, but not just for Washington, D.C. My congressional colleagues and I are very much aware of the impact this Festival has had on our own states and regions. For example, my state, Oregon, has had two successful folklife festivals as a result of the Festival here. A young woman who did the fieldwork for the 1976 Bicentennial Festival returned home to Oregon to direct a north coast festival in Astoria in 1977 and a central Oregon festival this year. The festival demonstrated the breadth of folkways in just one state. From loggers and fishermen on the coast to buckeroos and smoke jumpers in the rugged central part of the state. These regional festivals demonstrate that the cultural traditions brought out by the

Smithsonian are worthy of respect, celebration and scholarship on the home turf.

For a century, I believe the Smithsonian has been noted primarily for the collection of artifacts of the American experience and has become the nation's attic. But it is the life of the American folk that we celebrate here today, not their encased artifacts as important as they may be. For it is the people themselves here in festivals like this across the country that provide us with an understanding of our own community. No curator can convey through a glass display case what the people themselves can say to us directly.

Most states have remounted a Festival program back home — Oklahoma in 1982, Michigan, every year since being on the Mall in 1987, Massachusetts in 1988, and Hawaii in 1990. The U.S. Virgin Islands plans to remount the Festival on St. Croix later this year and next year on St. Thomas. States have also used the Festival to develop their own on-going programs for the study, presentation and conservation of local cultures. Michigan has done this effectively; Hawaii is now consider-

Iroquois teenagers play and demonstrate the Indian-originated game of lacrosse at the 1975 Festival. The Festival's presentation of American Indian culture has spanned music and dance, crafts, foodways, architecture, storytelling, ritual performance, subsistence activities, sports and efforts at self-documentation and cultural revitalization. Photo by Jim Pickerell, Smithsonian Institution



ing a collaboration with the Smithsonian for a cultural institute; and the Virgin Islands, based upon its experience, is poised to establish a state folk arts program, pass a Cultural Preservation Act and establish a Virgin Islands Cultural Institute.

The impact of such state and regional programs is not limited to formal institutions, but also extends to participating artists, cultural exemplars and scholars. For some, the Festival represents a personal highlight, a benchmark from which they take encouragement and inspiration.

Native American Programs

The 1970 Festival expanded to include a unified program focussed on Native American cultures. While the Smithsonian's long established Bureau of American Ethnology had collected and documented evidences of previous lifeways, the Festival's thrust was to complement this with the rich dance, craft, foodways and ritual traditions of contemporary Indian peoples. The Festival worked closely with members of American Indian tribes to document and present traditions on the Mall. Collaboration in planning the Festival, in training community people, and having American Indians speak directly to the public marked the development of these programs over the years.

Since 1970, representatives from more than 130 Native American tribes have illustrated their cultures at the Festival. Survey programs were followed with thematic presentations, so that in 1978, 1979 and 1980, American Indians demonstrated the uses of vernacular architecture, the skills and knowledge needed for its construction and its ecological soundness. In 1989 an American Indian program examined the access to natural resources necessary for the continuity of tribal cultures; that year's program was accompanied by the publication of Thomas Vennum's influen-

tial *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People*.

The American Indian program at this year's Festival examines use and knowledge of the land among Native American groups from Alaska and the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, the Andes, and Ecuadorian rainforest. In a continuation of the dialogue begun through the Festival model, Native American Festival participants will, during and after the Festival, work with staff and curators of the Smithsonian's new National Museum of the American Indian to help shape its operations and plan its initial exhibits.

Working Americans and Occupational Folklife

The 1971 Festival marked the beginning of another series of programs, one concerned with the occupational folklife of working Americans. Rarely presented publically as culture prior to the Festival of American Folklife, occupational folklife consists of the skills, knowledge and lore people develop as members of occupational groups or communities. In 1971, during a summer of great national division, young people harboring stereotypes of people in hard hats had the opportunity to meet, talk with and reach a greater understanding of construction workers. Since then, Festival programs have illustrated the folklife of meat cutters, bakers, garment workers, carpenters and joiners, cowboys, farmers, stone



Logger Gary Winnop of Sitka, Alaska, checks rigging at the 1984 Festival. Occupational presentations have seen barns, threshers, livestock, railroad tracks and cars, building frames, boats and computers on the Mall to help workers demonstrate and explain how they work for a living.

Photo by Jeff Ploskonka, Smithsonian Institution

masons, oil and gas workers, sheet metal workers, railroad workers, seafarers, truck and taxi drivers, bartenders, firefighters and in 1986, even trial lawyers, who demonstrated their dramatic, strategic, storytelling and people-reading skills.

Some occupational groups and organizations, such as the AFL-CIO Labor Studies Center and the American Trial Lawyers Association, have used their Festival experience in self-presentation, in turning work skills into performance, to study and interpret their occupational culture. Programs in the Festival have also resulted in longer term research studies and documentary films, such as Robert McCarl's *D.C. Firefighters* for the Smithsonian Folklife Studies series, and Marjorie Hunt's 1984 Academy and Emmy Award winning film, *The Stone Carvers*.

Folklife Legislation

The 1971 Festival also was the setting for what Oklahoma Senator Fred Harris called, "a folk hearing down on the Mall." Senator Harris, co-sponsor of a bill called the American Folklife Foundation Act, felt that

American cultures have not been viewed with the pride they warrant; too often, they have been scorned as the life-style of an uncultured lower class. Nothing American was allowed to bear the label "culture." We had no national policy of appreciation and support for America's folklife.

The legislation was proposed as an effort to invest in the culture of America's common man. The bill, according to Harris,

says that the country fiddler need not feel uncultured simply because his fiddle does not produce a concert tone; it says that the pottery of Jugtown, North Carolina, and the sandpainting of the southwestern Indians are artistic treasures in the same sense as those from the dynasties of China; it says that the black bluesmen along the Brazos Valley in Texas are recognized as pure artists and welcome as a national treasure; it says that the American Indian philosopher has something urgently important for America today and that society wants to hear him as well as the ancient Greeks; it says that the total lifestyles of Swedish Americans in Milwaukee, of Polish Americans in Chicago and of Italian Americans in Boston have brought a perspective and a contribution to this country that has ennobled us as a society; and it says that the bluegrass band has developed a music with a complexity and richness that will grow and that will endure always as a living monument to American musical genius. In short, the bill says that there is a vast cultural treasure in America's common man, and that our society will be a better one if we focus on that treasure and build on it.

The bill defined folklife and called for the establishment of an American Folklife Foundation that would give grants, loans and scholarships to groups and individuals to organize folklife festivals, exhibits and workshops, to support research, scholarship and training, to establish archives and material and documentary collections, and to develop and to disseminate educational materials relating to folklife. It was modeled on a

bill first proposed by Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough in 1969 and inspired by the Festival of American Folklife, by the initial 1967 conference and by the subsequent interest the conference had generated. Sen. Harris and Rep. Thompson of New Jersey, the sponsor of the companion bill in the House of Representatives, chaired the public "folk hearing" on the Mall at the Festival. Festival participants Dewey Balfa, a Cajun fiddler from Louisiana, Barbara Farnet and Rosetta Ruyle, American Indians from the Northwest Coast, Florence Reece a coal-mining wife and singer from Tennessee, building tradesman Phil Ricos, and others testified at the hearing as did singer and folk documentor Mike Seeger, folklorists Archie Green and Francis Utely, and Festival American Indian programs coordinator, Clydia Nahwoosky.

The bill was not voted upon in 1971 but laid the legislative groundwork for the establishment of two other federal programs — the Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The former assumed responsibility for grant-making to individuals and local, state and regional arts agencies, while the latter, under the terms of the 1976 American Folklife Preservation Act, concentrated on archival collections, folklife research and other programs.

Old Ways in the New World

While the emphasis of the Festival was on American folk traditions, staff folklorists and others had interests in the root traditions from which many American traditions had derived. In 1973 the Festival initiated the first of a series of annual programs on "Old Ways in the New World." These programs sought to research and present the ways in which traditional practices of community and ethnic identity, rooted in the "old world," were preserved and transformed in the American context. Programs like the one on Cajun culture in Louisiana examined this process through music, and rather than seeing immigrants as dispossessed of culture, presented examples of living cultural continuity, vitality and creativity. These programs fostered pride and, in some cases such as among Cajuns and Irish Americans, local renaissances of traditional cultural forms. Folks whose traditions had been devalued even by themselves and their children reinvested energy in those traditions. Cajun fiddler Dewey Balfa, who appeared at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival at the urging of Rinzler and came away promising "to take the applause that echoed in my ears back to Louisiana," expressed this point

of view at the 1982 Festival. Said Balfa,

It matters not what part or what nationality you are. You should be proud of your nationality, you should be proud of your region. I want to respect your culture, you respect my culture. And if we ever learn to do this, America is a beautiful country, but it would be even more beautiful. And we can do that. Some of us has some work to do, but I think we are all together. We can do that.

Balfa, now retired as a school bus driver, but still playing his fiddle, was recently appointed an adjunct professor at Southwest Louisiana State College to convey his knowledge of Cajun culture to the next generation.

Old Ways in the New World programs from 1973 to 1976 focused on ethnic groups with roots in Great Britain, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Tunisia, Greece, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Japan and Mexico. They generally reunited American communities with cultural exemplars from "back home." The connection between an American immigrant group, whether newly arrived or long settled, and its root population has continued to be important in Festival research and programming. The impact of these combinations on performing artists, craftspeople and musicians was sometimes profound. Said Balfa in 1989 when at the Festival with French-style fiddlers from Western France, Quebec, New England, North Dakota and Louisiana,

This afternoon we were all [together] doing a workshop. I imagined in my mind while this was going on how long it would have taken me to travel all these miles and hear this music. I got it in one hour on the Mall, and I think that is beautiful.

The Old Ways in the New World concept framed the need to include in our cultural history the new immigrant groups reaching American shores as a result of the 1965 immigration act and the war in Southeast Asia. Presentations of these groups at the Festival coincided with the Smithsonian's establishment of a Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies headed by Roy Bryce-Laporte.

Recognizing similarities in the immigrant experience between different eras and from different continents prompted a program at the 1988 Festival on "Migration to Metropolitan Washington: Making a New Place Home." African American, Chinese, Oromo, Amhara, Salvadoran and other immigrant communities were brought together to

illustrate cultural processes which they all shared, and which, when understood, could help promote neighborly intercultural exchanges in an urban environment.

Programmatic interest in newly immigrant communities and their interactions has continued in the research work carried out by staff folklorist Olivia Cadaval on Salvadoran and Latino communities in Washington, D.C. Another researcher, Frank Proschan, is working on the recovery and conservation of Kmhmu verbal art in collaboration with elders and lay scholars in a community widely disbursed geographically throughout the United States. Currently, we are engaged in a research project on Soviet American and cognate Soviet cultures resulting from a 1988 Festival program on Soviet musics. Joint teams of American and Soviet researchers are conducting fieldwork on Bukharin Jewish communities in Uzbekistan and in Queens, New York; on Old Believers in southern Russia and in Oregon and California; Ukrainians in the Soviet Union and U.S. cities; and other such root and cognate communities. The project examines the transformations of identity and folklife within these communities and will probably result in a Festival program in the mid-1990s.

The Old Ways in the New World programs involved cultural exemplars from some 40 nations in the Festival and provided a means for the American public to approach cultures and peoples usually far removed from them. In 1978 the Festival began "featured country" programs with the participation of Mexico and Mexican Americans. Such country programs as those on Korea, India, Japan, France, the Soviet Union, Senegal and this year, Indonesia, provide Festival visitors with an opportunity to see artistic and cultural expressions rarely glimpsed through mass media. These programs also provide an opportunity for close collaborative ties between American and international scholars and sometimes even influence cultural policies in the represented nation. The 1985 Festival program, "Mela: An Indian Fair," was accomplished with strong collaboration of Indian folklorists, community activists, designers, and local communities who were struggling to maintain their artistic traditions. This program, conceptually and aesthetically organized by Indian principles and sensibilities, provided a powerful cultural representation, which not only gave visitors a sense of Indian cultures, but also influenced policies and practices aimed at broadening human cultural rights in India.

African Diaspora

A similar impulse informed the founding of the African Diaspora program conceived in 1970 and produced at the 1974 Festival. The African Diaspora program, first proposed by Gerald Davis and developed in collaboration with the African Diaspora Advisory Group, which included Bernice Reagon, A. B. Spellman, Kathryn Morgan and others, was a ground-breaking attempt to make a statement about the continuity of African cultural forms in the many places in which African peoples live.

African American culture forms are rooted in Africa, often via the Caribbean and Latin America. Some forms, such as Sea Island basket making, folktales, hair braiding, and some musical and verbal styles have aesthetically and functionally survived intact; others were synthesized and transformed to deal with historical and daily exigencies. The 1974 Festival program made a tri-continental statement, linking musicians, dancers, cooks, woodcarvers, hairdressers, basket weavers and others from Ghana and Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago, and varied African American communities in the United States.

African Diaspora programs in 1975 and 1976 continued to look at commonalities of the African experience as found in a diversity of North American, Caribbean, South American and African settings. Participants at the Festival, millions of visitors, African Americans, European Americans, scholars and Smithsonian staff discovered the many ways in which common aesthetics in foodways, personal adornment, music, dance, use of language and use of space were expressed by peoples from Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Zaire, and Senegal; from Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad & Tobago, Surinam and Brazil; and from the Mississippi Delta, from the Georgia Sea Islands, from urban New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago and Washington, D.C. African Diaspora programs marked a major development in the scholarly and public treatment of African-based cultures and helped set the foundation for programs in the National Museum of American History.

The need and impetus for such programs continues. The 1990 Festival featured a program on Senegal involving the participation of Senegalese and Senegalese Americans. Joined with the U.S. Virgin Islands at the Festival, participants, scholars and officials "re-discovered" many of the cultural commonalities — in storytelling, *mocko jumbi*, music, narrative, foodways and adornment traditions — which unite them. At the Festival, the Senegalese Minister of Culture and the Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands announced plans for a



Yugoslavian participants and visitors join hands in dancing to tamburashi band music at the 1973 Festival Old Ways in the New World program. Photo Smithsonian Institution

bilateral cultural exchange program. Staff folklorist Diana N'Diaye and others are currently working on educational kits for the school systems in Senegal, the Virgin Islands and Washington, D.C. so that children will have access to their cultural heritage, spanning as it does, oceans, continents and centuries. We also continue to work with Senegal in developing a West Africa Research Center to promote continuing studies of the linkages between African and African American populations. And as the Smithsonian develops its new African American Museum, and Senegal its Goree Island Memorial, we trust the Festival will have played a role in bridging cultural connections.

The U.S. Bicentennial

In sheer size and public impact, the 1976 Festival for the U.S. Bicentennial was formidable. The Festival was held over a 12-week period and involved the participation of every region of the United States, 38 foreign governments, scores of American Indian tribes, and many labor organizations and corporate sponsors. Despite what might

be expected, the Festival avoided massive state spectacle and retained its intimate presentational modes — relatively small performance stages, narrative workshops, intimate crafts and foodways demonstration areas, children's participation areas and the like.

The Bicentennial Festival illustrated in the strongest terms the living nature of folk culture throughout the United States and the world. Rather than dying in the industrial revolution, or having been smothered by the influence of mass culture, community-based, grassroots cultural traditions were still practiced, still meaningful in the contemporary lives of Americans and other people of the world. This was easy for millions of visitors to see and experience on the National Mall.

The Bicentennial Festival was an immense undertaking and illustrated the collaboration of the Smithsonian with literally thousands of national and international scholars, community spokespeople and cultural exemplars involved in the documentation, presentation, transmission and conservation of cultural traditions. The plan-



Ghanaian praise singer Salisu Mahama, playing the gonje, and group illustrate the traditional music played for the court of the Dagomba king at the 1975 Festival. Photo Smithsonian Institution

ning for the Bicentennial Festival had begun in 1974 and provided an unprecedented means of establishing cultural networks, training students, and providing opportunities for diverse peoples to interpret and present their traditions.

The Bicentennial also saw the flowering of a touring program, originally begun in 1973, in which groups at the Festival would tour the United States, bringing part of the Festival to cities, rural areas, midwestern towns, concert halls, local school classrooms, city parks and shopping malls. Through these touring programs, the Smithsonian put people across the breadth of America in touch with traditional domestic and foreign cultures. While these tours are no longer formally done, they served as a model of taking grassroots performance to local people for other organizations and for the Smithsonian's own special programs. For example, the Festival sent contingents of American performing groups to the Soviet Union in 1988 and 1990. Groups included musicians for stage performances, street musicians, a New Orleans brass band and a girls double-dutch jump rope team. On tour in the Soviet Union, the Americans performed not only in concert halls, but also in the factories of the Leninski shipyards, on a collective farm, in a Ukrainian town square, on the streets of Kiev and in apartment complexes.

The Office of Folklife Programs

Preliminary plans to discontinue the Festival of

American Folklife after the Bicentennial were swept aside by the enormous outpouring of public support for the Festival and its educational and cultural mission. After the Bicentennial, the Smithsonian formally established the Office of Folklife Programs, with Ralph Rinzler as its founding director. The Office, now with a permanent staff, was able to approach the larger task set out by the initial American Folklife Conference of extending beyond the Festival to more thorough, broad ranging and varied means of documenting, studying, presenting and disseminating educational materials on folk cultural traditions.

The web of activity generated initially by the Festival and then by the Office has grown large and complex. In addition to producing the annual Festival and mounting the archival and field research which makes it possible, the Office is engaged in numerous projects. The Smithsonian Folklife Studies series, formally begun in 1976 publishes documentary studies on American and worldwide folk traditions in the form of scholarly monographs and ethnographic films. Monographs and films such as *The Meaders Family: North Georgia Potters*, *Tule Technology: Northern Paiute Uses of Marsh Resources in Western Nevada*, *The Drummaker* and *The Korean Onggi Potter*, among others, are technical, documentary studies used by scholars, community people and university educators. This series is supplemented by many other books, pamphlets and articles by Office scholars, some related to Festival programs, such as *Family Folklore*, others based on ongoing fieldwork and scholarship.

Since its inception the Festival has collaborated with Smithsonian museums in mounting exhibitions related to folk culture. Exhibits of folk art incorporating objects, photographs, song and spoken word recordings and sales were held in the National Museum of American History and then toured by the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service. An exhibit of Copp family textiles in the Museum of American History encouraged living practitioners, like Norman Kennedy, to work with the museum to help document and interpret its collection. Consultations between practitioners and museum curators have since become a regular Festival feature.

The Office of Folklife Programs has produced several traveling exhibits including *Southeastern Pottery*, *The Grand Generation*, which presents the folklife of the elderly, and recently *Stand by Me: African American Expressive Culture in Philadelphia*. All grew out of Festival programs and research. In 1982-83 the Office collaborated

with the Renwick Gallery to mount *Celebration*, an exhibition of objects related to human ritual behavior curated by Victor Turner. During the 15 month-long exhibition, artifacts in the Gallery were contextualized by living performances, demonstrations and rituals offered by numerous cultural communities. The exhibit resulted in a catalog and three books and established the groundwork for the inclusion of living people as integral participants in museum exhibitions. This practice was at the center of *Aditi: A Celebration of Life*, mounted in 1985 at the National Museum of Natural History for the Festival of India. This exhibition, one of the Smithsonian's most ambitious and successful, gained national and international attention, set high standards for museologists in design, content and programming, and served to connect museum display with issues of cultural survival.

The Office of Folklife Programs has produced numerous symposia, often in collaboration with other Smithsonian units and with national and international cultural and educational organizations. Symposia have ranged from those on popular culture and traditional puppetry to those for the Columbus Quincentenary on Native American agriculture and the relationship of commerce and industry to expressive culture.

The Festival has always generated educational materials and media products. Many documentary films have been produced about the Festival and its particular programs over the years in different regions of the country and abroad. Radio Smithsonian has featured series of programs generated from the Festival and other research projects; Smithsonian World has featured the Festival in its television segments. A record produced from music performed at the Festival was released in 1970 and helped establish the Smithsonian Recordings Division.

In 1987 the Office of Folklife Programs acquired Folkways Records from the family of Moses Asch. Folkways — a long established company with a 50 year archive and catalog of 2,200 titles spanning U.S. and world musics, verbal art, spoken word, and historical and scientific documentary recordings — took root at the Smithsonian under the care of musical anthropologist Anthony Seeger. To help pay for the acquisition, popular musicians agreed to produce a benefit album and donate their royalties to the Smithsonian. Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Emmylou Harris, U2, Little Richard, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, Willie Nelson, Taj Mahal and others performed their versions of Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly songs in the Folkways collection. The

effort, *Folkways: A Vision Shared*, generated considerable sales and won a Grammy Award. It also led to a companion music-cultural history video on Guthrie and Leadbelly, a release of original recordings from the archives, and educational materials produced in concert with the Music Educators National Conference. Smithsonian/Folkways is keeping every title in the original Folkways catalog in print and is stabilizing the archives. More than 70 titles have been remastered and rereleased on CD and cassette. New albums and series are being researched and produced — *Hawaiian Drum Dance Chants*, *The Doc Watson Family*, *Musics of the Soviet Union*, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, and many more — sometimes in concert with Festival projects and often in collaboration with local scholars and institutions. With the help of the Ford Foundation, Smithsonian/Folkways has worked closely with the Indonesian ethnomusicological society to train fieldworkers and documentors and to produce a series of recordings surveying the musical culture of that diverse nation. A version of the series with Indonesian language notes will be produced so that adults, but especially children, there can have access to their own, sometimes fragile traditions. Smithsonian/Folkways may also be found in unlikely places — the Boston Children's Museum plays its recordings in the bathrooms and computer-based educational programs use Folkways music to teach geography and cultural awareness. Folkways co-distributes a world music and dance encyclopedia and is about to embark on laser disc and high definition television projects. Its archival holdings attract scholars in ethnomusicology, folklore and cultural history and invite the attention of people from the communities whose music, words and art it seeks to preserve.

The range of scholarly, museum, educational and public service activities undertaken by the Office confirms the vision of the first Festival and Conference. But there is yet more to do.

Cultural Conservation

The Festival had long been conceived as promoting cultural pluralism, continuity and equity. The concern for preserving and encouraging cultural diversity and creativity framed Rinzler's work from the beginning. In 1973, Secretary Ripley made this explicit in his statement for the Festival program book:

We are a conservation organization, and it seems to us that conservation extends to human cultural practices. The possibility

of using a museum that is essentially a historical documentary museum as a theater of live performance where people actually show that the objects in cases were made by human hands, and are still being made, practiced on, worked with, is a very valuable asset for our role as a preserver and conservator of living cultural forms, and should be understood in those terms.

Programs in 1979 and ensuing years examined community efforts to preserve and extend their cultural traditions in such activities as vernacular architecture, food procurement and processing, and ritual life. Rinzler took this concern for cultural conservation to larger arenas in the Smithsonian when he became Assistant Secretary for Public Service in 1982.

In 1985 with Peter Seitel as Director of the Office of Folklife Programs and Diana Parker as Director of the Festival, a specific program called Cultural Conservation was developed for the Festival that examined how institutional practices and pressures threatened Mayan Indian, Puerto Rican, Cajun, Kmhmu and other communities and how local and sometimes national and international efforts worked to assist their cultural survival. Cultural conservation programs continued in following years to examine the role of local social institutions, the maintenance of language and the use of natural resources in preserving American cultural communities and allowing them to define their own futures.

The concern for the conservation of cultural diversity and creativity has been expressed in various publications and through various Festival projects, and it informs ongoing and developing collaborations with international organizations and federal, state and local agencies.

Conclusion

As the Festival passes its 25th year it will continue to experiment with presentational techniques and to explore categories for understanding varieties of grassroots cultural expression. Festival staff, and the scores of officials, academic colleagues, public folklorists and community people who yearly write and talk about the Festival continue to use it as a vehicle for thinking through issues of cultural representation and conservation.

An unfinished agenda from 1967 still resonates today. It would be a mistake to think that the promulgation of global mass culture will inevitably wipe out all forms of tradition-generated,

community-held, creatively performed grassroots culture. Not all culture is or will be produced in Hollywood, Paris, Nashville or on Madison Avenue. Local folks, people in families, communities, tribes, regions and occupations continue to make culture. More research must be done on the contexts within which local forms of grassroots culture do survive and indeed, may flourish. If we think cultural diversity is worth conserving, then the time is ripe to examine how economic development strategies can encourage the continuity of local culture, how local cultural practices and knowledge can support environmental preservation, how local communities can participate in the shaping of the images used, too often by others, to represent them, and how the wisdom, knowledge and aesthetics of diverse cultures can directly, and through innovative media, be brought into classrooms and other forums of public education.

The Festival and the Office of Folklife Programs will continue its work. It will continue to tap into the great streams of tradition and creativity which, though threatened, still abound in the United States and throughout the world. It will continue to heed, honor and celebrate remarkable people who, in exemplary ways, carry with them lessons learned by word of mouth over generations, so that the next generation of young artists can return to root forms when shaping new creations. And the Festival will continue to encourage practitioners to practice, scholars to research, and the public to learn.

To museums, educational systems, community groups, governments and the general public that seek forms for presenting information about cultural knowledge, practice, wisdom and aesthetics, the Festival offers an important resource. And as American society, and indeed societies around the world, daily confront cultural issues in schools, homes, market places and political arenas, the Festival provides a model, however emergent, of how diverse forms of cultural expression can be accommodated, communicated and appreciated within a broad framework that recognizes human cultural rights.

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