

# Festival Works

by Diana Parker

Festival staff people I know are a very dedicated and hard-working group. They give of their time, intelligence, and energy because they believe they are engaged in good work. Therefore, it is especially nice when others agree. The Festival of American Folklife has been designated the Top Event of the United States in 1994 by the American Bus Association. Previous top events, determined by the Association's survey of tourism and visitors' bureaus around the country, have included the Olympics, the Statue of Liberty Centennial, and the World's Fair.

The Festival continues to have an impact beyond the Mall and its two-week duration. The 1992 Festival program on New Mexico was remounted this past October in Las Cruces by New Mexico State University and a host of collaborators. Co-directors Dr. Andrew Wiget and Dr. Jose Griego made creative use of the Festival's educational potential. They developed a three-day curriculum unit for use in schools prior to the Festival. Trained docents met each class at the Festival and guided them around the site. More than 3,500 students took advantage of this excellent learning experience.

"Workers at the White House," an exhibit based on the 1992 Festival, opened at the Gerald Ford Library in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in January. Curated by Marjorie Hunt, who also curated the Festival program, the photo/text, artifact, and video exhibit will travel to the Truman, Eisenhower, Carter, and Reagan Presidential Libraries under the auspices of the National Archives and the White House Historical Association.

We sometimes say "the Festival never ends." Years, even a decade, after a program appears at the Festival, its educational products may reach a public audience. *Korean Onggi Pottery*, a documentary film in the Smithsonian Folklife Studies series based on research for a 1982 Festival program, won a Cine Golden Eagle award this year. A documentary film based on the 1984 program, *The Grand Generation* made its debut at

the Smithsonian this winter. Watch for it on your local public and cable television stations. Festival programs also continue to engender Smithsonian/Folkways recordings – most recently on U.S./Mexico Borderlands, The Bahamas, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Research scholars, fellows, and educators continue to use archival holdings created by the Festival. We recently completed a computerized inventory of our audio recordings to send to public folklore offices, state arts councils, and other interested organizations around the country.

The Festival also drew the attention of a wide range of writers and scholars. It was the subject of sessions at meetings of the American Folklore Society and the American Anthropological Association. Two new books by Smithsonian scholars reference the Festival: Dr. Thomas Vennum's definitive *Lacrosse: Little Brother of War* and Dr. Adrienne Kaeppler's fine *Hula Pahu: Hawaiian Drum Dances*. In a rather different vein, the Festival has also been subjected to levels of literary engagement ranging from satire to personal fantasy to murder mystery.

Clearly, the proudest moment for the Festival in the last year was when its founder and longtime director, Assistant Secretary Emeritus Ralph Rinzler, was awarded the Smithsonian Secretary's Gold Medal. Ralph was presented the award for his prescience in creating a museum program nearly 30 years ago that blazed a trail in the contemporary philosophy of museums and other public cultural and educational organizations.

Although the Festival has evolved over time, the basic model that Ralph developed in 1967 has endured. It still inspires Smithsonian staff, cultural exemplars, the public, and national leaders to make creative use of the myriad possibilities that arise when cultures come together for a special time with understanding and respect.

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*Diana Parker is the Director of the Festival of American Folklife. She has worked on the Festival in a variety of capacities since 1975.*