

The Festival Never Ends

DIANA PARKER

It's been a busy year for the Festival. In addition to researching and producing this year's event, which we hope you will find both enlightening and enjoyable, we are mining Festivals past for important and challenging projects as well as planning future programs.

Education kits prepared from materials generated for and by the 1991 Festival program *Knowledge and Power: Land in Native American Cultures* and the 1993 *United States-Mexico Borderlands/La Frontera* program are nearing completion. Written materials for these two kits are currently being sent to classroom teachers and other educational evaluators for testing and comments. We expect the kits to be ready for classroom use by the 1995-96 school year.

Collaborations forged for the Festival don't stop when the Festival closes. The Center is working with El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and Texas Folklife Resources, co-collaborators on the Festival *Borderlands* program, not only on the education kit, but to organize *Talleres de la Frontera*. A binational workshop and performance series for border communities that includes cultural practitioners who participated in both the Festival program and the education kit, *Talleres* will explore the relationships between history, identity, and the border.

Workers at the White House, a film based on the 1992 Festival program, premiered at National Geographic and was shown on televi-

sion in February. The traveling exhibition, of which the video is now a part, is at the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California, until October, following a stay at the Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia. A second version of the exhibition has been circulating through Washington, D.C., schools. Its opening at the Shaed Elementary School in February was attended by several of the featured White House workers and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. The exhibit will eventually reside in the new National Park Service White House Visitors Center. The video can be seen there now.

The 1993 Festival program *American Social Dance* was the winner in the Theater, Music, and Dance category at the annual Smithsonian Institution Exhibition Awards ceremony. Congratulations are due to the program staff and the dancers and musicians from around the country who were a part of that extraordinary event.

From the 1994 Festival, we are working with our colleagues in The Bahamas to produce an education kit. In addition, the Bahamians are planning to remount last year's Festival program in The Bahamas this summer.

Three new projects were initiated this year. The first is the formation of a Friends of the Festival group. The Festival has always depended on its friends for support of all sorts, and we look forward to having a more formal structure for our interaction. The Friends staff is busy developing membership benefits and

programs for the Washington area and beyond. The Friends have a tent on the Festival grounds this year. Drop by and talk with them, or contact them at (202) 287-3210.

The second initiative is the establishment of the Smithsonian Collection of Traditional Crafts, solicited from master craftspeople around the United States. Crafts will be displayed and sold at the Festival and major craft shows and through catalogues, printed and electronic. We hope this activity will encourage the continuing creativity of fine traditional craftspeople by providing access to markets and thus additional financial support for what they do.

In assessing our work in producing the Festival, we depend on honest appraisal by Festival participants, who see the results of our planning most closely. In order to broaden our understanding of participants' experiences, we recently mailed a four-page questionnaire to all domestic participants from 1989 to 1993. Questions were general (How would you rate your experience? Would you come again if asked?), specific (How would you rate travel arrangements? food? volunteers? academic presenters?), and open ended (How did your experience affect your life back home, if at all?). To our delight, we have had nearly 300 responses so far. We are still in the process of analyzing the material, but can

report that 82 percent of the respondents rated their overall experience as excellent and 17.5 percent as good. Eighty-eight percent said they would definitely do it again, with another 12 percent saying under certain conditions they would. Ninety-four percent felt that the audience generally liked their presentation and learned from it, with an additional 6 percent feeling that people were entertained, but didn't really learn anything. We would also like to know how Festival audiences perceive the event. If you would like to tell us how you feel, please write Festival of American Folklife Opinions, Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, MRC 914, Washington, DC 20560.

Finally, the Festival is in the process of going up on World Wide Web. The interactive nature of the medium makes it a natural for presenting a sampling of the rich audio, photographic, video, and text archives of the Festival. It can never match the level of interactivity of the Festival itself, however. "Virtual" is exactly that.

Next summer the Festival will enliven the Mall June 26 - 30 and July 3 - 7. Our programs will include Iowa, the American South, and Workers at the Smithsonian Institution. Please plan to join us for one of our most challenging and exciting Festivals ever.

DIANA PARKER is the Director of the Festival of American Folklife. She has worked on the Festival in a variety of capacities since 1975.