

# The Festival: More Than a Song

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The entertainment industry today dominates popular views of culture. Cultural enterprises including movies, television, theme parks, recordings, and video stores constitute one of the world's largest industries.

There is another world of culture created and sustained in homes, communities, places of work and worship. Our lullabies and hymns, liturgical chants and celebratory songs, songs of work, struggle, and mourning, are rarely heard in music stores or on radio stations. It is the culture highlighted at our annual Festival of American Folklife.

We have three programs at this year's Festival. *Sacred Sounds* brings together people from a variety of religious communities, from around the nation, Jerusalem, and from South Africa. Their songs express spiritual feelings and convictions connecting their lives to tradition.

A second program, *African Immigrant Folklife*, illustrates the many traditions of recent immigrants to the United States from Africa. These immigrants participate in a changing culture, as people, families, and communities find their place in American society.

*The Mississippi Delta*, the subject of a third Festival program, is a culturally rich region of the United States that has given us blues, jazz, rockabilly and rock 'n' roll, honky tonk, distinctive forms of gospel, oratory, marvelous stories, folk and visionary art, and an encyclopedia of river lore — not to mention barbecue and fish fries. These cultural expressions have been continually shaped by the daily experience — the work, worship, home life, and recreation — of the people who live there.

The Festival is a good example of how the Smithsonian can reach large audiences in an educational and entertaining way. As its organizers are fond of saying, though, the Festival is also much more than occurs on the National Mall. Over the past decade the Festival has generated more than a dozen television documentaries, a score of Smithsonian Folklife recordings, learning guides for schools in several countries and various regions of the United States. And now we have the Virtual Festival on our World Wide Web pages (at [www.si.edu/folklife/vfest](http://www.si.edu/folklife/vfest)).

Our course is clear. We must use modern mass media to communicate the value of cultural traditions while maintaining our values as scholars and educators. Our "ratings" are measured by how successfully we can reach the broadest number of people and thus realize our original mission to increase and diffuse knowledge.