

The Festival: On the Mall and Back Home

The 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival is proud to host programs on Wisconsin, the Río Grande/Río Bravo Basin, the Philippines, and the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

- Wisconsin this year celebrates its sesquicentennial, and seeks through the Festival to demonstrate to the nation the vitality of its people and their traditions.
- The Río Grande/Río Bravo region was redefined 150 years ago with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which established a new boundary between Mexico and the United States. The river has a variety of meanings for local communities that will be explored on the Mall.
- The Philippines first tasted independence 100 years ago, and marks its centennial with activities that give voice to Filipino peoples, both in the island nation and here in the United States.
- The Baltic nations each demonstrate the richness of their cultural life, and its importance in sustaining the struggle to regain their freedom and independence only a decade ago.

The Festival will attract about a million visitors. They will dance to polkas from Milwaukee, learn borderlands ballads, participate in a Philippine pageant, and marvel at the amber work, flax weaving, and choral songs of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The unexpected will also meet their eye —

a Tibetan sand mandala maker from Wisconsin, a Filipino artisan who fashions musical gongs from bullet casings, a New Mexican pueblo potter who incorporates modern flood stories into her craft, and a Baltic-style St. John's Day ceremony.

Impressive as it is, though, the Festival is more than the presentations on the Mall. It begins back home — wherever that may be — with good research. Wisconsin fieldworkers have done a wonderful job documenting the state's community-based culture. In the Río Grande region, cooperative field schools led by the Smithsonian with the University of New Mexico, Colorado College, University of Texas—Pan American, and Tierra Wools have encouraged local-area students and community members to study their cultural traditions. In the Philippines, the Cultural Center has devoted its staff to researching the traditions of the varied islands and developing a national archive. And in the Baltics, research has depended upon the documentation efforts of the Lithuanian Folk Culture Center and the Estonian National

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Council of Folklore, among other institutions.

Research allows us to plan and produce the Festival. It also leads to other outputs well beyond the Mall that cause the staff to declare, "The Festival never ends."

Highly visible Festival presentations have gone to the Olympic Games and formed the core of festivals in Hawai'i, Oklahoma, Michigan, Iowa, Mississippi, and other states. There is a copious scholarly literature on the Festival and some three dozen documentary films and television shows, radio broadcasts, a few dozen Smithsonian Folkways recordings, and numerous cultural learning guides for schools and communities.

The pattern holds for this year's Festival. Wisconsin, in association with the Smithsonian, will mount a Festival of Wisconsin Folklife in Madison in August. We have produced a Smithsonian Folkways recording on one of the state's dance music traditions, and Wisconsin public television is shooting a documentary for broadcast. In the Río Grande Basin, Festival collaborations assure a continuing effort to research the region and develop multimedia materials for the schools. And, for the Baltic nations, we trust the Festival on the Mall will reinforce the relationship between the encouragement of grassroots cultural expression and the development of a free, democratic, civil society — as it does for us every year.