

THE FESTIVAL'S TIMELY APPEAL

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Welcome to the 2005 Smithsonian Folklife Festival! This year we feature four programs—*Oman: Desert, Oasis, and Sea*; *Forest Service, Culture, and Community*; *Food Culture USA*; and *Nuestra Música: Music in Latino Culture*. Now in its 39th year, the Festival once again presents a sample of the diverse cultural heritage of America and the world to large public audiences in an educational, respectful, and profoundly democratic way on the National Mall of the United States. True to form, the Festival illustrates the living, vital aspect of cultural heritage and provides a forum for discussion on matters of contemporary concern.

For the first time, the Festival features an Arab nation, Oman. Oman is at the edge of the Arabian Peninsula, both geographically and historically situated between East Africa and the Indian Ocean. Trade routes, frankincense, silverwork, Islam, a strategic location, and oil have connected it to the cultures of the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Mediterranean region, and beyond. Contemporary Omanis live poised between a long and rich past and a future they are in the midst of defining. New roads, hospitals, schools, businesses, high-tech occupations, and opportunities for women are developing alongside traditionally valued religion, family life, artistry, and architecture. Omanis are well aware of the challenges of safeguarding their cultural heritage in an era of globalization. The Festival program provides a wonderful illustration of the approaches they have taken and enables American visitors and Omanis to engage in open, two-way interchange.

During the Festival, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service celebrates its 100th anniversary. Programs in previous years have illustrated the traditions of White House workers and of Smithsonian workers. This Festival examines the occupational culture of Forest Service rangers, smokejumpers, scientists, tree doctors, and many others devoted to the health and preservation of our nation's forests. They are joined by artists and workers from communities that depend upon the forests for their livelihood or sustenance. The Festival offers a wonderful opportunity for an active discussion of the significance of our national forests and rangelands to the American people.

Food Culture USA examines the evolution of our nation's palate over the past generation. New produce, new foods, new cooking techniques, and even new culinary communities have developed as a result of immigrant groups taking their place in our society, the rise of organic agriculture, and the growing celebrity of ethnic and regional chefs on a national stage. A diversity of growers, food inspectors, gardeners, educators, home cooks and prominent chefs share their knowledge and creativity as they demonstrate the continuity and innovation in America's culinary culture.

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We also continue our program in Latino music this year with a series of evening concerts. Last year's program drew many Latinos to the National Mall, helping the Smithsonian reach out to a major segment of the American population. Audiences were thrilled by the performances, as were the musicians who presented their own cultural expressions and thus helped educate their fellow citizens of the nation and the world. Smithsonian Folkways released recordings of three of the groups, and one later went on to be nominated for a Grammy award. This year, Smithsonian Folkways will hopefully continue that tradition with additional talented musicians from New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Puerto Rico, and Mexico.

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The Festival has provided an amazingly successful means of presenting living cultural traditions and has been used as a model for other states and nations. It has also inspired other major national celebrations. Last year, the Festival's producer—the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage—organized two major benchmark events. *Tribute to a Generation: The National World War II Reunion* drew more than 100,000 veterans and members of the “greatest generation” to the Mall to celebrate the dedication of a new national memorial. Through discussions, performances, interviews, oral histories, and the posting of messages on bulletin boards, members of that generation shared their stories with some 200,000 younger Americans. It was a stirring and memorable occasion. Months later, the Center organized the *Native Nations Procession* and *First Americans Festival* for the grand opening of the National Museum of the American Indian. This constituted perhaps the largest and most diverse gathering of Native people in history, as Inuits from Alaska and Canada marched down the Mall along with Suyás from the Amazon rainforest, Cheyennes marched with Hawaiians, Navajos with Hopis, to claim their respected place in the hemisphere's long cultural history. Over the course of the six-day celebration, some 600,000 attended concerts, artistic demonstrations, dances, and other activities and learned a great deal about the living cultural heritage of America's first inhabitants.

The Festival and the other national events inspired by it help represent the cultural traditions of diverse peoples of this nation and the world to a broad public. The Festival is a unique experience, both educational and inspiring, and one in which you, as a visitor, are wholeheartedly welcome to participate. Enjoy it!