



## The Festival as Cultural Partnership

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Welcome to the 2006 Smithsonian Folklife Festival! This year we feature three programs—Alberta at the Smithsonian; Carriers of Culture: Living Native Basket Traditions; Nuestra Música: Latino Chicago—as well as a special concert series, *Been in the Storm So Long*. The Festival, now celebrating its 40th year on the National Mall of the United States, presents a compelling, research-based sampling of the diverse traditions of America and the world to large public audiences in an educational, respectful, and profoundly democratic way. Employing a format it has both pioneered and mastered, the Festival illustrates the vital, living aspect of cultural heritage and provides a forum for discussion of issues of contemporary concern. And, it's fun: a great place to eat, sing, dance and meet artisans, musicians, and visitors from across the country and around the world.

For the first time, the Festival features a Canadian province—Alberta, which just completed its own celebration of its centennial. Albertans have created a dynamic home for diverse peoples—aboriginal inhabitants, settlers, and later immigrants—in a varied and dramatic landscape. They've built large world-class industries—oil and gas, ranching, farming, forestry—as well as two large, modern metropolises, Calgary and Edmonton, all the while being incredibly creative in the arts and sciences. On the Mall we'll learn how Alberta's scientists excavate dinosaur bones, see how the famed oil sands are mined and processed, witness ranching skills, appreciate fine Native craftsmanship, hear ballads from talented singer-songwriters, and experience their contemporary "Theatresports." Our work with key departments of the provincial government, the Royal Museum, the University of Alberta and other cultural institutions, researchers, scholars, and educators has produced not only the Festival program, but also recordings on Smithsonian Folkways, an exhibition, a series of programs with the Smithsonian Associates, concerts at the Kennedy Center, features on our Smithsonian Global Sound website, other events, and even an Alberta-Smithsonian internship program that will continue as a legacy of the partnership. Our collaboration is a testament to how good will and common purpose can effectively cross borders and serve the educational and cultural interests of Canadians, Americans, and a broader visiting public.

This kind of engaged collaborative partnership is also illustrated through the Carriers of Culture program that has brought together the Festival, the National Museum of the American Indian, Michigan State University Museum, and a network of Native basket makers' organizations around the United States. The collaboration is built upon the needs of basket makers themselves, who face various challenges to their living heritage. Basket makers need access to trees, bushes, and plants untainted by pollutants; they need recognition, appreciation, and access to markets as well as opportunities to train the next generation. At the Festival, you will

see scores of basket makers from dozens of Native communities from every part of the United States. They will be demonstrating their masterful techniques, making baskets of meaning and delight in every imaginable shape and texture. Their participation in the Festival, including sales at the marketplace and related public programs and consultations at the National Museum of the American Indian, is part of a cultural self-help strategy. That strategy, shaped by participatory research led by Michigan State University in concert with Native basket makers' organizations, aims to assure the vitality of long-lived traditions. The wonderful alliance with those organizations, MSU, and the Smithsonian enhances Native abilities to achieve that worthy purpose.

Nuestra Música: Latino Chicago reflects another substantive partnership. The Festival joins the Smithsonian Latino Center and Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music to present a small sampler of Chicago's Latino cultural heritage. More than a million Latinos—largely from Mexico, but also from Puerto Rico and just about every nation in Latin America—have made the Chicago area their home. Less known nationally than the Latino communities of California, Texas, Florida, and New York, the Chicago community has a storied past and a dynamic present. Institutions such as the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, the Mexican community's Fiesta del Sol and the Puerto Rican People's Parade, dozens of community-based dance groups, and myriad shops, clubs, and restaurants indicate the growth and vitality of the community. Music is both a measure and symbol of that vitality. On the Mall, visitors will join in Mexican folk and contemporary dances, hear the beat of Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena*, and enjoy Andean music and song. Through the Festival's live performances, as well as through its related Grammy nominated Smithsonian Folkways

series of Latino recordings, the Smithsonian helps provide a means for Americans to understand each other, to speak, listen, and be heard—ever more important in uniting our diverse, complex nation.

Finally, the Been in the Storm So Long concert series at the Festival represents an important collaboration between the Festival and the new National Museum of African American History and Culture. The Festival itself grows in part from events on the Mall during the Civil Rights Movement, and thousands of leading figures of African American culture have graced its stages and illustrated their traditions through its programs over the past four decades. It is fitting that the Smithsonian Regents chose an area of the Mall nicknamed "old Folklife" (so called because Festivals took place there from 1977-81) as the site for the new museum. To initiate the partnership, the Museum and the Festival feature musicians from New Orleans: folks who were hit with the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but nonetheless strive, with determination and grace, to continue the cultural traditions that give their communities their unique character and uplifting spirit so admired and appreciated around the world. Concerts will feature New Orleans jazz, rhythm & blues, and sacred music. It's a great beginning for a partnership that will yield future Festival programs, a series of Smithsonian Folkways recordings, websites, and many other programs.

The Festival thrives on partnerships and collaborations, programmatically with the featured artists, logistically with like-minded organizations, fiscally with supportive sponsors, practically with the National Park Service, and most significantly, with you the visiting public. The Festival is at heart a large, grand, wonderful, and complex cultural expression of a participatory democracy. Thank you for coming, and enjoy all the Festival has to offer.