

TRADITION AND CHANGE by Daniel E. Sheehy

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“If traditional music does not change, it’s not traditional, because it needs to stay part of the life of its community.” These words, spoken by longtime New Mexico musician Roberto Martínez, sum up the challenges faced by individuals, institutions, and societies seeking to keep their past relevant to their future.

The twentieth century saw an unprecedented, worldwide acceleration of social change. Often, such rapid evolution outpaced time-honored values and practices, eroding their currency. In many cases, a tsunami of unchecked global intrusion via commerce and the media provoked this change, overwhelming cultural self-determination and displacing the local with the foreign. In a time-span as short as a single generation, entire languages, musical traditions, and other expressive cultural systems were abandoned in favor of cultural trappings invented by others.

But the 43rd annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival tells another version of this story. It invites us to explore the process of cultural evolution from the other side of the equation. And it encourages us to experience the creativity, resilience, and fortitude of people, institutions, and cultures that follow their own path amid a torrent of contrarian voices.

Wales Smithsonian Cymru provides a forum for discovering how the Welsh people successfully integrate both the tradition and the change that are part of their cultural heritage. On the one hand, about one-fifth of the country’s three million inhabitants speak Welsh, one of the most ancient languages in the world. (Cymru is the Welsh word for Wales.) And the people of Wales still work to preserve the rustic rural landscapes that have long informed their sense of self. On the other hand, the Welsh can lay claim to the

nineteenth-century mantle of being “the first industrialized nation.” They take pride in their ongoing innovative spirit, exemplified by the efforts of St. Davids in West Wales to become the first zero-carbon city in the world.

How have the Welsh managed to navigate the turbulent waters of continuity and change to shepherd an economically and culturally sustainable society into the future? The Festival offers you the chance to find out firsthand from this “living exhibition” of Welsh heritage.

Giving Voice: The Power of Words in African American Culture presents living testimony to the resilience and imagination of a people. Out of three centuries of subjugation came a distinctive and separate Black world, a source of refuge and endurance in the face of cruel and wrenching societal decimation. Tapping the power and the play of African American oral traditions and verbal arts, the program “gives voice” to this poignant, powerful, and quintessentially American story of cultural transcendence.

In partnership with the National Museum of African American History and Culture, *Giving Voice* leads us into the realm of African American cultural creation via verbal expression, exploring it as both a means of social resistance and a major contributor to contemporary American life. Listen and be moved by compelling stories about the history, struggles, and creativity of African Americans, told through six tracks of programming: storytelling, oral poetry, interpretive drama, children’s and youth culture, humor, and radio.

Las Américas: Un mundo musical/The Americas: A Musical World shows us how the seemingly monolithic term *música latina* refers in reality to an inviting rainbow of musical sounds, styles, and traditions. The program also supplies vivid proof that music can amount to much more than

just music. Each tradition represented in *Las Américas* is a musical flag of identity, a beacon that unites cultural communities, and a means of cultural self-actualization.

This Festival program, the result of eight years of research and documentation, is the fourth and final in a series dedicated to exploring Latino music as a window into the cultures that give it meaning. The overarching project, entitled *Nuestra Música: Music in Latino Culture*, began with the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings series *Tradiciones/Traditions*. The series has produced thirty recordings that to date have earned eight GRAMMY nominations, one GRAMMY, and one Latin GRAMMY. Additionally, it includes *Música del Pueblo: A Smithsonian Virtual Exhibition* (musicadelpueblo.org), featuring dozens of video mini-documentaries of grassroots Latino musicians from the United States, Puerto Rico, and several Latin American countries.

A time of change has also come to the Festival itself, to the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage that organizes it, and to the Smithsonian Institution at large. After twenty-five years of leading the Festival, its director, Diana Parker, will retire this year. Her contributions to shaping the Festival are legion, and she leaves a wide wake of cultural ripples around the world. We tip our hats to her as we look for a capable successor to pick up where she leaves off.

Richard Kurin, director of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage since 1988, this year became the Smithsonian's Under Secretary for History, Art, and Culture. His underlying philosophy, intellectual grit, and hard work will continue to bolster the Festival and the Center for years to come. In the meantime, the search for a new Center director has begun.

As Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough completes the first year of his tenure during this year's Festival, his fresh ideas for increasing the public value of the national museum and taking it far beyond the walls of its buildings are beginning to be felt. In 1967, the Folklife Festival broke ground in establishing the notion of a living cultural exhibition outside museum walls, and in encouraging interaction between museum visitors and the people who put their culture on display. Now the Smithsonian seeks to extend its reach even further, harnessing the power of the Internet and institutional alliances.

In this time of change, we look both inward and outward for new ways to accomplish the Smithsonian's mission of promoting the increase and diffusion of knowledge, as well as the Center's goal of promoting the understanding and continuity of diverse, contemporary grassroots cultures in the United States and around the world. As we move forward, we count on the cultures represented at the Festival as sources of inspiration, and on you, our supporters and partners in the Festival experience, for direction.

We invite you to visit our new Web site, www.festival.si.edu. It marks our latest effort to extend the reach of the Festival, to increase our interactions with the people we serve, and to sustain and enhance our own relevance to the world around us. We welcome your help in guiding us along our path to the future by sharing with us your thoughts, opinions, and ideas.