

Celebrating Free Expression

Michael Atwood Mason

Director, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

Summer in Washington, D.C., would not be complete without its great civic rituals—the Fourth of July concert at the foot of Capitol Hill, the fireworks by the Washington Monument, and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. A remarkable celebration of the freedom of expression—sharing and seeking ideas and information—the Festival brings you face-to-face with hundreds of tradition bearers from around the world to explore their cultures and histories on the National Mall of the United States. The inherent give-and-take of the Festival creates relationships between people that in turn foster new understandings and new aspirations for communities large and small. I grew up in D.C., and I remember visiting the 1976 Bicentennial Festival with my family and meeting a kayak maker from Alaska. I confess I don't remember anything about his boat. Instead, what left a lasting impression on me was how he complained about the heat and described taking cold showers every day to cool off after his long hours on the Mall. I gained a whole new appreciation for the dog days of D.C. summer through a conversation with someone who was struggling to adapt to a climate that was uncomfortably different from the one to which he was accustomed.

The Festival can only happen through collaboration with experts and supporters from around the world. The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage forms partnerships with people and organizations who share our commitment to cross-cultural communication and understanding. Together, we research the vital traditions of the communities we highlight, and imagine and prepare presentations for the public. For this year's *Hungarian Heritage: Roots to Revival* program, we partnered with the Balassi Institute in Budapest, and especially its Hungarian Cultural Center in New York, to create a compelling presentation that highlights the dynamism and diversity of traditional culture in Hungary today. For the *One World, Many Voices: Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritage* program, we collaborated with UNESCO, the National Geographic Society's Enduring Voices Project, and the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages to focus attention on the thousands of endangered languages in the world today and to demonstrate the important role that language documentation and revitalization play in sustaining cultural heritage and tradition. For the *Will to Adorn: African American Diversity, Style, and Identity* program, we engaged artists, organizations, researchers, and scholars from around the country, including a remarkable

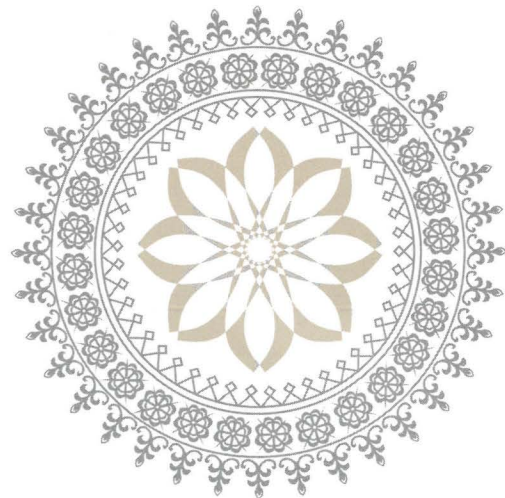
“The traditions presented and stories told at the Festival often spark new curiosity in visitors and participants alike.”

group of educators and youth from Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center in the Bronx, as well as with our Smithsonian colleagues at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, to explore the diversity of African American identity and communities through dress and adornment. At this year's Festival, you can meet, talk with, and learn from the many exceptional people who are working to sustain the world's diverse living cultures.

The traditions presented and stories told at the Festival often spark new curiosity in visitors and participants alike. The public can continue to explore these through our Web site. And over the past few years, we have been thrilled to get a glimpse of the Festival through the camera lenses of visitors who daily share their photos and reflections on the Festival Flickr page. Ultimately, we hope that the Festival serves as a catalyst for ongoing exploration, dialogue, and learning.

After you have left the Mall and you remember your Festival visit, I hope you find yourself reflecting on the people and traditions you encountered who remind you of your own culture and history—and on those who surprised you the most. We would love to hear from

you and gather your stories to add to ours. As a civic ritual in its 47th year, the Festival commemorates the expression of our common humanity and our cultural diversity, as part of the nation and the global community.



Find us at www.festival.si.edu. Follow us and share your stories on the Smithsonian Folklife Festival's Facebook page, by joining our Flickr group, or through Twitter [@SmithsonianFolk](https://twitter.com/SmithsonianFolk), [#2013Folklife](https://twitter.com/SmithsonianFolk).