

fried fish, packed coolers, and showed old fishing films. Storytelling, formal and informal, was pervasive. More people attended this exhibition than any other in the history of the school. *CNN*, *USA Today*, and *Field and Stream* did stories, and the university won an award for publicity.

I thought the overwhelming public response to the exhibition would vindicate our efforts. Our belief that folk aesthetics are valuable and important and could successfully exist in an art gallery frame of reference seemed self-evident. However, several art faculty members boycotted the exhibition and, with its success, became angrier than ever. Others recognized the exhibition's popularity but suggested that it should have taken place in the Popular Culture Department and not in the School of Art Gallery.

Doug Blandy and I both left Bowling Green State University that summer. Since that time I have had other, perhaps less difficult, battles over folk aesthetics and how and why they should be made visible. The "fishing show" made clear to me how important it is to many members of the Art World that art remain hierarchical. I currently do folklore fieldwork in a different university art department, where aesthetic hierarchies are still intact. But I now recognize the extreme battles that can take place when folk meets fine art.

The Up-Side of Folklife Festivals: Why We Keep Doing Them

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Despite my current disillusionment with folklife festivals, I realize that some of my most memorable and satisfactory experiences as a public folklorist have come during these maligned but seemingly indestructible events. All public folklorists have stories of priceless moments. Here are a few of mine.

At a recent festival we co-sponsored in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Iranian community really turned out and its members made themselves at home throughout the event. Whole families attended. They sponsored a food booth and spent all day barbecuing kabobs in the ninety-degree heat. They set up three tables filled with traditional crafts around a painter who was demonstrating as a boom box played traditional music in the background. When a family musical group stepped up to sing and play the drum and fiddle near the end of the day, community members jumped up and began dancing in front of the stage, shouting requests, clapping and cheering one another on. It was not just a performance for outsiders; it was a community event. For me, it was the highlight of the festival.

One of my favorite festival memories comes from "Tucson, Meet Yourself." The final event on the main stage was a *waila* band playing for a dance. As the Tohono O'odham Indians played polka music on accordions and saxophones, a captivating and unique phenomenon in itself, a couple in full Scottish kilts launched into an enthusiastic polka right in front of the stage. It was a successful mixing of cultures, each group retaining its own voice yet making music together. I still smile at the picture.

Another cross-cultural exchange that is forever embedded in my memory happened at the first "Voices West" concert in Salt Lake City, in the green room of Symphony Hall after a spectacular performance. There were Croatian musicians and dancers from Washington State, a Samoan doo-wop group called The Nature Boys, a Cherokee Baptist choir, and a Tongan choir. The Croatian musicians started playing and everyone joined in the dancing, eventually forming a circle that squeezed everyone else into the room's corners. I am sure that the thrill of performing in so distinguished a venue had something to do with the enthusiasm of the groups, but the spirit that evening was created primarily by the pure joy of their art as a participatory event.

At another festival in Las Vegas we were having sound checks and rehearsals in the afternoon prior to the event. I was in a lousy mood and sick of festivals. The day was gray and oppressive, and I wanted to be anywhere but there. The last group checking its sound was a Native American drum group, and I was moping around waiting for things to be wrapped up so that I could leave. Suddenly the heartbeat of the drum sounded, strong and centering, and my spirits lifted of their own accord. How could I be so glum with that sound reaching out and pulling me in, the voices chanting from a deep past into the present? Just then a full double rainbow appeared out of the gray sky, and I knew that I would have a fine time at the festival and that all of the work was worth it. The name of the drumming group was Rainbow Shield.

What all of these experiences have in common is that artists and communities have used the space and time of festivals to shape their own creative expression in order to present what makes them unique and human. They make the event their own, and it is a rare treat when these kinds of expressions are made available to an outsider.

Festivals provide unusual opportunities for members of two or more cultural groups, who would otherwise never cross paths, to get together and make music, dance, or share foods. Many of these interactions aren't seen by the audience, but their spirit can't help but pervade the atmosphere as generosity and beauty bring people together. Festivals are for the artists as much as for the audience. But could it be that we folklorists also do the festivals for ourselves?