CHAPTER FOUR

Connecting and Translating

"The folk arts are not excerpted from everyday life for special scrutiny or elevation of taste or intellectual curiosity. On the contrary, what makes folk art different from fine art is precisely that it is based on the aesthetic perception, expression and appreciation of the community adventures of everyday life... folk art flourishes or dies out entirely on its own, according to its meaningfulness to the people who use it."[1]

Barre Toelken, Introduction
Webfooters and Bunchgrassers: Folk Art of the Oregon Country

The majority of folk arts activity in this country occurs as part of community life or as part of other organizational agendas and calendars. At every turn, the folk arts defy attempts at institutionalization on a grand scale. Folk or traditional arts may find expression in the neighborhood ethnic association whose sole purpose is to sponsor one festival every year, a Christmas crafts show organized by a museum, the anniversary performances of black gospel quartets or in the one or two traditional music tours booked annually by a presenter. The uses or functions of traditional arts and culture are numerous and diverse.

Increasingly, a range of organizations throughout the U.S. understand traditional arts and culture as uniquely powerful expressions of cultural identity and as aesthetic systems with their own value. The upsurge of political and cultural activism in the 1960s, the concern about cultural heritage and the establishment of state and federal agencies and programs capable of providing assistance and funding have all contributed to this growth. A strong network of state folk arts programs now exists in over 40 states (*see page 56*). Organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies at the Smithsonian Institution and the National Council for the Traditional Arts (profiled later in this chapter) have played central roles in the development of a nationwide network of organizations involved in the preservation and presentation of folk arts and folk culture.

Established in 1991, The Fund for Folk Culture (FFC), the only publicly-supported foundation devoted exclusively to folk and traditional culture, now offers support for locally-based projects across the country through numerous funding programs. The largest is the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Community Folklife Program which has awarded over 125 grants nationally since 1993. The Fund for Folk Culture's other programs include the California Folk Arts Regranting Program in partnership with The James Irvine Foundation and the Conferences and Gatherings Program supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

At the local level, folk arts programming and services occur in a variety of organizational contexts—from a small number of organizations who identify themselves as folk arts organizations to ethnic associations, community-based arts or social service organizations, cultural centers of color and, increasingly, local arts agencies. Because folk arts are anchored in local communities—"a living heritage linking past and present" to paraphrase one folklorist—many organizations see folk arts as a vehicle for building relationships with communities and as a source for bringing people together to foster intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and understanding. Mississippi Cultural Crossroads is one such organization. Faced with a community torn apart by

The Roan Mountain Hilltoppers, an old-time music group from East Tennessee, were especially popular at the Smithsonian Institution's 1986 Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Robert Cogswell)

racism and racial division, Patty Crosby, its director, found a focus on local culture and traditional expression to be an effective means to rebuild "a sense of community" as well as a strategy for revaluing and revitalizing aspects of African American traditional culture in the area. As numerous cultural centers of color demonstrate in their programs, traditional arts also serve as a powerful means for the preservation of cultural autonomy against the accelerating homogenization of culture.

While few organizations have the inclination to focus exclusively on the presentation or preservation of traditional arts, a small number of private non-profit folk arts organizations have emerged as viable and visible organizations. A handful such as the National Council for the Traditional Arts, the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, or the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina have been in existence for decades, but most have emerged in the past fifteen years. Folk arts organizations, though small in number and diverse in their programming, are notable not only for their commitment to traditional art of communities but also for their methods and approaches to culture. Virtually all are multidisciplinary and engage in multicultural programming, and most engage in some form of fieldwork as a method for discovering or mapping the traditional arts or cultural life of a community.

Common Threads and Common Ground: Mississippi Cultural Crossroads

"You can create such beautiful patterns without looking at nobody's work. This is yours. You can give the quilt to someone, but the joy you get from starting with nothing and making something beautiful is yours..."

Hystercine Rankin
Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads

by Deborah Boykin

At first glance, Market Street in Port Gibson, Mississippi is all business: a few blocks of city and county offices, a hardware store, a small grocery and what was once a small department store. The sign above this building still advertises Red Goose Shoes, but inside, art is the business at hand. String quilts, story quilts and cornshuck hats fill the display windows, offering a crash course in Claiborne County traditional arts. Hanging side by side with the quilts is children's art: self-portraits, quilts with appliqué adapted from their drawings, and copies of *I Ain't Lying*, an oral history magazine produced by young people. This is Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads, an arts organization which works to bring the community together to explore its shared and diverse cultural traditions.[2]

A small town in the southwest part of the state, Port Gibson is the county seat of Claiborne County, situated on Highway 61 between Natchez and Vicksburg. Like many other small southern towns, it was once known primarily for its antebellum houses and its turbulent role in the civil rights movement. A 1960s boycott of white-owned businesses left a divided community where there was little interaction between black and whites. After nearly thirty years, divisions remain, but there are people in Claiborne County who take heart from the knowledge that their community is now better known for its traditional quilters than for its troubled past. This change came about through the work of a determined group of people, some who were born and raised there, some who moved to the county as adults. They shared the belief that the traditional arts were the common thread which ran through the lives of the black and white communities and Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads grew out of this belief.

When David and Patricia Crosby came to Claiborne County in the early 1970s, they were immediately struck by the contrast between the economic poverty and the wealth of traditional arts in the area. In an effort to get to know her neighbors, Patricia took a job as a census worker. She visited family after family, meeting quilters, hearing about decades of farm life, and learning about the community's traditions and history in the process. These were exciting discoveries, but the Crosbys found other aspects of life in Port Gibson troubling. "This was the seventies," recalls James Miller, president of Cultural Crossroads and a county administrator. "It was kind of a transitional period after the civil rights struggles of the sixties. There was no real dialog between the races in this community and it was hard to see how it would get better."

A first step towards community dialog came in 1978 when Patricia Crosby sought funding from the Youthgrants Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities to

Hystercine Rankin (left) and Esther Rogers (far right) demonstrate their quilting skills to elementary school children, Port Gibson, Mississippi. (Photo by Patricia Crosby)

plan a project for young people in the community. She envisioned a program that would bring together young people of both races to explore the commonalities and differences in the "arts, crafts, lore, attitudes, and emotions that characterize the . . . cultures that have shaped the community." An interracial planning committee working to examine community needs and develop a program reached several conclusions. They acknowledged that overcoming racial separation in the county would be a long and difficult process and determined that this process would best be served by the incorporation of Mississippi: Cultural Crossroads as an organization "to help serve the cultural, artistic and educational needs of the people of Claiborne County." Its first priority would be to encourage young people to explore the folklife of the community through media projects that they could execute themselves.

The new organization's first project was folk arts documentation conducted by young people. Working after school, the students talked with their relatives and neighbors, recording their recollections of life in rural Mississippi and photographing quilters, farmers, preachers, teachers and merchants. These interviews made up the first issue of *I Ain't Lyin'*, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. A second grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission supported a residency for a filmmaker to train public school students in film and video techniques.

The success of these projects led to a collaboration that would become one of the most important elements of Cultural Crossroads' programs—a collaboration between the students and several of the area's finest African American quilters. The Mississippi Arts Commission provided funding for four quilters to work with junior high school students, demonstrating quilting techniques and helping the young people to design and produce a quilt. "As this project went on," Patricia Crosby recalls, "it became clear that quilting was a widespread community tradition." Students saw quilting as a creative process in their classes and grew even more enthusiastic when they realized that the quilters who were their relatives and neighbors were equally talented.

This first residency was followed by a quilting demonstration held at the library and funded by the Mississippi Arts Commission's first folk arts apprenticeship program. An exhibit of quilts made by local women and held at the National Guard Armory sparked more community interest. Women who were already quilting were delighted by the opportunity to share their ideas and spend time working together, and others wanted to learn. Hystercine Rankin, a Claiborne County quilter, was one of the women who participated in the first residency and other quilting activities and her talents as a quilter and teacher were quickly recognized. Cultural Crossroads found funding to hire

Auditions for the 14th season of Peanut Butter & Jelly Theater in gallery of Mississippi Cultural Crossroads during "Pieces & Strings" quilt exhibition. (Photo by Patricia Crosby)

Facts About
Claiborne County, Mississippi

County Seat: Port Gibson, population 2,371

County Population: 11,545

Per Capita Income: $5,932 (Ranked 72 out of 82 counties)

Primary Industry: Agriculture and timber

Percentage of families below poverty level: 35.5% (state rate is 20%)

Unemployment Rate: 13.9%

Percentage with high school diplomas: 58.7%

Population with college education: 16.1%

Source: http://www.census.gov/ftp/pub/statab/USACounties 1994/28/021.txt. Table: general profile.

Mrs.Rankin as an instructor, initiating a program that would bring adults into the organization's classes for the first time, starting with nine young women. She has remained a central figure in Cultural Crossroads" quilting programs ever since. "Those first classes were in a little bitty building with no heat," Mrs. Rankin remembered, "But seeing those young mothers around the quilting frame helped keep me warm. I knew they were making quilts for their babies' beds."

That was in 1988. In 1996, Cultural Crossroads has a staff of three and provides a range of services and programs for the residents of Claiborne County. Still, the quilting program is one of Cultural Crossroads' most popular activities, involving both experienced and novice quilters. While several quilters are at the frame in Cultural Crossroads' new building on any given day, their quilts may cover family beds or fill orders from as far away as California or New York. The quilters receive some orders through the mail—repeat customers, people who have learned about them through articles, exhibits, festivals and the like. Participating quilters can work on quilts at home or in the quilting room and can hang their work for sale in the display room next door. Quilters set their own prices when they bring quilts in for sale. Cultural Crossroads adds 20%. In 1995, quilters received $15,300 from consignment payments.

As sales increase, the Crossroads quilters have recognized several issues that they want to consider as a group. Their primary concern is to maintain the consistent high quality for which their work is known. Since the quilters work independently and each woman makes her own design choices, the group is now working to establish standards which ensure consistently well-made, durable quilts without compromising individual artistic choices and cultural aesthetics. Most of the quilters who currently sell their work through the organization find that their work has evolved somewhat as they have been involved with Cultural Crossroads. They want to ensure that other quilters have this opportunity while maintaining high standards for work presented for sale.

Many of the quilters are women who have retired from jobs or whose children have grown and gone. These women relish the time they have to devote to quilting. "I used to watch my mother and grandmother quilt, and all the time I was teaching I thought I'd like to get back to it someday," said Gustina Atlas, a retired teacher who says she now "quilts all the time." She has plenty of company. At a recent quilting session, a half dozen women were working on two quilts and recalling how they got started. "It used to be a community thing," Edna Montgomery remarked. "My mother and her friends would go to each other's houses and work on their quilts. People don't do that

anymore, so I really like being able to come here and work with these ladies."

"Having a place to come together sure makes a difference," observed quilter Geraldine Nash. "All of the quilters who come here like to share. They share their ideas about patterns; they offer advice about putting colors together. It's really interesting to see how people can take the same patterns and express their individuality." The program also gives beginners the chance to learn by working side by side with master quilters.

Mrs. Nash's involvement with Crossroads quilting began when she was hired to baby-sit for women who attended Mrs. Rankin's class. "Nobody brought children with them," she said with a smile, "so I just sat down and started quilting with all the rest of them." Eight years later, Mrs. Nash works full-time as a quilting teacher for Cultural Crossroads. She has been instrumental in collaborations between the quilters and the children in the after-school arts program.

Since there are no visual arts programs in Claiborne County Schools, Cultural Crossroads brings students in each afternoon for arts activities. Patricia Crosby explained how the students began working with the quilters, "Students would come in and see the quilters at work and they'd become very interested in watching the women's' progress. Pretty soon they started asking, 'When can we make a quilt?'" Together, Geraldine Nash and the students designed a quilt based on the children's self-portraits. She transformed each child's picture into a fabric piece and with help from the students, placed them on a top which the "quilting women" quilted.

Many other such quilts have followed. The children and the quilters have collaborated on quilts which illustrate folk tales, recount stories from local history, or present seasonal themes. "It's a place where the quilting women and children can intersect," says Patricia Crosby. The public has the opportunity to enjoy these collaborations when they are shown in *Pieces and Strings*, the organization's annual quilt show and contest. This event features quilts from both African American and European American traditions and has become popular with Mississippi quilters from both traditions. An exhibit of children's art produced in the after school program is held at the same time.

The intergenerational partnership between the children and the quilters embodies one of the principles that guide Cultural Crossroads: Claiborne County traditional arts and oral history inform and influence all of the agency's arts programming. A more recent example, *What It Is, This Freedom*, is a play based on Claiborne county residents' stories and remembrances of local civil rights history. The stories were told and recorded in story swaps sponsored by Cultural Crossroads and playwright Nayo Watkins was com-

The National Endowment for the Arts and the Development of State Folk Arts Programs

In 1978, the Folk Arts Program (now incorporated in the Heritage and Preservation Division and once part of Special Projects) was made a separate program at NEA to support the preservation and presentation of traditional arts under the direction of Bess Lomax Hawes. It is no understatement to say that the Folk Arts Program and Ms. Hawes literally shaped a nationwide field of folk arts programs and organizations. From 1978 through 1995, the Program awarded 3,684 grants (total amount of $58,627,671) to organizations in 56 states and special jurisdictions. The Folk Arts Program developed and implemented the Apprenticeship Program model and established the National Heritage Fellowships. It provided initial seed funding for many nascent folk arts organizations. The Program's most far-reaching impact, however, may be its initial emphasis on creating a nationwide infrastructure of folk arts programs in partnership with state arts agencies and other organizations across the country. Through this strategy, the Folk Arts Program

established an effective means for reaching decentralized and diverse constituencies representing many artistic traditions in rural and urban areas throughout the country. In doing so, the Folk Arts Program served as an advocate for professional standards and trained staff with appropriate cultural and artistic expertise. By 1994, there were 46 state folk arts programs established in state arts agencies, other state agencies, state humanities councils, state historical agencies, state environmental agencies and private non-profits.

missioned to write the play. Local residents gave two performances for overflow crowds, enacting memories of plantation life, the Depression, World War II, and the civil rights movement, presenting history as it affected Claiborne County and its people. The performance moved from the Cultural Crossroads building to the street outside and then into the new county administration building, so that scenes depicting voter registration efforts and rallies in support of the black boycott of white-owned Port Gibson businesses were enacted near where the events had taken place. Cultural Crossroads not only sponsored the play, but was instrumental in the development of *No Easy Journey,* a permanent exhibit documenting the community's civil rights history and now displayed in the Matt Ross Administration Building.

The children and quilters of Cultural Crossroads helped ensure that Claiborne County quilts are also a permanent part of the building. When it was under construction, a group of children from the arts program, Geraldine Nash, and artist Brenda Wirth adapted designs from quilts made by three area quilters and executed these in stucco on the side of the building. The names of the quilters and the children are there, too. One child's parent told Patricia Crosby, "I never really felt comfortable going into the old administration building. When I look at this and see those quilt patterns and see my daughter's name up there, I feel like I own a little bit of this one."

Cultural Crossroads president James Miller, a county administrator, says that this sense of belonging is something that the agency tries hard to foster. "What we hope we've done is to offer some common ground in this community. In everything we've done, we try to cultivate interaction. It isn't always easy, but we try to keep it going." Having the Crosbys, who are not from the community, working together with Claiborne County natives helps. "It's a real partnership. We know about the local traditions like quilts and things, but we take them for granted. Local sponsors like the Board of Supervisors and the Board of Education might not have taken it seriously if Patty and Dave hadn't been so excited about it. It takes us all working together to carry it on and plan for the future. We always think about things as they relate to this community and our traditions, though. Our traditions are the glue that hold it all together."

Folk Arts Private Non-Profit Organizations

"We decided that we had no choice but to plunge into the community with a completely unapologetic attitude towards our art, as self-effacing missionaries for that art, seeking to build as many points of connection as we could find."[3]

Bruce Coppock, Executive Director
St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

BY ELIZABETH PETERSON

It may seem odd to begin an article about folk arts private non-profit organizations with a statement by a symphony orchestra director but, in fact, the statement describes accurately much about the attitudes and processes by which most private non-profit folk arts organizations approach the work that they do and the communities and audiences they serve. Most of these organizations are still in their youth—the vast majority were founded well after the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965—and they are still driven by the passions and convictions of their founders (*see page 61*).[4] From their very beginnings, the best of them have plunged and connected with artists and communities at a furious pace. Most of them place emphasis on working with traditional artists and cultural traditions within the context of community life and from the perspective of the local communities themselves. And, depending on their mission and focus, they have gone about this process in different ways.[5]

The Western Folklife Center called upon the assistance of fellow folklorists throughout the West to identify the practitioners of one art form—cowboy poetry—and wound up launching careers and connecting with ranching communities across the West in ways they never dreamed. The Philadelphia Folklore Project is committed to developing concerts, exhibitions and publications in collaboration with communities and traditional artists in their city and, in the past, has provided annual technical assistance workshops and ongoing consultation with other cultural agencies which leverages well over $100,000 annually for grassroots cultural organizations and traditional artists. Founded in 1966 by folk dance enthusiast and cultural activist Martin Koenig, the Balkan Arts Center evolved into the Ethnic Folk Arts Center by 1981. In addition to a year-round schedule of cultural presentations, the Center is now implementing Community Cultural Initiatives, major multi-year projects of cultural documentation and facilitation, technical assistance and collaborative programming with a broad range of communities in the greater New York metropolitan area, including Albanian, Arabic-speaking, Dominican, Asian Indian and West African communities.

Of course, the descriptions above beg the question, what is a folk arts organization? What characteristics if any do they share in common? What are their goals and accomplishments and what obstacles do they face? As this study demonstrates, folk arts private non-profit organizations share a commitment to the preservation and presentation of traditional art and culture of diverse communities with literally thousands of organizations throughout the U.S. They share common cause, encounter occasional conflict and frequently collaborate with grassroots volunteer-run organi-

Dominican carnival gagá dancer Pedro Sosa, a member of Asadifé, captivates school children in a performance produced by the Ethnic Folk Arts Center at Jumel Mansion in Washington Heights, Manhattan, 1995.
(Photo by Tom van Buren/courtesy of Ethnic Folk Arts Center)

What is Fieldwork?

When folklorists, ethnomusicologists or other cultural specialists use the term fieldwork, they are referring to both a perspective and a set of practices. Fieldwork is informed by a perspective which accepts cultural pluralism and diversity as positive values. It is likewise grounded in the premise that artistic traditions are best understood within broad social, cultural and historical contexts and from the point of view of artists, cultural practitioners or community members. In practice, fieldwork has been characterized as "engaged awareness." It requires sharpened skills of listening, interviewing and observation. It is a tool of research or discovery and it can be a means for other ends—to create an enduring record of traditions that would otherwise not be documented, to identify artists or for intergenerational programming, cultural revitalization projects, community planning or cultural needs assessments. When it is done well, as Marcie Reavens of City Lore put it, fieldwork skills are instrumental to knowing "how to get people talking to each other, how to get people telling stories, how to get people to the heart of the matter, and to the values of an issue."

ACCESS

The Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) is a human service organization which assists primarily low-income Arab American families and newly-arrived Arab immigrants in Detroit, and fosters among other Americans a greater understanding of Arab culture. The Cultural Arts Program has always been an important service offered by ACCESS along with all its other social, health, educational, employment, and legal services. The ACCESS Cultural Arts Program maintains a traditional arts exhibit inside the center, presents Arab artists at events, and conducts folk cultural surveys within different Arab communities throughout the city. Through arts and cultural programming, ACCESS seeks to bring together Arabs in the Detroit community—many of whom are from different religions and countries of origin—to participate in workshops with renowned Arab-American artists, enjoy concerts and other cultural events. Current survey work explores Michigan's Syrian, Palestinian, Lebanese, Yemeni and other Arabs who practice embroidery, music, instrument making, calligraphy, henna designs, traditional doll making, jewelry, and foodways.

zations, religious organizations, museums, ethnic specific arts organizations, mutual assistance associations, community activists, fiddle associations, other music societies and performing groups, social service and resettlement agencies, historical societies, presenters, community development agencies, humanities agencies, radio stations, independent film producers and many others.

As a group, folk arts private non-profit organizations display great variation as well: they are multi-disciplinary in the truest sense of the word and frequently conduct programming in varied presentational formats (*see page 61*). Because folk arts organizations work with diverse cultural traditions and communities over time, the relationships they establish with audiences and communities also shift and change. Some, for example, seek to foster intercultural understanding by introducing traditional artists and cultures to a broad public and place a greater emphasis on artistic presentation while others strive to work more closely with particular communities developing programs or services in cooperation *with* communities and *for* communities. Such orientations, of course, are not mutually exclusive. In fact, most folk arts organizations combine both approaches to greater or lesser degrees and many, by virtue of their mission, their training and their perspectives, are particularly skilled at moving "betwixt and between" cultures and communities. But what commonalities do they share?

Based upon the findings of the survey of folk arts organizations conducted for this study (which was limited to organizations with 501(c)(3) status), these organizations usually label themselves as entities primarily involved with folk or traditional culture; devote over 75% of their efforts and time to programs or services emphasizing folk arts, folklife or traditional culture; have at least one professional paid staff member with relevant cultural expertise; and share the following goals and practices:

- **to promote**, present, preserve or serve the folk and traditional arts, heritage, or traditional culture of diverse regional, ethnic, occupational or religious groups.
- **to engage** in (or rely upon) some form of field research to identify traditional artists, cultural practitioners and traditions, and to build collaborative working relationships with specific communities *(see page 59)*.
- **to foster** awareness, understanding and appreciation for the role of traditional art or cultural heritage in daily life through programs, services, publications or advocacy.
- **to provide** information and technical assistance to traditional artists, communities and their organizations.

While folk arts organizations share a commitment to presenting and preserving traditional arts and culture of diverse communities, they also share many organizational

Most Common Ongoing Folk Arts Organizational Activities

Activity	Organizations responding to this category
Presentation or production of performing folk/traditional arts (concerts, tours, etc.)	17
Advocacy Work	17
Photo documentation	16
Newsletter	15
Archival activity/ collection management	15
Technical assistance or services to community groups	15
Presentation or coordination of multicultural or multidisciplinary events/festivals	14
Field research	13

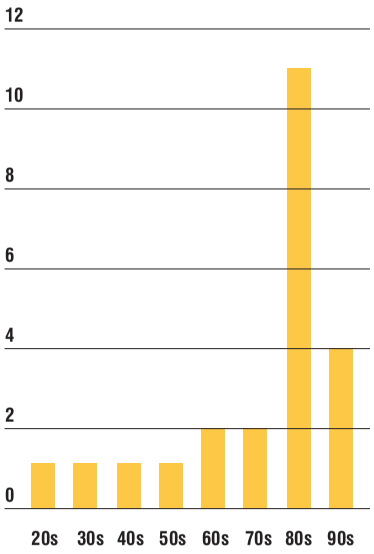
Range of Incomes Reported by Surveyed Organizations

	Number of Organizations (n=23)
Less than $100,000	4
$1000,000-$499,000	8
$500,000-$1,000,000	4
$1,000,000 or more	6
Refused	1
Total	**23**

Income Breakdown by Income Sources

Earned Income	32%
Private Funding	43%
Public Funding	21%
Other Funding	4%

Decades Folk Arts Organizations Founded



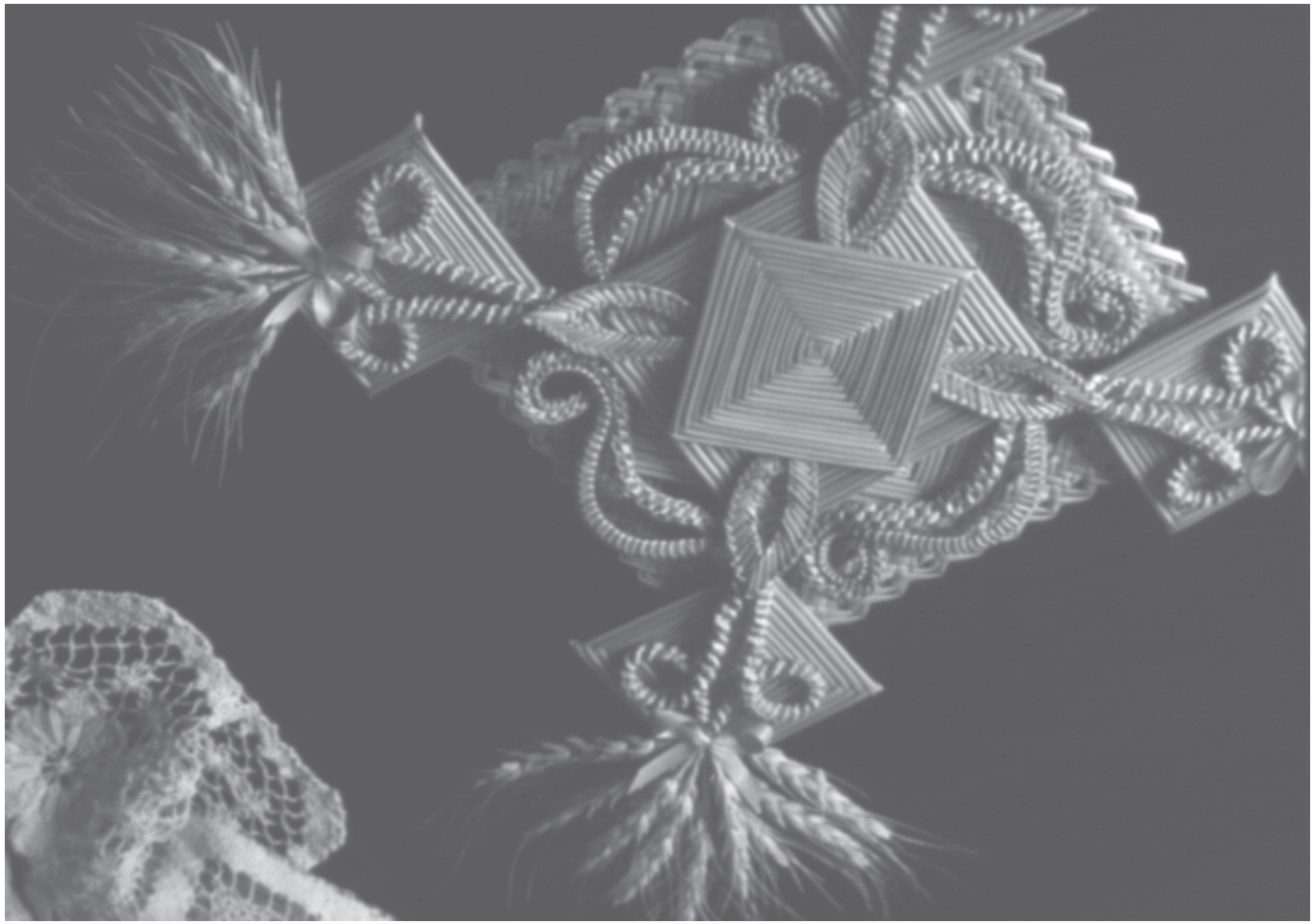
Most of the organizations (65%) were founded in the 1980s or 90s. Very few were established before 1980—about 9% have been in existence since the 1970s, and about 26% have been in existence before 1970. Source: NuStats, Inc., Austin, Texas.

Institute for Cultural Partnerships

Institute for Cultural Partnerships (ICP) was founded in 1995 by Shalom Staub to build positive inter-group relations through innovative, community-based programs that promote understanding of cultural diversity. Both Staub and fellow folklorist Amy Skillman formerly served in the state offices of the Pennsylvania Heritage Affairs Commission where they developed a folk arts program that reached thousands of ethnic organizations representing over one hundred ethnic communities. Through the ICP, Staub and Skillman continue to conserve folk and traditional culture in Pennsylvania through research, documentation, and presentation. They are joined by other professional staff trained in planning, needs assessment, management and conflict resolution, and, as an organization, they offer a unique blend of programs and services which address cultural differences as resources, not barriers. The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts awarded the ICP a contract to administer the state's folk arts funding program, including technical assistance for applicants, and application review. In their capacity as consultants, they also are developing the regional traditional arts program at the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. The ICP mission is to promote awareness and appreciation for cultural heritage of all ethnic communities and to bring down barriers between people by helping them open avenues of inter-group communication. For more information, contact ICP, P.O. Box 5020, Harrisburg, PA 17110, (717) 238-1770.

concerns and obstacles as well. As Tara McCarty, executive director of the Western Folklife Center, aptly commented, "It takes a whole lot more to run an organization than it does a group of people working passionately on a project." While a handful of nascent organizations are still struggling to create paid staff positions and establish themselves as independent entities, most folk arts organizations are in the throes of building lasting, sustainable institutions and facing the stresses that such an enterprise entails. Most operate with staffs of under ten people and with budgets which range from less than $100,000 to over $1,000,000 (*see page 61*). And, like other small to mid-size cultural institutions, institutional survival and funding are overriding concerns.

Based upon the data gathered in the survey and in interviews with several directors of organizations, it is clear that most planning efforts and creative organizational thinking these days are clustered around the problems of diversifying funding sources and developing earned income. While folk arts organizations have always relied on public support in the past, most are exploring new sources of support as they confront the vagaries of public and private funding (*see page 61*). Although the earned income average for all organizations is nearly one third of the total funding average, several with a performing arts emphasis already report earned income exceeding 50%. Others are seeking new forms of support: developing financially equitable partner-



Slovak wheat weaving by Sidonka Wadina Lee, from the exhibit **Passed to the Present: Folk Arts Along Wisconsin's Ethnic Settlement Trail**, organized by the Cedarburg Cultural Center. (Photo by Lewis Koch/courtesy of Cedarburg Cultural Center)

Conversations about Fieldwork

Hal Cannon (Western Folklife Center)

"When we raise money, we try to tell people if they are going to invest in something that is really good, they're not only investing in the outcome, the product. They're investing in the process, our research. They're investing in part of the archivist's salary so there is a lasting record. They're even investing in a cash reserve fund that gives us long term stability. That's a hard pill to swallow for some but we're up front about this. We know what our needs are. We see our work as a long term proposition, every project we do. And we've seen a lot of people come around. Research is the basis of all of our good work."

Patricia Jasper (Texas Folklife Resources)

"The true demands for serving our regions are based on our ability to continue to do fieldwork that feeds significantly into programs but also feeds into a way to communicate with the communities we work with. Fieldwork is a way to continue reconnecting."

Phyllis Brzozowska (Cityfolk)

"It occurs to me that we're talking about two aspects of fieldwork. There's the research and development but there's also audience development and outreach. There's the connections with communities, the partnerships, the building of relationships over time. It's only academically trained folklorists that really use the term fieldwork to mean both… I think this is one of the greatest things the folklore field has to offer the rest of the arts in this country—how to do the community organizing and interactions with communities that arts companies and organizations don't have a clue about."

ships with other organizations, providing consulting and technical services, exploring cultural tourism alternatives, and creating marketable services and products from their field research activities.

At a time when competition for scarce resources is increasing, many folk arts organizations represent a mature and vibrant perspective about cultural differences and common bonds and constitute a valuable community resource. Their voice is one of many speaking in cross rhythms and syncopation about the importance of traditional art and culture in everyday life, the resilience of its presence and the gravity of its loss. But it is an important one. They possess curatorial expertise and a set of facilitation and research skills which enable them to work with diverse communities, identify rich cultural resources among constituencies who often fall through institutional cracks, assist local cultural revitalization efforts and introduce folk artists and traditions to new audiences. Although the long-term impact of their work is very difficult to measure, the range of their accomplishments are best illustrated through the following brief profiles of four organizations. While these four should not be considered as representative of all folk arts organizations, they give an indication of the range, variety and quality of activity and emphasis.

Four Profiles

City Lore, New York City

Director Steve Zeitlin is unabashed in his hopes and dreams for City Lore, which he founded in 1986, when he says, "we want to move people deeply. We want to have an impact on people's lives and try to get people to see the world in a more humanistic way." A decade of steady growth may be one indicator of impact. In ten years, their budget has grown from roughly $100,000 to over a million. A full-time staff of five work in five programmatic areas of emphasis: 1) documentation (field research); 2) advocacy (cultural activism working with and in support of local folk artists and communities); 3) interpretation (special projects, utilizing scholarly expertise); 4) presentation (ongoing programming, activities); and 5) education.

In particular, City Lore takes an active leadership and advocacy role in developing programs, resources and skills which incorporate folk arts and culture fully into the educational curriculum. The City Lore Center for Folk Arts in Education has joined in partnership with the Bank Street College of Education to develop a multicultural resource center for teachers and develop materials for classroom use. In 1996, City Lore launched *Nourishing the Heart: A Guide to Intergenerational Arts Projects in the Schools* and *The Culture Catalog*, a mail order compendium of multi-media resources in oral history, folklore and community studies. The catalog also constitutes City Lore's first entrepreneurial venture to develop unrestricted sources of income.

Many, though not all, of City Lore's other programs and services explore the ways in which individuals and neighborhoods create and maintain affiliation with the cultural landscape of New York City. An early exhibition and accompanying book *City Play*, for example, examined the ways in which children use and adapt their environments for play. The People's Hall of Fame, an annual event started in 1993, honors selected city residents for "the way they live their art and embody tradition within their own communities" (*see chapter 6*). They also co-sponsored a 1996 conference with the Municipal Art Society on endangered community landmarks and establishments which brought together historic preservationists, local artists and residents, folklorists and other community activists to identify needs and examine strategies for preserving community-based sites. And, at the moment, City Lore's most pressing needs include finding a permanent place for themselves to call home—one with enough space for programming and a teacher's resource center.

National Council for the Traditional Arts, Silver Spring, Maryland

Founded in 1933 by Sarah Gertrude Knott, many people consider the National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) to be the granddaddy of folk arts organizations. It is the nation's oldest multicultural producing and presenting organization dedicated solely to the presentation and documentation of folk and traditional arts in the United States and its list of firsts is impressive. NCTA's flagship program, the National Folk Festival, is the oldest multi-cultural folk festival in the country and pioneered many of the presentational techniques used in today's festivals: workshops, crafts demonstrations, multi-cultural presentation, and using scholars as resources for providing contextual information of artistic traditions. Since its beginnings in 1934, the Festival has moved to different sites throughout the country. Today, NCTA employs the strategy of moving the festival every three years and working in partnership with host sites to lay the groundwork for the continuation of a festival by the host community.

Since 1978, under the direction of Joe Wilson, NCTA has also produced numerous national and international tours of folk, ethnic and tribal performing arts. To date, over 20 tours have traveled to 49 states and, under the

A PHOTO FROM THE TOURING EXHIBITION, **DEER CAMP: LAST LIGHT IN THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM**, ORGANIZED BY THE VERMONT FOLKLIFE CENTER. (PHOTO BY JOHN M. MILLER/COURTESY OF VERMONT FOLKLIFE CENTER)

Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Programs for Regional Folklife Centers

From 1991 to 1995, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has invested over $10.1 million in a variety of programs designed to strengthen folk arts organizations, broaden access to exhibitions and performances of folk and traditional arts, and foster community-based folk arts activity. As part of this holistic funding approach, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has awarded multi-year grants to seven regional folk arts centers, enabling them to broaden public programs, engage in long-range organizational planning and development, and build cash reserves or restricted program funds. Recipients include Cityfolk, City Lore, Philadelphia Folklore Project, Northwest Folklife, Texas Folklife Resources, Vermont Folklife Center, and the Western Folklife Center.

auspices of the United States Information Agency, in 31 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Near East, the former Soviet Union and the Caribbean. In touring, they have pioneered various presentational strategies and worked with community-based and mainstream presenters in innovative ways. An earlier tour, *Der Yiddisher Caravan*, presented traditional Yiddish theater, klezmer music, cantorial and folk songs in Jewish community centers and Hebrew homes for the aging throughout the country. *California Generations*, a specially-commissioned tour by California Presenters, presented the performing traditions of native, immigrant and ethnic groups who call California home.

Unlike most other folk arts organizations, the National Council for the Traditional Arts works most frequently and effectively at the national level, serving broad constituencies throughout the country. In addition to their ongoing touring and festival efforts, NCTA has worked with the National Park Service in cultural planning and programming for new parks and has provided technical and production services to other state and federal agencies including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Smithsonian Institution and the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

Texas Folklife Resources, Austin, Texas

When Pat Jasper started Texas Folklife Resources (TFR) in 1985, she and two other folklorists operated the organization from a desk in her house. Over ten years later, there is a full time staff of five, a devoted group of volunteers, a thirteen member board, and an annual budget near $400,000. As the name implies, TFR primarily serves a statewide constituency and is "dedicated to the preservation and presentation of Texas folklife and folk arts." They do so in four programmatic areas: 1) public programs (exhibitions, concerts, workshops, etc.); 2) technical assistance and advocacy (working with artists and community-based groups); 3) documentation and preservation; and 4) multi-media and publications.

While Texas Folklife Resources has assisted artists and communities throughout Texas in all four programmatic areas, the organization has focused in recent years on developing mechanisms and relationships to distribute programs and services more effectively to communities throughout the state. Developing programs in many presentational formats is one means for documenting particular traditions in depth and introducing artists and traditions to new audiences and contexts. *Accordion Kings*, for instance, was a multi-year research project examining the cross-cultural

Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción

Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA) was established in 1968 through the grassroots efforts of the largely Puerto Rican community of Boston's South End. Today, IBA's Villa Victoria houses more than 3,000 low and moderate income residents and is one of the country's most successful community development models. One key to IBA's success is its holistic approach to the services it provides to residents. In addition to economic and social services, IBA offers an array of cultural programs through the the Arte y Cultura Department, promoting Puerto Rican and Latino arts and culture through school programs and video production and arts instruction for youth. IBA also hosts cultural events at their Jorge Hernández Cultural Center, which reach over 40,000 people annually. The Cafe Teatro series at the Cultural Center brings theatre, dance, and traditional and popular music to IBA residents and thousands of their Boston neighbors. Puerto Rican bomba, plena, and jíbaro, Cuban rumba and ritual drumming, Latin jazz, dance and theatre, are mainstays of the popular series. In recent years, IBA joined with other Latino cultural organizations in the Northeast to form La Ruta Panorámica, a Latin American presenting consortium which enables members to share resources and develop collaborative programming in a timely, cost effective manner.

influences and blending of four distinct musical traditions (polka, conjunto, cajun and zydeco) native to Texas. Documentation efforts ultimately resulted in a Houston concert, an Austin concert and symposium (including artists, scholars, recording industry personnel and journalists), a radio series for NPR broadcast nationwide, and a statewide touring program.

Touring performing arts programs and exhibitions has proved to be another area which has enabled them to reach broader audiences and develop an earned income base. Touring Traditions, begun in 1992 as a cooperative venture between TFR and the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA), is a folk arts component to the TCA Touring Arts Roster. TFR produces thematic folk arts tours, provides assistance to artists and presenters, and TCA provides subsidies to presenters. In particular, TFR is building on the success of the 1994 *Canciones y Corridos* tour which offered extensive technical assistance to community-based presenters in South Texas and, in effect, created a loose-knit presenting network for future programs. Building on this success, they are developing an exhibition *La Tradicion Tejana—Focus on Tejano Traditions* to tour these communities and, in the future they intend to link their educational programs in the Rio Grande Valley more closely with touring programs.

Vermont Folklife Center, Middlebury, Vermont

Like Texas Folklife Resources, the Vermont Folklife Center serves a statewide constituency. Based upon recommendations from the Governor's Conference on the Arts, folklorist Jane Beck left a position as folk arts coordinator at the Vermont Council on the Arts in 1982 to found the Center. Since 1988, the Center has resided at the Gamaliel Painter House, an historic site which has enough space for on-site exhibitions, small-scale programs as well as an archive. In 1996, there is a staff of five and a budget approaching $400,000. In recognition of their role in the conservation of Vermont's cultural heritage, the Center was awarded the Citation for Arts Merit from the Vermont Council for the Arts in 1995.

From its very beginning, the Vermont Folklife Center has concentrated much of its programming around the spoken word, the oral interview and oral history. Its dominant focus is the people, the landscape, and the traditions rooted in Vermont's rural communities. Jane Beck herself credits the recognition the Center received for its first video *On My Own* (and subsequent Peabody award-winning radio series *Journey's End*) about the life and times of Daisy Turner, an African American native of Vermont born in the late nineteenth century, as critical to establishing the Center's viability early on. Since that time, the Center has continued to make available their recorded histories and narratives in a variety of accessible formats. *Voices from Vermont*, a weekly radio series for Vermont Public Radio, uses narrative and anecdote to examine various issues and topics about Vermont's rural life. They have developed several manuals and resource guides utilizing their research for teachers, educators and the general public. They also hold periodic workshops and conferences for teachers throughout Vermont regarding aspects of local culture and history.

In addition, the Center has an ongoing exhibition series, most of which are developed by Center staff. One such exhibition, *The Warmth of Words: Wisdom and Delight through Storytelling*, was a sound installation featuring selections from the Center's sound archive. Occasional exhibitions such as the 1993 *Deer Camp: Last Light in the Northeast Kingdom* tour nationally. More recently, however, they have begun identifying and working cooperatively with a loose-knit network of small museums and folk arts agencies throughout New England and upstate New York to develop small, low-security exhibitions suitable for travel to community-based venues throughout the region.