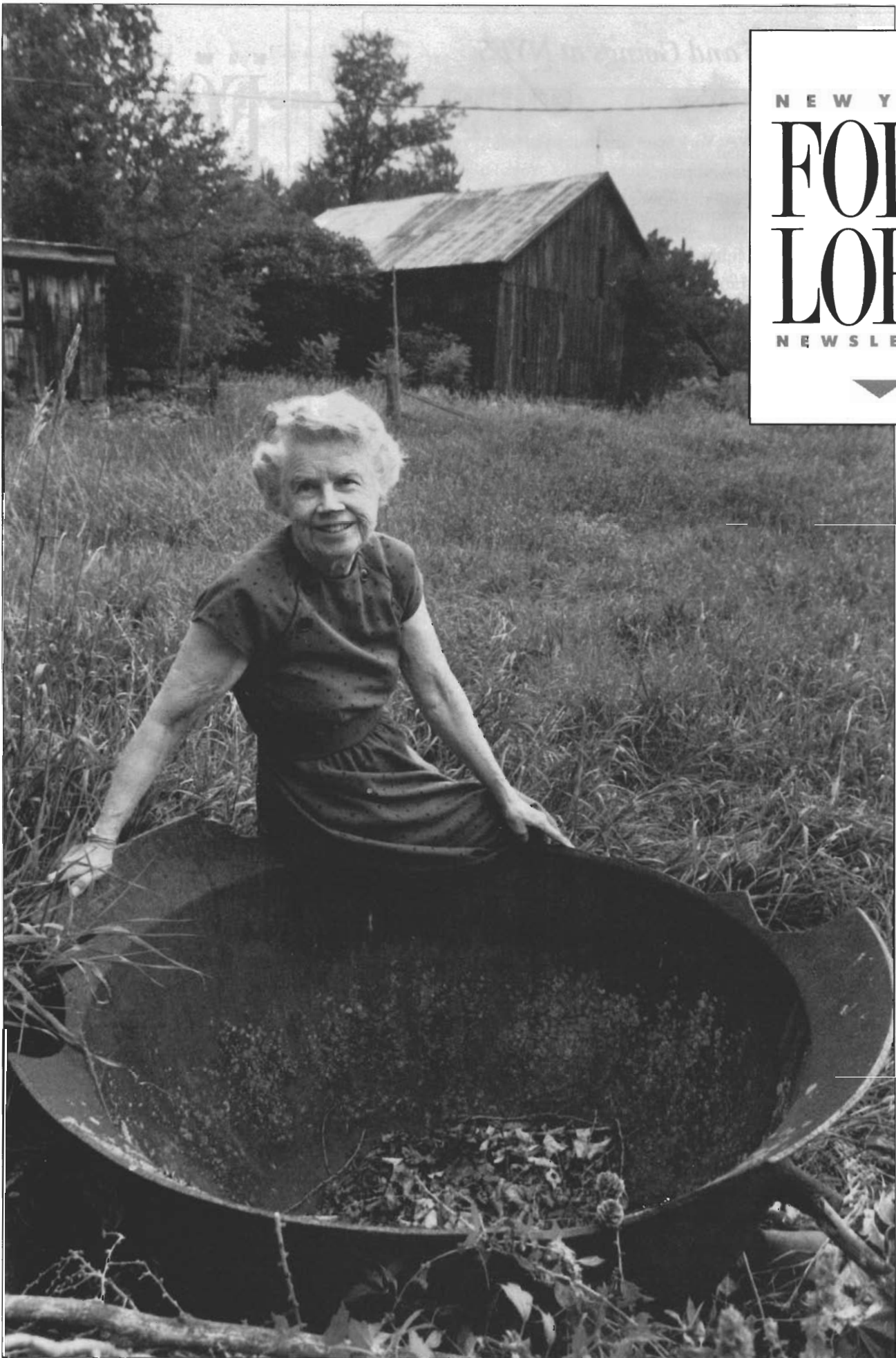


NEW YORK  
**FOLK  
LORE**  
NEWSLETTER



*Fall 1996*  
*Vol 17 No 3*

## *Comings and Goings at NYFS*

**T**he baby boomlet in the New York State community of folklore professionals (see the page 3 margin) is being felt at the New York Folklore Society. Our program director and newsletter editor Karen Taussig-Lux has moved to Media, Pennsylvania, babe in arms. She will continue to edit the newsletter and work on the Archives Project, but most of her other responsibilities have been assumed by our new administrative director Deborah Clover. Deb comes to us with a degree in folklore from the Empire State College, many years experience in community organizing and working with communities to design and build playgrounds and other projects, and lots of skills, energy, and enthusiasm.

With the heightened activity in our small office, we've added another phone line and have a new fax number: (607) 273-3620. Please make a note of it.

## *MAFA Takes a Sauna*

**T**he Middle Atlantic Folklife Association will hold its annual meeting on May 2-4, 1997, in the Ithaca area, home of the New York Folklore Society. Focusing on folk and vernacular architecture and the Finnish community, the meeting will include a Friday evening reception, sessions on vernacular architecture and Finnish culture, a tour of several saunas in the area (yes, we expect to experience not just visit the saunas), a Finnish dinner, and traditional Finnish music in the evening. Save the dates.

## *In Memoriam – Diane Ghisone*

**W**e were deeply saddened to learn recently that our friend and wonderful colleague Diane Ghisone had died this summer after a year-long bout with cancer. Diane was a graphic artist with a deep affection and respect for traditional arts and culture. She was a wise and inventive designer, and she believed strongly that folk culture should be presented so as to highlight its importance and dignity and avoid resonating with its stereotypes. In 1990 she redesigned this newsletter, then guided us patiently as we learned the design and how to apply it to the content of each new issue. For twenty years, Diane did most of the graphic work for the Ethnic Folk Arts Center. I knew her there first and was continually inspired by her creativity, her spirited sense of humor, her remarkable diplomacy, and her love of life. She touched many in our field as a friend and has left us all a splendid legacy of images. Diane's untimely passing is the more tragic for she leaves behind her husband Erich Blohm and their recently adopted daughter Addie Kai Lin. We offer them our heart-felt condolences.

John Suter

# NEW YORK FOLK LORE NEWSLETTER

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The New York Folklore Society Newsletter is published quarterly and provides information and services to individuals and organizations involved with folk arts.

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# A Lullaby from Edith Cutting

Edith Cutting has collected folklore in New York State since the 1930s. A student of Harold Thompson at the New York State College for Teachers (now SUNY-Albany), Edith followed a dual career of English teacher and author, publishing *The Lore of an Adirondack County* and *Whistling Girls and Jumping Sheep*, as well as a number of journal articles. Edith was active in the New York Folklore Society for many years and has witnessed the growth of the field. She is profiled in the most recent issue of *New York Folklore*. Recently we received the following letter, song text, and transcription from her:



Photo by Martha Cooper

Dear Mr. Suter,

Enclosed is a copy of a song my mother and grandmother used to sing to us as children. Because I have not seen it elsewhere in print, I would like to make sure it is not lost.

My grandmother's maternal grandparents came from England. The wording [of the song] also would indicate that origin (*tea* instead of *supper*, for instance).

I am sure of the wording, but unfortunately, music is not "my thing." I am quite sure the notes are right, but I'm not at ease with timing. It may just have been the individual singer's style, but I think some words, particularly at the beginning or end of a line were given more time. I have simply drawn in all notes as quarter notes, with a hold on a few. Otherwise, words were given even time, and there were no sharps or flats. The verses were sung without any musical accompaniment as a lullaby, but perhaps someone you know could try them with a fiddle or guitar to get the feel...

## Grandpapa

Last night when I was snug in bed,  
Such fun it was for me:  
I dreamed that I was Grandpapa,  
And Grandpapa was me.

And Grandpapa was me,  
And Grandpapa was me;  
I dreamed that I was Grandpapa  
And Grandpapa was me.

I dreamed I wore a powdered wig,  
Drab pants and gaiters buff,  
And took without a single sneeze a  
double pinch of snuff.

A double pinch of snuff,  
A double pinch of snuff,  
And took without a single sneeze  
A double pinch of snuff

And I went walking down the street,  
And he ran by my side.  
Because I walked too fast for him,  
The little fellow cried.

The little fellow cried,  
The little fellow cried;  
Because I walked too fast for  
him,  
The little fellow cried.

And after tea I washed his face,  
And when his prayers were said,  
I blew the candle out and left  
Poor Grandpapa in bed.

Poor Grandpapa in bed,  
Poor Grandpapa in bed;  
I blew the candle out and left  
Poor Grandpapa in bed.

Babies!  
Babies!  
Babies!



Ava Zwolinski

Rumor has it that the current generation of New York State folklorists have been very busy lately producing the next generation. Todd DeGarmo seems to have inspired a number of other folklorists with the birth of his daughter, Hannah, last summer. Now Hugh David Taussig-Lux and Ava Beatrice Zwolinski have recently made their appearances this summer. At least three (count 'em three) others are due before next summer. Edith's lullaby could not have come at a better time!



Hugh Taussig-Lux

Last night when I was snug in bed, Such fun it was for me: I dreamed  
that I was Grand-pa-pa and Grand pa pa was me. And Grand pa pa was  
me, And Grand pa pa was me; I dreamed that I was Grand pa pa, And  
Grand pa pa was me.

"Grandpapa" was sung to Edith Cutting and her brothers and sisters when they were children in Elizabethtown, NY, in the early 1920s by their mother, Mrs. Leon Cutting, and grandmother, Mrs. Theodore White (Amy White Cutting and Flora Bliss White).

# Fifty Pound Ice Cubes Cool Trainers: A Report on a Successful Mentorship

Phil Whitney

In early February of this year a group of hardy museum interpreters from New York State and Massachusetts took advantage of the New York Folklore Society's Mentoring Project and attended a one-day training session on historical ice harvesting at the Hanford Mills Museum in East Meredith, NY. Through the effort of the Museum Director, Jane Shepherd, I was invited to orient the group in the whys and wherefores of running an ice harvest at their museum. My trainees learned why, with the multitude of complications from the weather, the specialized equipment required, and the extensive research involved, many museums do not attempt to do an ice harvesting program.

The participants received detailed instructions on safety concerns, pre-planning, preparation over the entire winter of the pond from which the ice is drawn, how to care for the ice saw, and how to use the minimal tools and equipment needed to carry on the program. During a fine hot lunch supplied by the Museum, we viewed the Northeast Historic Film's video called "Ice Harvesting Sampler." The video, (which I narrated for the NHF) features historic footage of actual ice harvests and helped the group to visualize the procedures they were to attempt. The group then gathered at Hanford Mills' pond, and each member had the opportunity to try their hand at all aspects of the ice harvesting process, from cutting a cake of ice to floating it down the channel to using a tripod and jib-arm to remove their cake of ice. They used equipment from both my and the Museum's collection. We ended with a final discussion which focused on the use of horses and the use of gasoline-powered equipment that is on display at the Museum.

The following day I gave a pub-

lic presentation of ice harvesting that drew 300 people, thrilled to have the opportunity to watch and help out. The local draft horse club provided horses to draw the ice to the ice house on bobsleds.

I have been cutting ice for museums and historical societies for a number of years, have researched the industry and its techniques and have an extensive library on the subject. Through my connection with the National Ice Harvesters Club I have been able to collect tremendous documentation on the practice.

Dernell, and Bødenstein companies were also major producers of ice equipment in that area.

Barges plied the Hudson River to bring ice from the Rockland Lake area to the city. Brick makers from that area who were laid off for the winter found this an excellent source of income. Most rural dairy farms stocked their own ice houses with ice cut on their farm ponds to chill the cream until the milk train could pick it up in the morning. It took one and a half tons of ice per milking head to take care of their needs.

Hanford Mills Museum has conducted an ice harvest for school children and the public for a number of years, attempting to keep this as historically correct as possible. Caroline Demarrais, a Hanford Mills staff member, has researched this and written a pa-



**Phil Whitney, center, instructs a hands-on Ice Harvest Folklore Workshop at Hanford Mills Museum.**

New York State's long heritage with the ice industry has been documented in articles and books. The vicinity of Hudson, NY became a headquarters for the manufacture of ice tools and elevating equipment after fire destroyed the Arlington, MA-based Wm. T. Wood Co. in 1905. Wm. T. Wood combined with Gifford Bros. of Hudson to form the major manufacturer of the trade, Gifford-Wood Co. The Staatsburg,

per on how to properly store ice within their small icehouse. My hope is that some of these people who were introduced to ice harvesting through the mentorship and demonstration will convince their museums to start staging at least a small ice harvest so that more and more people will understand the procedures and logic of this magnificent trade.

*Phil Whitney resides in Fitchburg, MA and may be contacted to demonstrate or train museum staff in a number of other historic rural traditional skills besides ice harvesting.*

# Science As A Well Worn Coat

Steve Zeitlin

**H**ow do you wear the universe? Does it drape across your shoulders loose or snug? Does it need some alterations? Is it a rag or *schmatte* thrown across your shoulder? Or are you life resplendent in that intergalactic diamond cloak? I playfully jotted down these lines, inspired by the new popular cosmologists—scientists like Stephen Hawking and Michio Kaku, who use homespun metaphors to make the mysteries of the universe as comfortable as a well-worn coat.

In his book *Hyperspace*, Japanese American Michio Kaku discusses how cosmologists have replaced “‘faith’ in an all-powerful God with ‘faith’ in quantum theory and general relativity.” But unlike the ancient Greeks and Babylonians who used tales and myths to bring their religion to the people, the new cosmologists use the homespun metaphor to give the gods of mathematics a human face. In this new literature, a beam of light—almost impossible to catch because time slows down as you approach it—becomes a ghost ship, “the Flying Dutchman” that old sailors love to spin tall tales about. Time is described as “Old Man River,” meandering around the stars at different speeds.

A while ago in New York, cosmologist Claudio Velez led a wonderful series of seminars on the cosmos. He explained how cosmologists see the world of science as a kind of cosmic cone. At the bottom of the cone is cosmology, the most basic of sciences, asking questions of how the universe began. Moving up the cone is chemistry, asking how particles began joining together; moving up the cone still further was biology—asking questions about how life, especially human life, emerged and developed. Finally above that were sociology and the social sciences.

As we were leaving the talk, a friend asked me, “Steve, where do the kinds of things you study—folklore, storytelling, and folk poetry—fit into that?” I answered that those fields are at the very top of the cone, just where the ice cream touches the tongue! But the two are not necessarily so far apart. Cosmologists often draw on folk metaphor and traditional imagery to help us fathom ideas that exist primarily as mathematical theories. We can still suck some of the ice cream from the bottom of the cone.

In *A Brief History of Time*, Errol Morris’ film about Stephen Hawking, cosmologist James Wheelan explains how a black hole can be visible in the darkness of space. “Have you ever been to a ball? Have you ever watched the young men dressed in their evening tuxedos, and girls in their white dresses whirling around, held in each other’s arms? [With] the lights turned low, all you can see is the girl. Well, [she] is the ordinary star and the boy is the black hole. You can’t see the black any more than you can see the boy. But the girl going around gives you convincing evidence that there must be something holding her in orbit.”

Michio Kaku tells a story of visiting the famous Japanese Tea Garden as a boy in San Francisco. He recalls being mesmerized by the brilliantly colored carp swimming slowly in a pond beneath the water lilies. With his face just inches from the water, he was separated from them by the thin barrier of the water’s surface. Yet the fish would scoff at any notion that a parallel universe could exist just above the surface—just as we might dismiss the notion of a fourth, fifth, or even tenth dimension. When it rains in our world, the carp feel the tumult beneath the surface—yet, a “carp scientist” might picture it not as rain, but as a mysterious force in his aquatic universe. Kaku’s homespun metaphor conveys the notion that light can be explained as a vibration in another dimension, appearing in our world as light.

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# History Happened Here

*City Lore Conference on Preservation*

**History Happened Here: Preserving the Historical and Cultural Narratives of the City.** Co-sponsored by the Municipal Art Society and City Lore, this conference expands the boundaries of historic preservation by examining the plight of “historical and cultural landmarks:” sites important for their associations with events, people, movements, or traditions of the past, or even with ongoing cultural traditions. Expanding the boundaries means a collective effort by preservationists and related disciplines to recognize and understand the significance of these sites.

Recent examples of preservation battles in New York City demonstrate the many questions and controversies over the preservation of historical and cultural sites, and how they should be interpreted. To say “this happened here” is preservation’s most compelling contribution toward a broad understanding of the intangible associational significance of historical and cultural landmarks.

Expanding the boundaries means also recognizing that history happens here, in the continual transformation of places by traditional cultural practices. New York is a city of neighborhoods, in which the vernacular culture of a community can be the dominant shaper of place. The ongoing incorporation of traditions into everyday life creates “living landmarks”—the ethnic social clubs, local markets and eateries, and religious and work-related sites, which contribute to a strong sense of community and sense of place. When these kinds of spaces are endangered—as many are—the people and communities whose traditions give them meaning become endangered as well.

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*(Editor’s note: The inter-connection between folklore, local history and historic preservation is one that New York Folklore Society recognizes as vital to a sense of identity with place and the cultural expressions that help define it. We believe this conference is an important step forward toward communication and collaboration between related disciplines and the people and communities of New York City, New York State and beyond.)*

# Park Jam in Schenectady The Community Partners Traditional Arts Project

Mary Zwolinski

**O**n August 5 the Monday Park Jam took place at Central Park in Schenectady, NY, featuring performances of local Latino and African American musicians for the entertainment of the city. The concert was the culmination of the planning phase of the Community Partners Traditional Arts Project, a collaborative community effort facilitated by the New York Folklore Society. The project, funded by the Ruth Mott

Fund, is intended to bring two communities together to plan and implement a joint project focusing on traditional arts. Its goals are to promote awareness and appreciation of traditional arts and artists within the participating communities, and to open dialogue between the communities that could lead to cooperation in addressing common social, cultural, and economic issues.

John Suter, director of the New York Folklore Society, and I brought this project to two community organizations in Hamilton Hill, a neighborhood in Schenectady beset by social and cultural problems but rich in culture. The Hamilton Hill Art Center is an established institution dedicated to promoting African and African-American arts which offers a range of programs to the community; and the Centro de Progreso is a newly established social service and cultural organization serving the Latino community. The initial plan was ambitious: We would bring to the organizations the basic idea of the project, explaining the possibilities and limitations of its funding

requirements. Folk artists and community members would then develop and carry out a project that would fit the needs of their neighborhood, rather than simply implement a project designed for them by the Society.

After a few initial meetings attended by members of the participating organizations and invited artists, we held a dinner meeting for the larger community. The meeting was successful; about 35 people from both the Latino and the African-American communities came to help plan. After dinner the group opened up to share suggestions for the project. Some of the artists gave impromptu performances. In the end, the group decided that a public performance that showcased the talent from the neighborhood would be the best type of event.

I was directed to Don Wilcock for help in developing a performance venue that could attract people both from within and outside of the community. Don is a long-time resident of Schenectady, a music critic, and an activist in the Schenectady music scene. Each year he organizes several concerts for the city of Schenectady, the most well-known being the Tuesday in the Park Jam, which attracts hundreds of people to free music in Central Park on the first Tuesday night of August. Don and his committee were interested in expanding the Jam, and suggested we schedule the performers for the Monday night before, to broaden the successful Tuesday night event.

We attempted to pull together

another large meeting to discuss the new developments with community members. Unfortunately no one but Don and representatives from the two partnering organizations attended. We decided to go ahead with the plan anyway. Since the venue would be a high profile one within the city of Schenectady, an audience was assured, and if it were successful, it might still serve as a springboard to further collaboration in the ongoing planning process. We all worked with Don in choosing musicians who represented the neighborhood of Hamilton Hill.

The Community Partners Traditional Arts Project presented the Monday Jam to a large, diverse crowd on a steamy Monday night. Carla Page, Marva Robinson, Lily Masilloti and José Masilloti, radio personalities and community leaders well-known to the African-American and Latino communities, acted as hosts and MCs. The line-up included Sounds of Sankofa, an African drumming and dance group, Carlos Torres, a Latino rapper from Hamilton Hill,



Sounds of Sankofa perform at Park Jam. Photo by John Suter.



Alex Torres and the Latin Kings. Photo by John Suter.

Pryzm, a contemporary jazz trio based in the neighborhood, The George Boon Blues Band, also a homegrown group, and Alex Torres and the Latin Kings, a salsa and merengue band based in Amsterdam, several of whose members are from Hamilton Hill. The performances were lively and strong, the MCs were spirited onstage and off, and there was a buzz in the air, not only about the

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Mary Zwolinski is director of the Folklife Program at RCCA: The Art Center in Troy, NY.

# Jeffrey C. Yuen - Bridging East and West, Past and Present

Teri Chan and Cecily Cook

*Jeffrey C. Yuen, age 32, is director of Oriental Studies at the Swedish Institute, a school of massage therapy and related health sciences located on West 26th Street in Manhattan. A Tai Chi Chuan master and expert on Chinese classical medicine, Jeffrey was trained by his grandfather, a Taoist priest in New York's Chinatown.*

*This interview was conducted in Jeffrey's office at the Swedish Institute by Teri Chan and Cecily Cook. Teri, who began her work with traditional artists as a researcher with A.R.T.S., Inc. and is now a project planner for the Asian American Arts Center, and Cecily, who is the program officer at the Asian Cultural Council, were placed together through the New York Folklore Society's Mentoring Program. Bob Lee, director of the Asian American Arts Center, asked that they interview Jeffrey for the Center's archive.*

TC: Where were you born?

JY: I was born in Hong Kong.

TC: When did you come to the United States?

JY: I came here, I think, in 1967. I was very young, three years old.

TC: Where did you learn Chinese?

JY: Basically at home. I didn't really go to Chinese school or anything but I do speak Chinese, and I do write Chinese as related to what I do....

TC: Where did you learn Tai Chi and the herbals?

JY: From my grandfather. My grandfather was a Taoist priest. And essentially, when I was very young, he baby-sat me so I just followed him along everywhere. And that was like, his way of watching over me. And as a result he had become part of my training.

TC: Was this in New York City?

JY: This was in New York City. He had a lot of friends back then who had the herbal shops in Chinatown. And I would go along with him to the herbal shops and help them fill herbal formulas, prescriptions and things like that.

CC: What were the roles of a Taoist priest in the Chinese com-

munity here?

JY: The role of a Taoist priest usually is [performing] religious types of ceremonies. Usually in Chinese culture, on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month, many people go to the temples in Chinatown. At that time, they didn't really have Taoist temples, but he was really close to one of the monks who were at a Buddhist temple. And they kind of allowed certain types of Taoist ceremonies to be performed there, so every now and then he would preside over some of the ceremonies in Chinatown, I mean one of the Buddhist temples in Chinatown.

TC: Is there a conflict between Buddhism and Taoism?

JY: I wouldn't call it a conflict. [In] Taoism, the idea is that the body is very, very important so they look a lot upon the idea of health, maintaining the physical well-being of the body. Whereas in Buddhism, the body is impermanent—it is not going to last anyway—so they don't place as much emphasis on the body, instead more emphasis on the mind....

CC: [Did] people [come] to him [JY's grandfather] for spiritual advice, for consulting advice, the way people might see a Christian priest?

JY: Yes, all of those things. They came to him for, you know, spiritual advice and exorcism. They came to him for health advice. Most of them are usually medical practitioners. It was common in Taoist religion that most of the priests knew about medicine. So most of the time, I would say the majority of them came to him for medical advice.

CC: So he is...like a doctor?

JY: Yes, as a doctor for the community. In many of the herbal shops, at least back then, he would go and basically stay at these herbal shops so people could come and ask for medical advice...as a physician, but not all physicians are priests. So there's the big difference between the two.

CC: What was his name?

JY: Yu Wen. Which is, you know, his Taoist title because all Taoist priests have a Taoist name. It means chaotic origin. They have these very Taoist types of ideal names.

TC: What was the first thing you learned from him — herbal medicine or the idea of Taoism?

JY: You see, this is the question a lot of the time people asked me. "What is, at what age did you really start learning?" Really ever since I was a kid, it had been part of what we did, so I can't say that I was formally taught. It is not like I went to a teacher and said, "Okay, I want to study herbs, and I want to teach herbs."

CC: So [in Taoism] the body is seen as a part of the tool for enlightenment?

JY: Yes. Even though "Yes the body is impermanent, essentially you have to shed it," but the fact is it is still that which carried, formulated who you are...Basically, Chinese medicine is considered [a combination] of acupuncture; massage therapy; dietary therapy—teaching you the right food to eat. [It] also considers herbal medicine and *Chi Kung*—breathing exercise and so on. So those are considered the five modalities of Oriental medicine. Actually...[an additional] one is astrology—being able to look at a person's date of birth and to predict why they have certain kinds of conditions. So Chinese medicine has a lot of Taoist ideas behind it. At least pre-Communism medicine. Today when people talk about Chinese medicine, actually it is quite different from what they call classical medicine.

CC: Is that what you practice, classical medicine?

JY: Yes. Because my grandfather was before the Communist era. Today they call the medicine of China "TCM." It means Traditional Chinese Medicine. But all the classical practitioners say,



**Jeffrey Yuen.**  
Photo by  
Teri Chan.

For more information about the NYFS's Mentoring Program which supported the collaboration between Teri Chan and Cecily Cook, please give us a call.

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## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Director of Presenting Programs.** The Ethnic Folk Arts Center seeks an individual with a solid background in ethnomusicology, urban or cultural anthropology, folklore, or related disciplines, and significant experience in conceptualizing and implementing a wide variety of performance events. Salary \$35,000 plus benefits. For more information contact: Presenting Programs Search Committee, Ethnic Folk Arts Center, 131 Varick Street, Room 907, New York, NY 10013.

**Executive Director.** The Empire State Crafts Alliance seeks someone to administer a statewide advocacy organization providing craftspeople's services and programs including craft fairs, a grant program, and a quarterly newsletter. A graduate degree in Arts Administration and/or 2-5 years experience in arts administration (crafts or visual arts) required. Send letter, resume, and salary requirements to: Sarah Saulson, Search Committee Chair, Empire State Crafts Alliance, 320 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202.

## SMITHSONIAN OPPORTUNITIES

**Research Fellowships:** The Smithsonian Institution announces its research fellowships for 1997 in the fields of History of Science and Technology, Social and Cultural History, History of Art, Anthropology, Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, and Materials Analysis. Under this program, senior, predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships of three to twelve months, and graduate student fellowships of ten weeks are awarded. Deadline: January 15, 1997. For more information, please write: Smithsonian Institution, Office of Fellowships and Grants, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 7000, Washington, D.C. 20560, or e-mail: [siofg@si.edu](mailto:siofg@si.edu). Please indicate the particular area in which you propose to conduct research and give the dates of degrees received or expected.

**Minority Internship Program.** Internships, offered through the Office of Fel-

lowships and Grants, are available for students to participate in research and museum-related activities for periods of ten weeks during the summer, fall, and spring. U.S. minority undergraduate and beginning graduate students are invited to apply. Deadline: February 15. For more information and application forms, please write: Smithsonian Institution, Office of Fellowships and Grants, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 7000, Washington, D.C. 20560, or e-mail: [siofg@si.edu](mailto:siofg@si.edu).

## INVITATION FOR TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

The Maurice F. Sweeney Museum of the Livonia Area Preservation & Historical Society invites traditional artists to set up a one month exhibition of their work during June, July, or August. The Museum is located in the resort community of Livonia, NY, at the north end of Coneus Lake. For more information, contact Mary Cole, President IAPH, at 617-346-4579.

## CONFERENCES

**Visual Diversity: Revitalization of Ethnic Arts and Material Culture Since 1960. Landmark Center, 75 West 5th Street, St. Paul, MN, November 8-9.** The conference accompanies the Landmark Center's exhibition, *Norwegian Folk Art: The Migration of a Tradition*, opening November 8. Sponsored by the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Museum of American Art, it will give multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary consideration to revitalized ethnic arts and material culture since the increased recognition of diversity began in the 1960s. The conference features lectures by folklorists, art historians, and a cultural historian as well as presentations by experts on Native American, African American, Hispanic American, Hmong, Ukrainian, and Latvian arts. For further information contact Marion Nelson at 612-624-4500.

**Delta Studies Symposium III: The Blues and Beyond. Arkansas State University, State University, AR, April 10-12, 1997.** The Department of English and Philosophy at Arkansas State Uni-

versity (Jonesboro campus) will hold a third interdisciplinary Delta studies conference. Scholarly papers, organized panels, and creative multimedia presentations and demonstrations on the blues and related forms of expressive culture may come from any humanities and social science discipline. Deadline for 250 word proposals is December 15, 1996. For more information contact: Delta Symposium Committee, Department of English & Philosophy, P.O. Box 1890, Arkansas State University, State University, AR 72467. Tel.: 501-972-3043. Fax: 501-972-2795. Email: [DELTA@TOLTEC.astate.edu](mailto:DELTA@TOLTEC.astate.edu).

## HISTORY HAPPENED HERE

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Preservation's protection of buildings and sites increasingly converges with the efforts of folklorists, public historians, educators, artists, and other disciplines to interpret the historical and cultural landscape of the city. This conference will bring together a number of disciplinary and community perspectives to investigate how to expand the boundaries of preservation in New York, so that we can preserve not only the physical fabric but also the history of its endangered historical and cultural sites.

Speakers will include Richard Moe, president, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Richard Rabinowitz, President, American History Workshop; Mary Hufford, Folklife Specialist, American Folklife Center; Dolores Hayden, author of *The Power of Place*; Roberta Brandes Gratz, author of *The Living City*; Steve Zeitlin, Director, City Lore; Ken Fisher, Chair, New York City Council Landmarks Committee; Winston Dong, Director, The Museum of the Chinese in the Americas; Howard Dodson, Director, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; community activists from Brighton Beach, Sheepshead Bay, a *casita* and social club in the South Bronx, and proprietors of community establishments in Flushing, Queens, and Coney Island.

The conference will take place at the Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave., New York, NY. Friday-Sunday, November 22-24. Registration fee is \$20; \$25 after November 8. For more information call Maia Mordana at (212) 935-3960.



# Comprehending Culture Under Duress/ NYS Regents Exam

**O**ne day in June, Katherine Suter, a high school junior in Poughkeepsie, called her Uncle John at his office in Ithaca. She reported that she had just gotten home from taking the New York State Regents exam in English, and on the test was a reading-comprehension passage by a John W. Suter. "Could that be you?" she asked. "Not likely," said he. Well, it was. It was drawn from "Thoughts on the Role of Folk Arts in the Ecology of Cultures," an article published by the American Indian Program at Cornell in the Northeast Indian Quarterly (1990: vol. VII, no. 4). The article explores principles of cultural diversity as analogs to principles of natural ecology and argues that folk life and folk arts constitute an important source of cultural "genetic material" vital to the health of the cultural ecosystem. Here are the excerpts assembled into the exam passage along with the questions. The Regents Examination is taken by all college-bound public high school students in New York State; many schools administer it to all students.

Since very early in the history of human beings when cultures began to evolve with different ways of doing things and different understandings of the world, human groups have interacted with one another across cultural boundaries. Whether through conquest, trade and travel, or meeting one another along common borders, peoples have always exchanged cultural information, along with other resources, in a complex web of relationships that has shaped human history. The cultural information has flowed both directions, even when the political, military and economic might has been concentrated on one side of the relationship. The influence of the conquered on the conqueror is often denied or ignored in the subsequent tellings of the story by the victor, but it is documented throughout history.

Encoded within the beliefs, customs, language, arts, and other expressions of each culture is basic information about its history, what the world is like, how it works, what is of value in it, and how people should live in relation to each other and to the environment. This information is often specific and subtle—how close it is appropriate to stand to someone you are addressing, or when it is appropriate to play a particular tune, or what colors go together.

Each culture is the product of human intelligence—among many other qualities—applied to the problems and opportunities of living in the world and passed down through the generations. Just as the hawk is not judged a better species than the mouse, so it makes no sense to view one culture as better or worse than another, regardless of inequities in economic or military might or technological accomplishment. Each occupies a particular niche in the system of world of cultures, and each survives with its mix of particular wisdom and folly.

John W. Suter

According to the passage, what happens when one group conquers another?

- 1 The loser's culture is destroyed.
- 2 The winner's culture loses respect.
- 3 A cultural exchange occurs.
- 4 A simpler culture emerges.

When the author identifies culture as the "product of human intelligence," he is implying that

- 1 only intelligent societies survive
- 2 primitive societies have no recognizable culture
- 3 each society has reached the same conclusions about life
- 4 people construct their own societies

The author most probably makes reference to a hawk and a mouse because they seem to represent

- 1 two nonthreatening animals
- 2 animals respected in many cultures
- 3 apparent differences in status
- 4 observable differences in intelligence

The author implies that a victor may give a version of history that is

- 1 verifiable
- 2 apologetic
- 3 uninformed
- 4 self-serving

The author implies that no culture has progressed to the point of

- 1 being without faults
- 2 admitting its mistakes
- 3 rejecting improvement
- 4 accepting other cultures

## YUEN

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"That is modern Chinese medicine, that is not traditional at all!" And the idea was Mao [Tse-Tung] wanted all these people to learn the best of all the Chinese medical systems. Just like when we talked about martial arts, that there are many different systems. Chinese medicine is the same thing. "There are many different systems, so why don't we just take the best out of all of these systems and make them into one system so we can train doctors in a very short period of time, so they can go back to the villages very fast and use this knowledge right away." So that is what Mao did essentially, with Oriental medicine.

TC: So for you this practice didn't work?

JY: Well, it is not that it doesn't work...It is just that I feel that it has become a way where everything is routine...they always use the same point [method] again and again...it is very effective, and it works. But there are going to be incidents when it won't work. And then the practitioner is not going to know what to do because he is using the same [method]...they don't know about the other [methods]...Then the practitioners are not very sophisticated because what they are doing is that they are becoming technicians. The technicians just follow the rules, and they always do the same thing over and over again. They are no longer the thinkers. They are not thinking out the process and why they are using these [methods], what got them there in the first place. So there is, in this country, a big movement now, trying to establish what they call the "American Acupuncture System" because a lot of Americans realized what they were learning from China was not the old way of doing Chinese medicine but more the new way. Of course...there are some people who simply like the things of the past. They want the past, they don't want the new. And other people realized that the treatment is not as effective anymore.

TC: Did your grandfather also practice acupuncture?

JY: Yes, he did.

TC: So when you practice acupuncture, are you practicing the traditional way like your grandfather did?

JY: I practice the way [of] my grandfather, basically.

TC: Have you made any changes to

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## SCIENCE

From page 5

This new literature leaves us shaking our heads in amazement and admiration for those discombobulated earthlings who seek to understand the nebula, parallel universes, black holes, and time warps with our tiny kilogram of brain. Most of us on the planet conceive the universe in terms of our own limited experiences in a three dimensional world; but this new, wonderful speculative literature of popular science makes it possible for us to travel to distant corners of the cosmos on a lily pad or in the arms of a date at the prom.

*Steve Zeitlin is the Executive Director of City Love, a private non-profit organization dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and presentation of the living cultural heritage of New York City. His column is a regular feature of this Newsletter.*

## PARK JAM

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music but also about the meaning and intent of the project—getting people working together. In the end, what we planned may not have been a concert of strictly traditional music, but it was exciting music and dance from the neighborhood, representative of what is happening today in both Latino and African-American communities.

In the end, the project was successful, but not yet by our original standards. We met some of our goals, and grappled with some important issues in the process. One of the most important was that the concept of tradition and traditional arts is not understood the same way in every community, and it continues to be a challenge to reach a common working understanding.

One thing we learned was that too little intervention and direction on our part was almost as problematic to the communities we worked with as too much might have been, and we have been reminded that the process of community planning is difficult and takes a long time, even with good inside connections. Trying not to dictate the direction of the process, we were intentionally vague at the beginning, which frustrated some of the people with whom we were working. However, once we and the partnering organizations took the

step of deciding to go ahead with the concert and were able to work out the details for the performance, we were able to meet the objectives set forth to us by the community members during the first meeting. The project showcased the local Latino and African-American talent in a good venue, one that played to a diverse and enthusiastic audience. We haven't completed this phase with a plan in place for the next phase, but we hope to build on the momentum generated among the enthusiastic participants in the project so far to carry it forward.

## YUEN

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adapt [to] the modern world?

JY: In terms of language. You know, if you are working with the medical system in America, you need to be able to speak the Western medical language. So my adaptation is that I study Western medicine, read their textbooks, and I translate their ideas into Chinese medicine. Then when I talk to them, I am conveying my Chinese medical idea, I talk to them in Western medical terms to explain what I am doing. That becomes a bridge for the two systems so they can come together.

TC: Do you have an example?

JY: Let's see. Say a certain type of food in Chinese medicine is supposed to be very, very *Yin*. *Yin* means it is really relaxing for the body. It is very cooling for the body. It makes the body, the blood pressure go down and all that. So when you talk to a Western physician, "Oh, this food is *Yin*," they don't know what it is. [You say instead] "No, what this food does is make the blood very alkaline. The body basically begins to cool off. The body, the parasympathetic nervous system begins to respond, which means the body is now very rested and digested, so that's cooling." So what you are doing is translating something that's Oriental now into their language. And they say, "Oh, I can understand that." ...

CC: How old were you when your grandfather thought you were qualified to practice?

JY: I would say around seventeen when I started treating people on my own. For someone who started young, that is the average age in China. You know, if you are six years old and you start helping the herbalists, powdering the herbs and all that, you might start by the time you are

fifteen or something. Traditionally it takes ten years to qualify to be a practitioner.

CC: When you started practicing, was this in Chinatown?

JY: It was in Chinatown, mostly helping friends and people that I knew. I didn't have a practice. I mean, I still do it today, the same thing, except when I treat someone, I don't charge money. I just write the formula, and you get it filled. Because in China you get paid when the person is well. When the person got ill, that's when the payment stopped. And most herbalists were in the community, so everyone was supporting the herbalist because he was keeping, or she was keeping, everyone well. If someone got sick in the community, then the herbalist, the "doctor," has failed his or her duty, and that's when they stopped the payment. So we do the same thing. So my livelihood is mostly from teaching. I don't make any money from treating people. So as a result, I have a lot of clients that come to me, and right now I just can't see them any more because there are too many people.

CC: When you were growing up and now, how many practitioners (of Oriental medicine) would you say there were in New York?

JY: At that time I would say, at least the people opening practices, about fifty. Today there are definitely a lot more, now going to the hundreds...

CC: Why did you want to start teaching?

JY: Why? They recruited me actually. I never thought I was going to be a teacher. My degree is in mathematics. I have a bachelor in mathematics, and I did some graduate work at Columbia in archaeology. That's where my interests were. But then...there was a job opening at one of [the] high school's adult education...and I started teaching Tai Chi. And the class got very successful for the school, so they said, "Well, what else can you teach?" So I said, "Oh, I can teach something about food, nutrition from a Chinese point of view." So then they created the Chinese dietary therapy class and also the Chinese massage therapy class...I started adding more classes, and then more and more students started to come, and eventually some were acupuncturists, and they asked if I would teach acupuncture and so on. That's how I

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## YUEN

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really got involved in teaching.

TC: I am sure most of your students are not Chinese. Traditional Chinese people, will they criticize you for teaching non-Chinese people the Chinese culture?

JY: No, I came in the times when a lot of people were teaching non-Chinese already.

TC: So the road has been opened for you already?

JY: Yes, the road has been opened for me. If I were, maybe back in the 50s, I think I would be extensively criticized.

CC: What is the ratio of Chinese, non-Chinese students you have?

JY: I would say maybe eighty per cent are not Chinese, twenty per cent Chinese. Chinese again, overall, want to be more American and less Chinese, so all these things are not of interest to them. Even when you look into acupuncture and Oriental medical schools, the ratio [is] usually eighty-twenty per cent. "This is outdated stuff, get on to modern technology." They don't want to learn the primitive idea that things run through the body that you can't even see. And again, there are a lot of Caucasians who are interested because of the mysticism they seek in the Far East. And with some of them, I want to shatter that because I want them to understand that there is something very tangible, it's not just hocus pocus. So I think that's one of the major goals of my teaching.

TC: So you are the bridge?

JY: Yes, I see myself predominantly as a bridge. As a result I usually have been invited to Western school of medicine after I gave a talk in Mount Sinai's School of Medicine... I am not trying to say Chinese medicine is better than Western medicine, [what] I am trying to say is that we can converge a bridge between the gaps that we have.

CC: What would your grandfather think of that?

JY: I think he would approve of that. I think his whole life had been making bridges and helping people to understand.

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## NYFS at Old Songs Festival

**T**he New York Folklore Society made a public debut this past June as an exhibitor at the Old Songs Festival in Altamont. This was our first time setting up at such an event, and the reception was warm and encouraging. Over 100 people signed up for our mailing list, and several joined as new members. The highlight of our presence, however, was the Sunday afternoon book signing by Nancy Groce. Her book *The Musician's Joke Book: Knowing the Score* brought laughs throughout the festival, from the stage, the audience, and those who stopped by our booth to browse. All-in-all, a real success: good weather (what's a little wind and rain?), great music, making new friends, reconnecting with old ones, and the opportunity to let more people know about NYFS and our programs. A first, but certainly not the last. Thanks to volunteers Natasha Suter, Sonya Suter, Daisy Kelly, Kent Gregson, Ellen McHale and Mia Boynton. Thanks also to George Ward and other announcers for plugging the book from the stage. By the way, "What happens when you throw a banjo and an accordion off the Empire State Building at exactly the same time? Applause."



**Nancy Groce signs her joke book for a customer.**



**Natasha Suter (left) and Deb Clover at Old Songs booth.**

**Photos by John Suter.**

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