



Back issues of and single articles published in *New York Folklore Quarterly*, *New York Folklore*, and *Voices* are available for purchase. Check the tables of contents for availability and titles. To request an article for purchase, contact us at info@nyfolklore.org. Please be aware that some issues are sold out, but most articles are still available.

Copyright of NEW YORK FOLKLORE. Further reproduction prohibited without permission of copyright holder. This PDF or any part of its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv or website without the copyright holder's express permission. Users may print or download article for individual use.

NEW YORK FOLKLORE
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
518/346-7008
Fax 518/346-6617
Email: info@nyfolklore.org
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

Democratizing the (Folk) Arts Nonprofit Workplace

Sunday, February 28, 2016, 5–8 p.m., Brooklyn, NY

BY EILEEN CONDON

Overview

On Sunday, February 28, 2016, from 5–8 p.m. in the Great Room at South Oxford Space, 138 South Oxford Street, Brooklyn, New York, the New York Folklore Society welcomed approximately 20 attendees, some who had come from as far as Philadelphia, to a folk arts forum convening local and national arts and labor leaders for panel presentations and an open forum on the topic of “Democratizing the (Folk) Arts Nonprofit Workplace.” Presenters included Andy Kolovos, co-director and archivist of the Vermont Folklife Center (VFC); Selina Morales, director of the Philadelphia Folklore Project

(PFP); Lisa Rathje, assistant director for Local Learning; The National Network for Folk Arts in Education; cooperative developer and strategist Joe Rinehart; and UAW Local 2110 President Maida Rosenstein (Local 2110 represents part-time academics and museum workers). New York Folklore Society NYC Representative and folklorist Dr. Eileen Condon organized and curated this event. Kathleen Haughey, a colleague of Andy Kolovos in educational programs at Vermont Folklife Center cancelled her planned participation due to illness.

The presenters approached the forum’s topic from intersecting approaches, based on

their varied work experiences and positions within or in connection with the field of traditional arts administration. The general purpose of the forum was to generate and document a critical conversation about best work practices in the (folk) arts nonprofit field (aka public sector ethnography/culture work). The speakers explored several different schools of thought about how more sustainable and more democratic ways of working together in the field of folk arts could be achieved. Their approaches included:

- (1) changing nonprofit organizational work styles and practices through consultation;
- (2) considering alternative working structures to the nonprofit (such as the worker-owned cooperative and the movement supporting it in NYC) for the traditional arts; and
- (3) exploring precedents and prospects for unionizing traditional arts nonprofit organizations.

Presentations

Lisa Rathje began by sharing that she, Andy, and Selina had previously participated in a national conversation about leadership in the field of public sector folk arts in Chicago, together with folklorists Christina Barr (Nevada Humanities) and Sally Van de Water (Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage). Out of that conversation, a “manifesto” was written collectively, and some of the following questions emerged:

- (1) How can we better foster peer-to-peer mentoring to sustain ourselves and our work?
- (2) What are the core qualities of leadership that suit the values, ethics, and methods of our field?
- (3) What are the internal mechanisms of



Seven Cooperative Principles. According to the Willy Street Co-Op in Wisconsin: “Cooperatives operate according to seven basic principles. Six were drafted by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) in 1966, based on guidelines written by the founders of the modern cooperative movement in England in 1844. In 1995, the ICA restated, expanded, and adopted the 1966 principles to guide cooperative organizations into the 21st century.” See www.willystreet.coop/seven-cooperative-principles. Image courtesy of Willy Street Co-Op.



Leaders of Green Worker Cooperatives (GWC) and affiliated cooperative workers. GWC receives New York City funding to offer two worker-owned cooperative business start-up training sessions (“Coop Academy”) per year. Photo courtesy of Green Worker Cooperatives.

healthy organizations, and do they reflect the values and ethics of our discipline?

(4) In what ways can effective leaders impact or facilitate creative, healthy workplaces?

Lisa and **Selina Morales** pointed to the importance of defining leadership and workplace practices in this value-grounded way, and they also described leadership as something more than “ambition,” more than just the acquisition of positions of greater and greater power within organizations. Andy’s and Selina’s organizations had both come through recent upheavals in directorship— PFP’s longstanding founding director had retired two years earlier, opening that position to Selina, and Andy had joined a coworker five years ago in a “marriage” of sorts as co-directors of VFC. Through these periods of change, both PFP and VFC benefitted from consultations with Jenna Peters-Golden from the worker-owned cooperative AORTA (www.aorta.coop—Anti-Oppression Resources and Training Alliance). Selina outlined the “points of unity” that PFP staff generated, with Jenna’s encouragement, as a set of values that all staff believed in wholeheartedly, and which would serve (and continues to serve) as a foundation for revisiting the routines and practices in PFP as a workplace

going forward. Here is a selection of some of the points from Selina’s staff-generated list:

- We recognize peoples’ multiple and intersecting identities.
- Due to overt and covert systemic oppression, many cultures and ethnicities are not valued and respected. This is not OK with us.
- Opportunities to practice valued cultural traditions and knowledge enhance lives, self-determination, and community vitality.
- Because of economic injustice and disparity, there is a real need to fund artists who are systematically denied access to resources and support.
- Care for people, relationships, and artistic connections nourishes us.
- We see our work as playing a role in building a world without violence.
- We are working towards a world in which folk and traditional artists and practitioners can practice their arts and be valued for it, monetarily and socially.

As Selina explained, the points of unity are still a work in progress, and the list also serves as a reference by which PFP staff can monitor the success of their work, conversations, and collaborations, at present.

Andy Kolovos outlined how he and his co-director Greg Sharrow have evolved through a process of hiring more staff, including an educational director and a fundraiser, while asking themselves how to accommodate these new people in a structure that gets the work done. Andy and Greg “flirted” with a “what if there’s nobody in charge?” or “what if no one person is the boss?”—as a way of working, in which “everyone could have an equal stake in what happens...everyone has a say in major decision-making, and where things still get done.” After Andy attended the Chicago meeting of folklorists (which Lisa Rathje described), he, like Selina and her staff, consulted with AORTA to build a decentralized organizational structure. Despite his excitement at having progressed into this structure at the staff level, Andy confessed that he and Greg realized their group has nevertheless “created a parallel structure,” one which “as far as the board is concerned... doesn’t exist.” They have tried to mitigate this by making sure that staff are welcomed at board meetings, but according to the organizational bylaws, the executive(s) who run the organization remain the primary individual(s) responsible to the board, while the board retains the hiring/firing responsibility over the

executive director(s). Having staff at board meetings helps “mitigate” these power dynamics and helps the board “recognize that staff are people,” Andy quipped. However, staff members are “part of the organization,” he reflected, paradoxically, “more than the board members are.”

From the complexities of power sharing and values-based decision-making in non-profit workplaces, the conversation moved to **Joe Rinehart**. Joe outlined his experience as a worker-owner at a cooperative bookstore in North Carolina, a cooperative developer at the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, and a cooperative director at the Democracy at Work Institute. His inquiry centered on questions of what “democracy” and “democratizing” could actually mean in relation to workplaces. Democracy, he pointed out, is often equated with “participation,” but teasing these concepts apart can be useful. Democratic work implies the generation of “stronger bonds of accountability” and the “decentralization” of power. But what are those bonds of accountability, exactly, and to whom are they being decentralized? “Thinking about how we are democratizing wealth is also a huge problem. How can we make wealth more distributed, more evenly controlled, and more community controlled,” Joe asked? “Monetary wealth” could also be replaced by “cultural wealth” in this question. Sometimes, Joe pointed out, there is conflict between spreading participation and spreading wealth. He provided several cases in point based on real organizations he had worked with or within. Lest worker cooperatives be opposed as some sort of utopian concept for nonprofits, Joe teased out the complexities further: large (1,000+ member), worker-owned cooperatives can operate with very traditional management structures, which are hierarchical and rely on decision-making from single individuals coming into play from the top down. Likewise, nonprofits and worker-owned cooperatives alike can operate with participatory discussion being a regular part of worklife, whether or not the major decision-making is made traditionally by an executive or more collectively. There can be a “middle ground” in which the participa-



Ileia Burgos is the Outreach Coordinator for Green Worker Cooperatives. She leads workshops and political education with groups fighting for justice on environmental, climate, economic, and gender frontlines across the country. Ileia came to activism and knowledge of Bronx history through involvement in hip hop and as a photographer-artist, documenting her life in the Hunt’s Point and Mott Haven sections of the South Bronx. Photo courtesy of Ileia Burgos/Green Worker Cooperatives.

tory work styles can exist within a hierarchical structure where decision-making can be alternately made by an executive and collectively. In situations in which the “loop of accountability” is long—running from executives through middle management to workers and shareholders—some co-ops may use unions to shorten that accountability loop, or even an employee advocacy committee, in place of a union.

One motivating factor for considering the worker-owned co-op model, as opposed to nonprofits, is the desire for members to “share risk, share reward, and share financial reward much more broadly.” Joe joked that he would like to see a “folk arts for-profit” organization come into being, especially one that would support contra dances (his current area of interest is running Brooklyn Contra)! The juxtaposition of “folk arts” and “profit” caused most panelists to smile. A for-profit dance hall might work, he said, pointing out that leasing space is one area that can be profitable and sustainable in the arts. Joe wound up by returning to the differences between asking how far one wants to go with creat-

ing a participatory workplace culture, versus creating an organization that shares risk and reward in order to share wealth more broadly.

Maida Rosenstein explained that UAW 2110, the local for whom she is president, does not serve any “united auto workers;” rather, the union serves workers in cultural institutions, ranging from the very large (such as the Museum of Modern Art) to smaller museums and a number of small nonprofits, many of which are involved in publishing rather than with the arts directly. Reflecting on the conversations she had been listening to thus far, and the approaches the other presenters had been describing, Maida noted that no approaches presented so far, in her view, would “preclude” the process of unionization right alongside other efforts and methods to make work and wealth more democratic. That being said, Maida commented that she found it “amazing” how few cultural institutions were organized in terms of labor, even in the more public institutions.

In smaller organizations, or more “rarified” ones like galleries, she said, “unions are virtually nonexistent.” “Most workers who

are working in those settings have very little power.” An option of electing board members or changing the work structure “does not actually exist.” These cultural workers “don’t have any ability to make changes in the workplace, other than as individuals hoping to negotiate or navigate a better situation.” So the step that Maida said she would posit is for these workers to begin looking at unions. Folk arts, she conjectured, would be a field in which there would be organizations that are “very tiny,” in which people were “expecting no great wealth.” Nevertheless, she pointed out, even in small nonprofits, there are “often inequities.” “If workers want to obtain changes in their workplace, unionization is the way to go.”

Noting situations in which the executive director is making a huge salary, and the workers are earning very little—“that happens a lot in the nonprofit world,” Maida stated. People also organize unions in situations in which they are not motivated by money, she pointed out, but rather by a desire to change the ways in which they work together—seeking not just a change to the culture of the workplace, but to reform a workplace that isn’t really living up to its mission. In her view, the United States is “losing our democracy in part because we are losing our unions.” As fewer and fewer workers have less and less power or voice in the workplace, she said, “not only are workplaces becoming less democratic,” but enormous wealth inequalities have developed, even in nonprofits. Probably not “in the folklore center,” Maida guessed, casting a look towards her fellow presenters, who smiled, but “if you look at the Museum of Modern Art, or at a university, you see that the presidents of universities are earning multimillion dollar salaries.” In institutions that purport to stand for culture, enlightenment, and education, she observed, “you see incredible wage inequality.” She called for an alliance between artists and arts workers with labor and workers’ rights advocates, to resist the increasing austerity measures affecting the lives of workers and the poor in the US, describing this alliance as a natural “marriage.” This concluded the panelists’ opening presentations.

See more online:

Own The Change: Building Economic Democracy One Worker Co-op at a Time

“A short, practical guide for those considering worker owned cooperatives, made by GRITtv & TESA, the Toolbox for Education and Social Action. Featuring conversations with worker-owners from Union Cab; Ginger Moon; Arizmendi Bakery, Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA); New Era Windows; and more.” (22:12)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GI-SYMatNc>

A Co-op Story: Green Worker Co-op Academy

“For our New Economy series, The Laura Flanders Show at GRITtv is highlighting solutions to our economically precarious times. Cooperatives have demonstrated the great power in working together, and this week we bring you the Green Worker Cooperative Academy. . .” (8:03)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vPjmxjWg84>

Wrap Up of Presentations/ Discussion:

Andy posed the following question in conclusion: If our work in the field of folk arts is based upon values such as partnership, collaboration, and cultural equity, then “why should we have a top-down structure, if what we are advocating for in the world is completely different?” “Ethically, perhaps morally,” he added, “we have an obligation to think about how we structure the organizations we run, to do the work we do in the world.” Maida commented that unionization can bring workers concerns “outward,” rather than just focusing upon making their own workplaces fairer. Unions can expand workers’ power beyond the workplace, she explained, moving those cherished values to “face outward” into society, beyond a single workplace.

The Forum progressed into more critical “how” questions following this phase, as audience members and the curator posed questions to the presenters about how folk arts organizations and the field of folk arts might take steps toward unionizing (begin with coalition building, not with protest); how worker-cooperatives could be established (incubation organizations in NYC have free start-up programs available); and how nonprofits can continue to democratize and promote equity (such as including regional housing/home ownership in an employee benefits package to increase the value of an otherwise low

salary). Further, New York Folklore Society-sponsored forums were scheduled in 2016 to explore these more specific, and intriguing, interest areas to continue the discussion, and hopefully, to translate interest into action.

Readers are urged to view the entirety of the four-part video documentation of the Democratizing Forum, which was posted to the New York Folklore Society’s YouTube channel just after the event and included on its website <http://www.nyfolklore.org/progs/conf-symp/forum2016-video.html>. The link to this documentation was also posted to the national public sector folklore list, Publore, as well as the New York State Folk Arts Roundtable Facebook group, and the NYFS Event Page on Facebook, where comments were encouraged.

Shortly after the forum, folklorist Amy Mills (Programs Coordinator at the Western Folklife Center) wrote to Publore to express the following comment of appreciation:

THANK YOU. . . for making this session available online. It was personally and professionally meaningful to hear how several new leaders are trying to innovate, while paying close attention to pay and power equity. Three cheers for the panel participants, for trying new things and sharing your challenges honestly with us! Fellow early-to-mid-career folklorists—take time to watch this. It’s a good, grounded conversation about issues that affect our job market and our jobs.

New York Folklore Society followed up the initial forum on democratization with a workshop at South Oxford Space in Brooklyn on October 23, 2016. The workshop, led by Ilea Burgos of Green Worker Cooperatives in the Bronx, presented an overview of cooperatives as business structures and focused on how this work structure might be of benefit to artists and culture workers/ arts administrators. Green Worker Cooperatives <www.greenworker.coop> is the nonprofit organization, which provides five months of free business start-up training, twice a year, for teams of two or more individuals with a community-oriented business idea. Ilea fielded questions and provided an overview of Coop Academy, and how to apply to the program, which is subsidized by New York City cooperative funding. Coop Academy helps applicant teams do market research to be sure their business ideas are viable, and links applicants with the “Working World” cooperative business loan program and free legal support through the Urban Justice Center. Applications were accepted for Coop Academy’s Spring 2017 Semester, via the application portal on Green Worker Cooperatives’ website, through December 16, 2016 ▼

This article was based on the report submitted to the American Folklore Society by Eileen Condon, May 17, 2016. The forum was presented with support from the American Folklore Society. The New York Folklore Society’s programs are made possible in part with public funds from the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

Dr. Eileen Condon is the New York Folklore Society’s New York City Regional Representative. Eileen holds a PhD in Folklore from the University of Newfoundland and resides in Queens. Prior to her appointment as New York City Regional Representative, Eileen served as the Acquisitions Editor for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*, from 2008 to 2012.



Submission Guidelines for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*

Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore is a membership magazine of the New York Folklore Society (www.nyfolklore.org).

The New York Folklore Society is a nonprofit, statewide organization dedicated to furthering cultural equity and cross-cultural understanding through programs that nurture folk cultural expressions within communities where they originate, share these traditions across cultural boundaries, and enhance the understanding and appreciation of folk culture. Through *Voices* the society communicates with professional folklorists and members of related fields, traditional artists, and a general public interested in folklore.

Voices is dedicated to publishing the content of folklore in the words and images of its creators and practitioners. The journal publishes research-based articles, written in an accessible style, on topics related to traditional art and life. It also features stories, interviews, reminiscences, essays, folk poetry and music, photographs, and artwork drawn from people in all parts of New York State. Columns on subjects such as photography, sound and video recording, legal and ethical issues, and the nature of traditional art and life appear in each issue.

Editorial Policy

Feature articles. Articles published in *Voices* represent original contributions to folklore studies. Although *Voices* emphasizes the folklore of New York State, the editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world. Articles on the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are also welcome, as are purely descriptive articles in the ethnography of folklore. In addition, *Voices* provides a home for “orphan” tales, narratives, and songs, whose contributors are urged to provide contextual information.

Authors are encouraged to include short personal reminiscences, anecdotes, isolated tales, narratives, songs, and other material that relates to and enhances their main article.

Typically feature articles range from 1,000 to 4,000 words and up to 6,000 words at the editor’s discretion.

Reviews and review essays. Books, recordings, films, videos, exhibitions, concerts, and the like are selected for review in *Voices* for their relevance to folklore studies or the folklore of New York State and their potential interest to a wide audience. Persons wishing to review recently published material should contact the editor. Unsolicited reviews and proposals for reviews will be evaluated by the editor and by outside referees where appropriate. Follow the bibliographic style in a current issue of *Voices*.

Reviews should not exceed 750 words.

Correspondence and commentary. Short but substantive reactions to or elaborations upon material appearing in *Voices* within the previous year are welcomed. The editor may invite the author of the materials being addressed to respond; both pieces may be published together. Any subject may be addressed or rebutted once by any correspondent. The principal criteria for publication are whether, in the opinion of the editor or the editorial board, the comment constitutes a substantive contribution to folklore studies, and whether it will interest our general readers.

Letters should not exceed 500 words.

Style

The journal follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Consult *Webster’s Third International Dictionary* for questions of spelling, meaning, and usage, and avoid gender-specific terminology.

Footnotes. Endnotes and footnotes should be avoided; incorporate such information into the text. Ancillary information may be submitted as a sidebar.

Bibliographic citations. For citations of text from outside sources, use the author-date style described in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Language. All material must be submitted in English. Foreign-language terms (transliterated, where appropriate, into the Roman alphabet) should be italicized and followed by a concise parenthetical English gloss; the author bears responsibility for the correct spelling and orthographics of non-English words. British spellings should be Americanized.

Publication Process

Unless indicated, the New York Folklore Society holds copyright to all material published in *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*. With the submission of material to the editor, the author acknowledges that he or she gives *Voices* sole rights to its publication, and that permission to publish it elsewhere must be secured in writing from the editor.

For the initial submission, send an e-mail attachment or CD (preferably prepared in Microsoft Word and saved as Rich Text Format).

Copy must be double spaced, with all pages numbered consecutively. To facilitate anonymous review of feature articles, the author’s name and biography should appear only on a separate title page.

Tables, charts, maps, illustrations, photographs, captions, and credits should follow the main text and be numbered consecutively. All illustrations should be clean, sharp, and camera-ready. Photographs should be prints or duplicate slides (not originals) or scanned at high resolution (300+ dpi) and e-mailed to the editor as jpeg or tiff files. Captions and credits must be included. Written permission to publish each image must be obtained by authors from the copyright holders prior to submission of manuscripts, and the written permissions must accompany the manuscript (authors should keep copies).

Materials are acknowledged upon receipt. The editor and two anonymous readers review manuscripts submitted as articles. The review process takes several weeks.

Authors receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which their contribution appears and may purchase additional copies at a discount. Authors of feature articles may purchase offprints; price information is available upon publication.

Submission Deadlines

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| Spring–Summer issue | November 1 |
| Fall–Winter issue | May 1 |

Send submissions as Word files to
 Todd DeGarmo, *Voices* Editor
 (e-mail preferred): degarmo@crandalllibrary.org
 or
 New York Folklore Society
 129 Jay Street
 Schenectady, NY 12305

Join or Renew your New York Folklore Membership to Receive *Voices* and other Member Benefits

For the General Public

Voices is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, published twice annually. Join New York Folklore and become part of a community that will deepen your involvement with folklore, folklife, the traditional arts, and contemporary culture. As a member, you'll have early notice of Gallery special exhibits and NYF-sponsored key events. Members receive a discount on NYF Gallery items.

For Artists and Professionals

Become a member and learn about technical assistance programs that will get you the help you may need in your work:

Mentoring and Professional Development
Folk Artists Self-Management Project
Folk Archives Project
Consulting and Referral
Advocacy
A Public Voice

Membership Levels

Individual

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| \$ 50.00 | Basic Membership |
| \$100.00 | Harold W. Thompson Circle |
| \$150.00 | Edith Cutting Folklore in Education |

Organizations/Institutions

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| \$ 75.00 | Subscriber |
| \$100.00 | Partner |
| \$150.00 | Edith Cutting Folklore in Education |

Please add \$20.00 for non-US addresses.

For payment, choose the option that works best for you:

Use our website, www.nyfolklore.org

or mail a check to us at 129 Jay St., Schenectady NY 12305;

or call the NYF business office, 518-346-7008, to pay with a credit card over the phone.