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Meet Our Fieldworkers

BY ANNE BERLINER

As a statewide organization, New York Folklore is always looking to strengthen our reach to diverse regions of the state. A grant from the National Endowment for the Arts is helping us do just that! New York Folklore is prioritizing fieldwork. We are developing a network of community scholars who will document traditional arts throughout the state. These fieldworkers are supported by New York Folklore staff, headquartered in the Capital Region. Our fieldworkers represent diverse communities and levels of experience. We are excited to welcome (or welcome back!) this exceptional group of women to the field!

Divena Ramessar



The newest addition to New York Folklore is Divena Ramessar, a first-generation Guyanese American raised with a strong connection to her Guyanese heritage. She has been attending festivals, concerts, performances, and community events since she was a child. Divena has become a tradition bearer in her own right, absorbing the sights of Guyanese culture: jewelry, clothing, household items, etc. A visual artist, Divena is currently carrying out fieldwork in the Guyanese community of Schenectady and working as a teaching artist in the Schenectady School District.

Akilah Briggs Melvin



Akilah Briggs-Melvin is a dancer and teaching folk artist who has over 10 years of experience in various styles of dance. In 2020, she created a community step and dance team for K–12th -grade youth, called “Diverse Destiny.” She has experience as a youth development specialist, and she currently works in the field of community rehabilitation. As a community fieldworker, Akilah is working within the African American community within Broome County to identify artists and cultural traditions.

Nada Odeh



Nada Odeh is a Syrian artist, activist, humanitarian, and a modern-day poet. She was born and raised in Damascus and lived in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates before coming to the United States in 2013, due to the conflict and revolution in her country. She is currently

working to build Arabesque, a center to facilitate cross-cultural understanding by promoting the work of Middle Eastern artists, performers, and folklorists, hosting them in conversation and connecting them with American counterparts. Nada’s work takes place in Buffalo and the Southern Tier of the state. Nada’s fieldwork is being funded in part by a grant from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation.

Ladan Nikravan



Ladan Nikravan has been a resident of the Capital Region since the 1980s, when she arrived in the region as a student, emigrating from Iran. In 1989, she began employment with Centro Civico. Within six months of her employment, she was promoted as Deputy Director, and three years later, became the second person to hold the title of Executive Director for the organization. After 30 years of service as the Executive Director of Centro Civico, Ladan retired in 2019. She continues to serve the community. A former board member of New York Folklore, she continues to be involved in folk and traditional arts and culture. Ladan lends her expertise and her long-standing work with community as a New York Folklore community fieldworker in the Capital District and the Mohawk Valley.

Are you a New York State folklorist or community scholar? We would love to include you in our reporting in “From the Field.” Email Anne,

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