Ukrainian Folk Singing in NYC

Hindu Home Altars

Mexican Immigrant Creative Writers

National Heritage Award Winner

Remembering Bess Lomax Hawes
From the Director

Since the founding of the New York Folklore Society, the organization has provided two consistent benefits of membership: receipt of a published journal—since 2000, Voices—and at least one annual meeting.

In the early years, the annual meeting took place jointly with the annual gathering of the New York Historical Association, the organization from which the New York Folklore Society originated. The society’s New York City chapter also conducted an additional midwinter meeting that highlighted folklore activities within this urban core. The first New York Folklore Society meetings focused on papers presented by scholars from New York State, with musical and other performances: Pete Seeger and Frank War- ner performed at early New York Folklore Society meetings, and an early meeting in Rochester included music by a local Ukrainian chorus. In the first ten years of the society, meetings were frequently in Cooperstown, but meetings were also held in Ticonderoga, Rochester, and Elmira in an effort to extend the reach of the New York Folklore Society and to fulfill its statewide mission.

The general format of the annual meeting has consistently remained the same, albeit with a stronger stress on experiencing a region in more recent years. Meetings in the past fifteen years have incorporated an Erie Canal boat ride (Seneca Falls, 1997), a guided walk through a Hudson Valley orchard (Clinton Corners, 1996), and an opportunity to drive at a NASCAR-sanctioned racetrack (Watkins Glen, 2004).

At this year’s annual meeting, held on November 20, the New York Folklore Society decided to launch a new initiative: a student-only conference. There are precedents for this format, also. In commenting on the 1950 meeting, then-president Moritz Jagendorf wrote, “Another ‘new’ at the Rochester meeting was the suggestion to have an annual contest among students of New York State colleges and universities for the best paper on New York State folklore. The winner will receive fifty dollars, and his or her paper will be read before the members.” (It is unclear whether this suggestion was implemented)

The 2010 meeting was held at New York University, in conjunction with NYU’s Latin American and Latino studies departments. While the meeting did not offer a monetary prize, many graduate students delivered papers on the theme of “Latino Folk Culture and Expressive Traditions.” In keeping with our own traditions, the conference also included food, music, and opportunities for conversation among colleagues. We thank those of you who joined us in New York City—and we hope to see even more members next year.

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From the Editor

This issue of Voices celebrates New York’s cultural diversity across a wide variety of genres of folklife and folk art. Ukrainian-American singer and educator Nadia Tarnawsky describes her experience of exchanging songs with Ukrainian seniors at the Self-Reliance Association of American Ukrainians Senior Center in New York City’s East Village. In “Voices in Exo: A Sample of Writing from Mano a Mano,” readers will enjoy fresh prose pieces and poetry in English and Spanish from a recently published anthology, produced by Mexican cultural nonprofit Mano a Mano, the New York Writers Coalition, and a group of New York’s newest Spanish-language writers. Musician, discophile, and Irish-American music researcher Ted McGraw presents a preliminary report and asks Voices readers for assistance in documenting the fascinating history of twentieth-century button accordions made by Italian craftsmen and sold to the Irish market in New York.

Puja Sahney leads us into Hindu homes in the New York metropolitan area to explore structure, meaning, and change in domestic altar traditions.

We remember, too, our most brilliant elders and inspiring mentors in folk arts. Folklorist Mick Moloney shares a portrait of one of this year’s winners of the National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Award, Irish flute master Mike Rafferty. Robert Baron, director of the New York State Council on the Arts Folk Arts Program, offers a personal remembrance of the pioneering contributions of Bess Lomax Hawes to the field of folklore in New York State and beyond.

Also in this issue, Voices welcomes Nancy Solomon, folklorist and executive director of Long Island Traditions in Port Washington, New York, whose new column, View from the Waterfront, focuses on maritime folklife, the environment, and vernacular architecture. As always, we remind readers that Voices is only as strong as the many voices and perspectives you lend us through your contributions. Please keep your articles, reviews, photos, artwork, and ideas coming our way.

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“From a distance little communities seem homogeneous, even bland, but from the inside, they feel diverse and exciting.”

—Henry Glassie, Irish Folk History: Tales from the North (1982)
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NYFS Gathering for Latino Artists

The first of three gatherings for Latino artists was held on October 24, 2010, in cooperation with Long Island Traditions in Port Washington. Delegates from as far away as Attica, New York, attended to compare experiences and connect with like-minded individuals who are presenting and preserving Latino cultural arts.

Future gatherings will take place in Batavia (March 19, 2011) and Amsterdam (May 14, 2011). See the back cover for details.

Julia Gutiérez-Rivera and Juan Gutiérez of Los Pleneros de la 21, a bomba and plena performance group from New York City, demonstrate how they engage school-age children through music and dance. Photo: Nancy Solomon, Long Island Traditions

There is more than one way to support the New York Folklore Society during this holiday season!

Here’s how you can help:

• Send a tax-deductible donation directly to the New York Folklore Society. Your dollars will support our many programs, including the Latino artists’ gatherings, the annual student conference, and Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore.

• Plan to spend your holiday shopping dollars at the NYFS gallery, either online or in person. We have CDs, books, and handmade objects—all made in New York State and sold by consignment. Find us online at www.nyfolklore.org or come to our gallery at 133 Jay Street, Schenectady. Members receive a 10 percent discount.

• Purchase items online by going through www.ShopforMuseums.com or through www.Goodshop.com. Both of these platforms work with major brand retailers, with a portion of your purchase price going to a nonprofit of your choice. You can stipulate that a percentage of your purchases will go to the New York Folklore Society.

We appreciate your support!
When people leave their homeland, often they can take very few physical items with them—limited amounts of clothing, only the most prized possessions—but they can bring a store of items held within their memory: stories, folklore, poems, songs. When tapped, this vein of hidden or sometimes seemingly forgotten remembrances brings forth many gems. I recently had an opportunity to experience these gems—and collect some songs—among members of the Ukrainian diaspora in New York City.

This project was spearheaded by the Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD). CTMD was founded in 1968 and has become one of New York’s leading organizations in nurturing and preserving the traditional performing arts of the city’s ethnic communities. One means of this kind of preservation is the Ukrainian Community Cultural Initiative project, known as Ukrainian Wave. The Ukrainian Wave initiative presents aspects of traditional culture through concerts, educational programs, and recordings and strives to bring together people from diverse backgrounds to experience and enjoy these traditions. In 2008 CTMD launched the Ukrainian Women’s Voices series, which invites singers of Ukrainian and many other backgrounds to learn Ukrainian village-style singing from masters in the artform and perform these songs for the New York community.

I came to Ukrainian folk singing because of my parents. Both were very active members of the Ukrainian community in Cleveland, Ohio, and I was an active member because I was their child. At first I was resistant to all of this Ukrainian culture, but eventually, it was something I came to love and respect. When the Soviet Union dissolved, it became easier to meet and sing with individuals from Ukraine and other Eastern-block nations, and I welcomed these opportunities. Over the years, I have studied with Ukrainian singers including Nina Matvienko, Marjana Sadowska, and Lilia Pavlovka; Bulgarian singers Donka Koleva and Maria Bebeleková; and Albanian superstar Merita Halili. I received a 2002 U.S. Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship to spend ten weeks in Ukraine. I collected many extraordinary pieces, and since that time, I have had the opportunity to teach these songs to many, including the group of dedicated singers at CTMD. As the leader of the fourth Ukrainian Women’s Voices series, I was asked to collect some songs from Ukrainian seniors in New York City.

Funded with discretionary spending allocated by New York City councilwoman Rosie Mendez, the song collection took place on June 10, 2010, in the Self-Reliance Association of American Ukrainians Senior Center at 98 Second Avenue in the East Village. Ukrainian seniors gather here weekly for fellowship and bingo, but this afternoon, they had been asked to bring the songs of their youth. The first participants began to trickle in after lunch. Some had forgotten songs, but others came with song sheets in hand. One singer arrived with eight legal-sized sheets of paper with song lyrics typed to them. At the top of the page was written, “KOBASNIIUK REUNION SING-A-LONG”? It filled me with joy to think of a family coming together in person and in song.

Some of the songs were well-known canonical folk songs, like “Chorna kura” (“The Black Chicken”), while others were composed melodies. There were a few songs written by the Ukrainian composer Volodymyr Ivasiuk. Ivasiuk was a celebrated composer of the 1970s, whose infectious music was so popular that I’d venture to say his compositions have become folk songs. Among those appearing in this group of songs were “Vodohray” (“Fountain”) and “Chervona ruta” (“Red Rue”). One singer claimed she no longer had a voice for singing, but I would beg to differ, for her voice strongly led many of the songs sung that afternoon. She proclaimed when she arrived, “I have songs for you,” and soon after began sharing song after song from her song sheet. Other singers were more timid, but by the end of the afternoon, all had an opportunity to sing and share whatever they remembered.

Once a good number of people had arrived and names were recorded, the
"Њали козаки" Traditional Ukrainian folk song Performed by the Kuban Kozak Chorus

1) Іг′- кхал′- ко′- за′- ки із′ Дону до′- до′- мун під′- ма′- ну′- ли Га′- дьо Нару′

2) Га′- аро′- тем′- ми′- ді′ сак′- пр′- ви′- зай′- Га′- дьо Нару′

3) Розбуроць′- нав′- нав′- хми′- під′- ви′- нов′- соц′- ну

4) Го′- ру′- ти′- сос′- да′- го′- ру′- ти′- тай′- за′- кр′- крит′- Га′- дьо кр′- ком

5) Не′- хай′- той′- ря′- ту′- а′- хто′- до′- док′ ма′- Ц

6) А′- хто′- до′- чок ма′- не′- хай′- на′- ча′- вий′- і′- нов′- чі

за′- бра′- ли′ зсо′- бу′(у)

до′- сос′- ни′ ко′- сак′(м′)

од′ го′- ри′ до′ ну′(у)

кри′- чить′ про′- мов′- ді′(С)

не′- хай′ на′- у′- ча′(С)

gу′- лить′ не′- пус′- ка′(С)

під′- ма′- ну′- ли Га′- дьо за′- бра′- лис′ зсо′- бу′(у)

при′- ви′- зай′- Га′- дьо до′- сос′- ни′ ко′- сак′(м′)

під′- ви′- зай′- Га′- дьо до′- сос′- ни′ ко′- сак′(м′)

кри′- чить′ Га′- дьо кр′- ком кр′- чить′ про′- мов′- ді′(С)

а′- хто′- до′- чок ма′- не′- хай′ на′- у′- ча′(С)

tай′- тем′- но′- й нов′- чі гу′- лить′ не′- пус′- ка′(С)

tay tem-no-yi  no-chi hu-lyat' ne pu-skai(ye)
Traditional Ukrainian Folk Song, as Sung by the Kuban Kozak Chorus

**Yikhaly kozaky**

1. Yikhaly Kozaky iz Donu dodomu  
Pidmanuly Halyu zabraly zsobo(yu)  
Oy ty Halyu, Halyu molodaya  
Pidmanuly Halyu zabraly zsobo(yu)

2. Tay povezly Halyu temnymy lisamy  
Pryvyazaly Halyu do sosny kosa(my)  
Oy ty Halyu, Halyu molodaya  
Pryvyazaly Halyu do sosny kosa(my)

3. Rozbrelys’ po lisu nazbyraly khmyzu  
Pidpalyly sosnu od hory do ny(zu)  
Oy ty Halyu, Halyu molodaya  
Pidpalyly sosnu od hory do ny(zu)

4. Horyt’ sosna horyt’ horyt’ tay pylaye  
Krychyt’ Halya krykom krychyt’ promovlya(ye)  
Oy ty Halyu, Halyu molodaya  
Krychyt’ Halya krykom krychyt’ promovlya(ye)

5. Oy khto v lisi chuye nekhay toy ryatuye  
A khto dochok maye nekhay naucha(ye)  
Oy ty Halyu, Halyu molodaya  
A khto dochok maye nekhay naucha(ye)

6. A khto dochok maye nekhay naucha(ye)  
Tay temnoyi nochy hulyat’ ne puska(ye)  
Oy ty Halyu, Halyu molodaya  
Tay temnoyi nochy hulyat’ ne puska(ye)

**“The Cossacks Rode Home” (Summary)**

The Cossacks rode home from the Don River and took Halya with them. Oh, Halya, young Halya, they took her with them. They rode into a dark forest and tied her to a pine tree. The Cossacks gathered kindling and burned the tree from the top to the bottom. As the tree burns, Halya cries out, “If anyone can hear me, please save me, and if anyone has daughters, please warn them! Warn your daughters, and never let them go out into the dark forest!”

*Transliteration, transcription, and summary by Nadia Tarnawsky.*
were quietly sung by the keeper of the song. Unfortunately, at this juncture there was not an opportunity to record stories and personal memoirs, but my desire to return to this group and continue this type of work is very strong. There were too many songs left unsung, too many stories left untold, and too many gems left unmined. I am grateful to Ethel Raim and Eileen Condon of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance and to Irene D’Alessio and Oksana Lopatynsky of the Self-Reliance Association of American Ukrainians Senior Center for organizing this event, and I hope that there will be future chances for these seniors to recall and record these gorgeous remembrances of their homeland.

The afternoon began with songs sung by a few of the participants of the Ukrainian Women’s Voices Collective. The singers came from a variety of backgrounds and included Magda Polkowska, Julie Rozar, Cherrymae Golston, and Maria Sonevyrtsky. These singers sang a few songs that they had learned as part of our vocal workshops, in preparation for our June 12 Ukrainian Women’s Voices concert, “Seven Deadly Sins: Traditional Songs of Good and Evil,” at New York’s Ukrainian Museum. They also sang along with some of the songs the seniors presented. The voices had violin accompaniment provided by Brandon Vance, my musical collaborator and a recent graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music. The pieces sung by the CTMD workshop participants included “Vyjshla vodova” (“The Widow Emerged”), a song from the Carpathian region about incest, and “Oy, kovale” (“O, Blacksmith”), a song from the Zhytomyr region about a young girl who drowns her newborn.

I chose the concert theme in order to present some remarkable songs detailing people’s inhumanity to one another. Some songs are intended to be lessons. One piece we performed at both the senior center and the June 12 concert (to which all the seniors were invited) was “Yikhaly kozaky” (“The Cossacks Rode Home”), which details the murder of a young woman named Halya. The melody is bouncy, fun, and virally catchy, but the topic is gruesome. It is meant to be memorable, so that adolescents can learn how not to behave and how to keep themselves safe. It is sometimes possible to speak in song what is often left unspoken. Despite the seriousness of the subject matter, the seniors warmly welcomed the singing, which provided an impetus for their own sharing. By the end of the afternoon, songs were overlapping and singers from all ends of the room were offering up the songs of their youth. Some were known by many and had the support of multiple voices and others

Nadia Tarnawsky is a freelance performer and teacher. She has taught at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Baldwin Wallace College, and Allegheny College. Recent performance venues include LaMama Experimental Theatre in New York City, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, and the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle.
S sometime in the mid-1970s, a Ukrainian mother was walking through a grocery store in Cleveland. The toddler at her side spied a rack of books and lingered as the mother continued on. A few minutes later, the sounds of a Ukrainian Christmas carol could be heard, drifting from another aisle. “Where is that kid?” the mother wondered in desperation. Luckily, Mrs. Tarnawsky found her daughter, Nadia, sitting in the middle of a nearby aisle, surrounded by books and happily singing away.

As Nadia wrote in an autobiography she provided to the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, “Music has always been a part of my family’s life. My parents both sing and adore Ukrainian folk music, and how fortunate for me that they had a large collection of vinyl records of Ukrainian folk music. How fortunate also that they had such a keen desire to maintain Ukrainian culture within our home. My mother taught me how to embroider and how to draw (Ukrainian Easter eggs). My father spoke to me exclusively in Ukrainian, often to my frustration, but now to my great relief. And, of course, when a school of bandura [Ukrainian harp-lute]

Nadia Tarnawsky: A Ukrainian-American Singer’s Journey

Compiled by Eileen Condon
From autobiographical notes provided by Nadia Tarnawsky
opened in Cleveland in 1983, they signed me up as one of the first students.”

Nadia studied Western classical music on the piano and cello before she attended her first bandura camp in 1984, an experience that, she confesses, she didn’t enjoy. “It was my first time away from home, and everyone was considerably older than I was. The one good thing was that it was where I first met Julian Kytasty [director of the New York Bandura Ensemble]. We met again at camp in 1988. This was a much better experience for me, and it set me on a path.” The All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church facility in Emlenton, Pennsylvania, has been the home of the Kobzarska Sich Bandura Camp since 1988. Nestled in the Allegheny mountains on the banks of the river, as Nadia describes it, the camp was a pilgrimage site to which she would keep journeying, first as a student, next as an assistant instructor, and finally as a full-fledged faculty member.

Here Nadia first met New Jersey–based singer Lilia Pavlovsky. “Lilia was intensely interested in Ukrainian women’s polyphonic singing, and that’s what she taught in Emlenton. She was there for three consecutive years, and in that time, the women’s ensemble flourished under her direction. You must understand that this is an amazing thing. The bandura is a chronically male instrument. Boys can have a decent singing voice, get good at playing the instrument, and go on to sing with the Ukrainian Bandurist Chorus. Girls can sing really well, play the instrument well, and . . . yes, and what? For those years, those girls could work with Lilia and get an opportunity to sing powerful music together as an ensemble. It was an unparalleled experience.”

Julian eventually asked Nadia if she would follow Lilia in leading the women’s ensemble at Emlenton. Nadia served in this capacity for three years, beginning in 1994. By this point, Ukraine had become an independent nation. “This was something I never expected to see in my lifetime. . . . When the Iron Curtain dropped, the opportunities to work with musicians from Ukraine abounded, and I took advantage of everything I could.” Nadia first traveled to Ukraine in 1992 as part of a project sponsored by the Ukrainian National Association (UNA) for teaching English as a second language. She taught English for four weeks in Chernivtsi, spending weekends in the nearby village of Bedrykivtsi, where she visited family members.
and sang songs with women in the village. Nadia traveled a second time to Ukraine in 1995 with her brother and her father—the first time her father had returned since childhood.

Nadia attended Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) in Cleveland, which has a joint music program with the Cleveland Institute of Music. There she started working with actors and began learning to use her voice for the stage. As her career continued to develop in music and theater, she returned for more intensive fieldwork in Ukraine. Nadia began to perform early music at CWRU, as well. As a student in 1995 and 1996, Nadia organized the Workshop for Women’s Voices, an opportunity for women to work with Ukrainian-Canadian singer Alexis Kochan to learn Ukrainian folk music.

Nadia fell seriously ill in 1999. While recovering, she engaged in intense personal reflection, reading and translating Ukrainian poetry, especially the work of Oleksander Oles. “One day, as I was sitting [in the Cleveland Clinic] in my hospital gown, waiting for the next round of tests, I began to think about legacy, how I wanted to be remembered. At that point I determined that I wanted to create a project that would allow me to do what I love—sing Ukrainian folk music—with my closest friends and colleagues.”

Upon her recovery, Nadia asked a friend, dancer Natalie Kapeluck of Pittsburgh, to join her in creating a theater piece that told a story through modern dance, using Ukrainian folk music and poetry for its story line. Other fine Ukrainian immigrant musicians and choreographers joined in, including cimbalom player Alexander Fedoriiouk. By 2000 Nadia and friends had created their own production company, presenting musical theater based on Ukrainian literature and folk songs to American and Canadian audiences.

While teaching music and simultaneously pursuing a master’s degree in music history and ethnomusicology at Cleveland State University, Nadia received a fellowship that paid for another journey to Ukraine in 2002. She accompanied University of L’viv professor Ivan Denysiuk on an expedition to northwestern Polissia, collecting folklore about rusalky (river mermaids) along with wedding songs, songs of lamentation, and other folk songs. She finished graduate coursework and then returned to Ukraine to work with Mariana Sadowska.

“I had the opportunity to see Mariana on her occasional stateside visits, but now we were in Ukraine together. We rented a car and drove to Kriachkivka. She had to go to another village, but I ended up staying in Kriachkivka for a few days. I had seen some of the singers in this village on a documentary called O i po li dvo, but I was not prepared to hear them sing in person. The sound of their voices completely overwhelmed me.”

She stayed with Halyna Popko, the leader of the group, and filled notebook after notebook with lyrics and notes on Kriachkivka harmonies. “At one point Halyna said, ‘It’s so hard to sing it without the other voices there. These songs need a group of people to sing them.’ They are not songs I can sing alone—I need the women of this ensemble [Ukrainian Women’s Voices] to sing them, just as Halyna needed them.”

Nadia continued to teach at the Cleveland Institute of Music through July 2010. Since 2008 she has somehow found the time to fly back and forth to New York City to nurture Ukrainian Women’s Voices. She has performed and recorded with Quire Cleveland, Apollo’s Fire, and a small Ukrainian folk-fusion ensemble The Ancestors. The latter group includes excellent Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian folk musicians, such as Alexander Fedoriiouk and Brandon Vance, two-time open U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Champion. Alex and Brandon joined forces with Nadia and Ukrainian Women’s Voices in June 2010 to present the group’s concert, “Seven Deadly Sins: Traditional Songs of Good and Evil,” at the Ukrainian Museum in New York’s East Village.

The Center for Traditional Music and Dance thanks Nadia for leading the lovely singing session for seniors at the Self-Reliance Association of American Ukrainians Senior Center, and we wish her well on her recent move to Seattle, where she will explore—and enrich—the West Coast traditional and classical music scene, continuing her musical collaborations with Brandon Vance. Nadia assures us that she will be back to New York to work with Ukrainian Women’s Voices next season, no matter how great the distance.

Eileen Condon is acquisitions editor of Voices and project director at the Center for Traditional Music and Dance in New York City.
The New Obit

BY VARICK A. CHITTENDEN

He loved golf, spearmint leaf candy, jazz, blues, laughter, the company of good friends, a good story, and a well-mixed stinger. He was a kind, patient, loving man who dedicated his life to his family and helping others.

—Michael, 69, Sackets Harbor

These days, I often find myself picking up the local morning newspaper, skimming the headlines, and then going directly to the obituary page. I like to think my habit comes from living in one place for so long and knowing—or knowing of—lots of people. I don’t like to think that it’s because of my age! An old axiom among journalists is that the obit page is among the most read in the entire newspaper, before sports, stock market news, comic strips, and advice columns.

In recent years, however, I’ve been noticing some interesting changes in the content of local obituaries. Unlike the New York Times and other major city newspapers that publish only the obituaries of people whose lives and accomplishments the editors deem newsworthy, our small-town papers have long included the passing of everyone in their coverage area. The standard format included the deceased’s birthplace and parents’ names, education, marriage, work experience and employers, survivors, and funeral and burial arrangements.

John B. Johnson Jr., third-generation publisher and editor of the family-owned Watertown Daily Times, says that for a long time, their paper adhered to “strict professional standards” for obituaries, because they believe they are creating a historical record. That sometimes meant also including facts that families didn’t want, like divorces, criminal records, or suicides. But with severe belt-tightening during the recent economic downturn, the paper started to charge by the inch for obituaries and death notices, a practice common at most other papers for some time. According to Johnson, that now means that the deceased’s survivors can include (almost) anything they want in the text. The notices are now usually written by a family member or someone from the funeral home. The effect has been noticeable.

Putting aside my twitching blue pencil left from over thirty years of teaching writing, the part that interests me most is the frequent inclusion of “special interests” or “favorite things to do.” For months now, I’ve collected examples of the “new obituary” from several local sources. Here are a few.

Charlotte, 72, “enjoyed spending time with her family, gardening, crossword puzzles, reading the New York Times, preparing Hungarian dishes, and traveling. Fay, 71, ‘loved to build anything, and there was nothing that he couldn’t build when he put his mind to it.’” Irene, 89, “enjoyed square dancing with the Seaway Squares, sewing, and quilting.” Vernon, 80, “enjoyed music, playing guitar, hunting, fishing, and his cat Tip-it.” Barry, 54, “enjoyed hunting, fishing, and was an avid Jeff Gordon NASCAR fan.” Harrison, 84, “had a continuous garage sale at his house, although it was more for meeting people than it was to sell items. He loved his dog Missy.” Francis, 72, “enjoyed woodworking, gardening, and caring for his three pet turtles.”

Paul, 90, “enjoyed fishing, hunting, golf, and manhatts with his numerous good friends.” Jo, 61, “was a devoted mother, grandmother, sister, and aunt, who was loved by many. . . . It was common knowledge among family not to call at 7:30 when Jeopardy was on.” Maria, 95, “loved the Sacred Heart, Saint Anthony, Saint Jude, Saint Elizabeth Seton, and Dexter [her hometown]. . . . She loved gardening, dancing, bowling, knitting, her family and friends, and the Lawrence Welk Show.”

Some seem more like eulogies, like this one for a farm woman who died at 82:

While residing on the farm in Malone, Ellen was always known to have a big, beautiful, and bountiful garden. Once the ground was worked up in the spring, [it] was planted, maintained, and harvested by Ellen. She instilled strong Christian values in her children. Ellen enjoyed square dancing and bowling. In later years, watching the birds at the feeder or on the birdbath gave her special delight. Part of her daily routine included crossword puzzles and, more recently, completing the “jumble.” Without a doubt, watching and cheering on the New York Yankees gave her the most pleasure.

The obituary for a 27-year-old man killed in a motorcycle accident is quite telling:

Jordan was a unique person and a good father and friend. He enjoyed spending time with his family, whether it was a camping trip or kite flying with his kids. He took pleasure in just about any outdoor activity: from hunting and fishing to boating, water skiing, snowmobiling, downhill skiing, dirt bike riding, and off roading with his truck “that went one year without a dent,” spoke Jessica. “He was a motor head,” says his brother Jason. Jordan and Jason both found fun and entertainment in fireworks, mostly when they were lighting the fuse instead of observing. Those who knew and loved Jordan will remember him as an extremist who liked to have a fun time. He will be greatly missed.

Mary Jones, a bereavement counselor for our local hospice, likes it this way. She says, “We live in a death-denying culture. In grief-stricken moments after their loved one dies, family members express how they think of him or her, want to remember their loss, and want to talk about him or her.” As a folklorist, I like it too. It makes the life three-dimensional, a hint of how interesting the person was, even in their love for the simplest things. It can be the stuff of stories told by family and friends for generations to come. Although I’m not planning anything soon, this makes me think about how I’d like to be remembered. How about you?

Varick A. Chittenden
is professor emeritus of humanities at the State University of New York in Canton and The TAUNY Center project director for Traditional Arts in Upstate New York. Photo: Martha Cooper
The People’s City Report Card  

BY STEVE ZEITLIN

For a while, I’ve wanted to give a People’s Hall of Fame Award to the casting director of Law and Order. That’s not just because I’m a hopeless addict. In addition to the gritty stars, the casting always features that man putting boxes in a van or the secretary in a doctor’s office, nailing the cast of characters that populate this remarkable city. Every episode mixes the wealthy lawyers, socialites, and art collectors with the landlords, cops, and working men and women trying to make ends meet. The magic is in the mix.

Most New Yorkers recognize—and even the tourists know—that the heart of New York is not at the Met or Lincoln Center, but in the hustle and bustle, the cacophonous mix of ethnic groups, social classes, and the arts. At a time when the mayor and Chancellor Joel Klein are hell-bent on testing students, we at City Lore decided to grade the city on what is being done to preserve the grassroots creativity that makes this city unique, endlessly interesting, and forever replenished by the immigrant tides and the diverse accents, foodways, and customs they bring.

PRAISEWORTHY

1. Religious Tolerance and Respect. We applaud Mayor Bloomberg for taking a courageous stand on the Islamic Center at Ground Zero. On August 3 he stated, “We would be untrue to the best part of ourselves—and who we are as New Yorkers and Americans—if we said ‘no’ to a mosque in Lower Manhattan.” This year, the New York City Council also passed a resolution adding Eid Ul-Adha, marking the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and Eid Ul-Fitr, the end of Ramadan, as official school holidays, along with the Christian and Jewish celebrations.

2. Open Markets. According to foodways consultant Makale Faber, GrowNYC, a city agency, has done commendable work opening new markets and expanding existing ones. She mentioned that many more of the city’s markets are doing well according to the “protein factor,” which suggests that markets are stable when meat, fish, and cheese are sold in them.

TROUBLING

3. Community Gardens. New York City Community Gardens Coalition is campaigning against a new set of rules for community gardens that eliminates the legislative language that protects them and makes it easier for the gardens to be sold to developers.

4. Arts in the Schools. For many low- and middle-income New Yorkers, access to the arts begins in the schools. Reorganization of the Department of Education eliminated Project Arts, which guaranteed that a certain amount of school funding would be spent on arts education. The city gave principals discretion on how to spend their funds, and then rated them principally on their schools’ math and English language test scores. This change, along with budget cuts, has decimated arts education in the schools.

5. Drumming Circles and Ethnic Celebrations in the Parks. As a result of a brawl in the park unrelated to the drumming, the wonderful weekly Haitian drumming circle on Sundays in Prospect Park has been shut down indefinitely by the police.

MIXED

6. Street Performers. I and my fellow advocate Susie Tannenbaum were pleased that the new Chief of Transit Bureau, Ray Diaz, allowed us to address the transit police commanders and that he is sympathetic to street performers rights. However, we are still receiving about one call a week from performers who have been thrown out of Washington Square, Union Square, and Times Square.

7. Street Vendors. A conversation with Sean Basinski, director of the Street Vendor Project run by the Urban Justice Center, revealed that a few years ago the city increased fines for vendors operating in the wrong places from $250 to $1,000. On the other hand, Mayor Bloomberg and British Prime Minister David Cameron did share a hot dog from a stand outside of Madison Square Garden recently, and the city is now offering permits allowing fresh fruits and vegetables to be sold in a number of additional neighborhoods.

8. Street Parades. Robert De Vito, who outfits most of the city’s parade floats at Bond Parade Floats in Clifton, New Jersey, said that parades are still thriving in New York, though with fewer floats, as a result of the economy. But he also pointed me toward a series of articles about the recent city crackdown on parades. As Andy Newman wrote in the Times, “Everyone may love a parade, but…the department notified parade organizers throughout the city…that starting April 1, their processions must cover 25 percent less distance and may no longer exceed five hours in duration.

9. Places that Matter. Coney is such an important release valve for New York City that it deserves a category of its own. We are thrilled that New York’s State Historic Preservation Office has declared Coney Island’s amusement district eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The new Luna Park, on land the city bought back from Thor Equities, was a wonderful addition to Coney this summer. Thor appears to have begun demolition work, however, on Coney Island’s Henderson Music Hall on Surf Avenue, one of the few remnants of historic Coney.

10. Ethnic Social Clubs. No news is good news.

Overall, the Bloomberg administration has improved on the record of the Giuliani administration for supporting New York’s grassroots cultural life. Nonetheless, administrators seem intent on creating an upscale, tourist-friendly city, without recognizing that street parades and performers and places like historic Coney Island are part of what attracts visitors, makes the city distinctive—and livable. The magic is in the mix.
I n September 2010, Mike Rafferty—or, as we like to call him, “The Mighty Raff”—received the National Heritage Award, the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on the nation’s traditional artists. Quite simply, no one deserves it more. Mike has become a truly legendary figure in the long, distinguished history of Irish traditional music in America.

Mike was born in 1926, the fourth of seven children, in the village of Larraga in Ballinakill Parish, East Galway. This was an area known nationally for its great music, and particularly for its fiddlers and flute players. When he was seven, he began tin whistle lessons with an uncle and, at age twelve, picked up the flute. His main mentor was his father, who was recognized locally as one of the finest flute players in the region. His nickname was “Barrel,” given to him because he could get such a great tone from the flute, and eventually “Barrels” became the nickname of the whole family.

At that time young men and women typically completed their formal schooling at fourteen. This part of the rural west of Ireland had been hard hit economically since...
the mid-nineteenth century. Employment possibilities were severely limited, and there were few opportunities for young men like Mike.

He worked sporadically as a farmhand and also did construction work for the Land Commission, but in order to advance himself in life, he had to do what thousands from East Galway had done before him—emigrate to America. He ended up in New York and later in New Jersey, and with the help of friends already established in their new home, Mike worked at a variety of jobs, including gardening and loading supermarket trucks. He also on occasion took on a second job as a bartender. He married and began to raise a family of five children with his wife, Teresa.

These duties left little time for music, and Mike practically abandoned the flute for close to ten years. Then various musical friends from East Galway based in New York, such as Jack and Charlie Coen and Sean McGlynn, encouraged him to start playing again. He switched for a while to the silver flute and gradually recovered his technique and built his repertoire.

I first met Mike in 1975 and was impressed by his beautiful, unhurried, lyrical playing and the subtle swing to the music which has been indelibly associated with the East Galway style since the early twentieth century. Mike had learned the tunes and stylistic nuances by ear, like almost all of the traditional musicians of his generation.

By then he had most decisively regained his musical skills and was part of the distin-

guished group of musicians who appeared in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1976 as part of the Smithsonian Institution’s celebration of the American Bicentennial. From that point on, he widened his musical horizons and started to make a name for himself, first with the touring group The Green Fields of America, and then at scores of concerts and festivals all over the country.

He recorded on two compilation albums issued by Rounder Records in the late 1970s: Irish Traditional Music from the Eastern United States and The Light through the Leaves. He was also featured on a Shanachie album named Fathers and Daughters, where he performed with his daughter, Mary Rafferty. Mike was extremely gratified and delighted when Mary—entirely of her own volition—took up the music and became a fine player on the tin whistle, flute, and accordion. After Mike retired from his supermarket job in 1989, he began to make more and more appearances with Mary. They were a grand combination. Mary had learned most of her music from her father, and the fit was perfect. They made three recordings together—The Dangerous Reel, The Old Fireside Music, and The Road to Ballinakill—with Mike now back on the wooden flute, and each one is a gem filled with beautiful tunes played with gentle understated virtuosity, very much rooted in the East Galway style.

Mike put out his first solo album at the age of seventy-eight, which he aptly titled Speed 78 (2004). It is great stuff. In fact his playing on all these albums demonstrates that his music has gone from strength to strength since his retirement. He continues to astonish his fellow musicians and aficionados by his level of technical skill, which has not diminished in the slightest with the passing years.

Last year Mike Rafferty recorded a beautiful album, The New Broom, with his great friend and fellow New Jersey resident, fiddler Willie Kelly, and Mary’s husband Donal Clancy, who accompanied on guitar and bouzouki. It makes absolutely delightful listening.

In America and in Ireland, Mike’s fame has grown within the ranks of traditional musicians of all ages. He is unanimously seen as the “real deal,” representing a kind of timeless center in the venerable musical tradition he so proudly espouses. And it’s not just his musicality that makes him so beloved. He is a gentleman to the core—gracious, good-humored, and good-natured, and willing to help anyone who comes his way.

He truly is the Mighty Raff. —

Mick Moloney is Global Distinguished Professor of Irish Studies and Music at New York University. He has recorded and produced more than sixty albums of traditional music and advised on festivals and concerts all over the United States. Mick also served as the artistic director for several major arts tours, including The Green Fields of America, an ensemble of Irish musicians, singers, and dancers that has toured the country several times. In 1999, he too received the National Heritage Award from the National Endowment for the Arts—the highest official honor a traditional artist can receive in the United States.

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Midwife

BY PAUL MARGOLIS

From the time before recorded history, there have been women whose role it was to help mothers safely deliver their babies into the world. The earliest recorded references to midwives and their work appear on Egyptian papyrus scrolls dating back to 1500–1900 B.C. The modern term midwife derives from two Old English words —“mid” and “wyf”— that combine to mean “with woman.”

Barbara Sellars has been a midwife for more than three decades. She was led into a career in this ancient field by her own experience in childbirth in the late 1960s, when, as she said, “Nobody felt the need to educate young women”—and she believed it shouldn’t be that way. She had been treated impersonally by the medical and hospital staffs during the birth of her first daughter in 1968. When she was expecting her second daughter, a neighbor mentioned the Lamaze method of childbirth. Barbara took a six-week Lamaze class and tried to educate herself more about pregnancy and birth, but “there wasn’t much out there.”

The birth of her second daughter was more satisfying, thanks to her Lamaze training, so Barbara decided to become a Lamaze teacher herself. She became disillusioned, however, because she would try to talk to doctors on behalf of expectant women, but “the doctors did whatever they pleased” and ignored her.

Then Barbara met a midwife who was also teaching women how to be Lamaze instructors, and by the end of the week’s workshop, she had decided to become a midwife herself. She went to nursing school at the University of Texas and became a registered nurse, which at the time was the traditional first step in the training of midwives. She then earned a midwifery degree from Yale in 1979. When she graduated from the Yale midwifery program, Barbara went to work at North Central Bronx Hospital. It was one of the first hospitals in the New York City public health-care system where midwives did the majority of deliveries.

Barbara has a practice, CBS Midwifery on lower Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, that she shares with another midwife. CBS Midwifery was founded by two midwives. Barbara joined the practice in 1985, then later bought out the founders.

Barbara is associated with Saint Luke’s–Roosevelt Hospital in midtown Manhattan. New York State law requires that midwives have written practice agreements with a doctor who can be available as a backup, in case of complications or if surgery is needed. Out of all the births at the Birth Center at Roosevelt Hospital, where Barbara has privileges, she estimates that only about 30 percent need more intensive medical intervention than a midwife can provide. Midwives accept insurance, just as doctors do, for delivering babies and for prenatal care. Midwives’ services include more than just delivering babies. They also provide health counseling and education, not only for the woman, but also for her family.

During the era of immigration into the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, midwives often brought their skills from overseas and worked in immigrant communities. By the 1920s, however, doctors had largely forced the midwives out of work. Doctors could offer “modern” medical techniques and anesthesia; they had powerful professional organizations and were associated with hospitals. They accused midwives of being untrained and dirty and had laws passed to prevent them from delivering babies. The result was a rise in the mortality of infants and mothers, especially in areas where there were few doctors.

Despite these threats to the profession, the first midwife school was established in the United States in the mid-1930s. Midwifery remains far more common in Europe and much of the rest of the world than in the United States. In many other countries, most births are assisted by a midwife. In this country, poor women were more likely to rely on midwives, but by the 1960s, middle-class women began to ask why they couldn’t have the option of a midwife’s care. Private midwife practices began in New York City in 1968. Currently, midwifery qualifying programs are offered in New York City at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, Columbia University, and several other schools in the area, and there are five thousand midwives in New York State alone.

Barbara Sellars is part of a continuum of women’s health care that goes back to Egyptian times and before. She is the practitioner of an ancient profession that has survived into modern times and is continuing to gain in popularity and respect.
Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders has hosted a weekly gathering of writers—mostly Mexican immigrants—for the past two years, a shared project with the New York Writers Coalition. Mary Ellen Sanger facilitates the group. The group recently produced a chapbook, Voces con Eco: Writing from Mano a Mano, which was launched through the Mexican Cultural Institute, a project sponsor, at the Mexican Consulate in New York last May. The book collects poetry and prose writings of sixteen writers and is available through Mano a Mano, the New York Writers Coalition, and Amazon.com.

Begun in 2000 as a project of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, Mano a Mano is an independent, New York–based nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating Mexican culture in the United States and promoting the understanding of Mexican traditions among immigrants, artists, educators, and the general public. Mano a Mano is proud to present a sampling of the works of five writers published in Voces con Eco. We encourage you to purchase the book and support the work of creative artists in our immigrant communities. Writers in the New York area who wish to become part of this active community of writers should contact Mano a Mano at (212) 587-3070 or info@manoamano.us.

As the executive director of Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders, I have watched the Creative Writing Workshop for Mexican Immigrant Writers grow over the past two years. As we finish our workday on Mondays at Mano a Mano, the doorbell begins to ring at intervals: the writers arrive! Sloughing off the prodigious stresses of their city lives, they enter a transformed space of collective creativity. The expectation and camaraderie of the assembling group is thrilling.

Presiding over the writers is the luminous Maria Elena (Mary Ellen Sanger). The joy she brings to the work and her unparalleled capacity to catalyze creativity in all the writers is an inspiration. Epitomizing the philosophy of the New York Writers Coalition, the workshop she leads is a space of unconditional support and acceptance: a haven that is sweet and sometimes savory. While psychologists may talk of Monday Syndrome as something to be overcome, here at Mano a Mano, “Los Lunes”—the Monday people, as they call themselves on their blog—have turned that dread on its head: the week starts out with anticipation.

Mano a Mano is dedicated to celebrating Mexican culture, an endless font of expressive tradition. Artists are at the center of everything we do, and we view the arts as a bridge of communication across cultures and a path to personal and social integration. Thus far, more than forty people have passed through our writers’ workshop: authors of many ages and experience levels, from New York City, Westchester County, and New Jersey. Nothing moves me more in my work than to pass a new face coming through the door as I depart for home on Monday evening. When that fledgling writer asks me, ¿Es aquí donde escriben? (Is this where they come to write?), my heart fills with delight.

May the door to expression always remain open. ¡Qué vivan los escritores!

—Emily Socolov, Executive Director
Mano a Mano: Mexican Culture Without Borders
“Onion, Castaway, Moon.” Write.

Each week, the writers at the Mano a Mano Creative Writing Workshop for Mexican Immigrant Writers start with an idea such as this. They can use it or not—change it, use part of it, or none of it. They can write on what the idea stirs up or what it means to them literally. The writers choose their approach. The only thing that is consistent is that each writer finds, through the act of putting pen to paper, a personal thread to unravel, sometimes unmasking possibilities from the most unlikely of phrases. And nobody sits idle. Even the newest writers around the table quickly tune into the uncommon freedom to create, and they begin, often with no idea where they will end.

It’s a familiar dynamic for this mostly immigrant group. They are discovering their own creativity as they open roads—now with their pens. The stories tonight will not likely be strictly about onions or moons, but they will include the scent of frying onions in a mother’s kitchen and the pale gold sliver of moon that munched at the Empire State Building on the way to work. The diversity of reactions to a single phrase echoes the diversity of responses to their lives in New York City. Through poetry, in prose, with humor, as fable, as treatise on love or cautionary tale, the stories told by these writers are as varied as their experiences.

In that room on that night, they are all writers. Outside they are mothers, nurses, lawyers, pedicab operators, kitchen help, and art restorers. Having previously written is not a prerequisite for participating in the group. Currently the group has both practiced writers and writers who are just discovering their voices. The writing system used by the New York Writers Coalition is based on the belief that everyone has a voice, and given the proper space, time, and respect, the voices will emerge. The writers not only write as a group, but also read their fresh work to each other—a powerful experience, as having a safe platform where one can be heard helps writers develop confidence in their own voices.

At the blog (loslunes.wordpress.com) where group members can post their work, a “word cloud” collects the themes and shows that they have taken on everything from hope and mythology to silence and love. The city and the country seem to have equal airtime, as both immigrants and U.S.-born writers remember (or invent) a nostalgic Mexico, Nicaragua, or El Salvador.

These pieces, excerpted from Voces con Eco: Writing from Mano a Mano—published in 2010 by the New York Writers Coalition, with the support of Mano a Mano and the Mexican Cultural Institute—show a diversity of style, points of view, approach, and voice. They show the diversity that is New York City, and the originality that each person brings to this city’s story as they open their own stories...now with their pens.

—Mary Ellen Sanger, Workshop Leader
New York Writers Coalition

Participants in the Creative Writing Workshop for Mexican Immigrant Writers, 2009. From left: Mariel Escalante, Tatiana Mendoza, Rosio Ramos, Alberto Bremermann, Mary Ellen Sanger, Luz Aguirre, Raúl Hurtado, Flavio Tochimani, Abelardo Durán, Maria Cruz, and Luis Ángel Ortega. Photo: Mariel Escalante
Evil Eyes
Luz Aguirre

You can see evil in people’s eyes. It is like a flash; you can see darkness even in the lightest eyes. Every day I see him and he sees me. Somewhere in this city, he has something to do; it ties him to a schedule to which he is a slave. In the beginning, I started moving more and more to the cars in the front and to the ones in the back, but it did not work. When I turn, he is there, ghostly. Whenever I scan the narrow train cars, I fall into his watchful eyes. He may be in the car I am in, or one or two further back, but his gaze always tortures and enslaves me. I avoid his gaze but it is heavy, pervasive. I have the feeling that if I move, I will die. In the corners of my brain, I cannot find a reason for this unstable thought. When he arrives at his destination I sense it, the trepidation vanishes. I turn, I look for him, but he is not there. In this space, which I own and he violates, he no longer exists, and I can move again freely though the world. It is strange; with time, it has become an event I need in my daily life.

Ojos Malvados
Luz Aguirre

Puedes ver la maldad en los ojos de las personas. Es como un destello, hasta en los ojos más claros puedes ver obscuridad. Todos los días; lo veo y me ve. En algún punto de esta ciudad, tiene algo que hacer que lo ata a un horario al que es esclavo. Al principio me fui moviendo más y más; a los vagones de enfrente, o a los vagones de atrás, pero no funcionó. Cuando voltee; ahí está, fantasmal. Siempre que escaneo los angostos vagones, caigo en su mirada acechante. Puede estar en el vagón en el que estoy, o uno o dos más allá, pero su mirada siempre me tortura, y esclaviza. Evito su mirada pero me pesa, es penetrante. Tengo la sensación de que si me muevo de lugar; moriré. En las esquinas de mi cerebro no encuentro argumento para este inestable pensamiento. Cuando llega a su destino; lo siento, el temor se desvanece. Volteo, lo busco y ya no está. En este espacio, el que me pertenece y el viola, ya no existe, y me puedo mover por el mundo nuevamente con libertad. Es raro, con el tiempo se ha vuelto un evento que necesito en mi diario vivir.
Birth: First Encounter with My Father
Leonardo Anzu
Trans. Luz Aguirre

It is midnight, and like every night, everything seems to be at peace. Images float through my mind and I feel calm, somewhat nostalgic. I think of the whole production, everything that happens or has happened, I think of my fate, of God’s blessings, of my faults and mistakes, my triumphs and tribulations, in everything that occurs in life. I have made plenty of laps with these ideas. I have always wanted to write something special, something other than formulated words, adorned with poem or verse, something that speaks about us, when we met, something that will say everything about everything, without hurting either of us. It is very difficult, I almost cannot see the lines of my notebook, my tears blur my vision; like your age dulls your eyes. Do not think that I write because I’m resentful . . . no. It is necessary for us to be at peace. I want to imagine the day I was born.

I imagine you: you are getting rid of the weeds on your land. The year is 1979, midday, plenty of sunshine, your machete on your belt, wearing a hat. Youightly kick the playful dog between your feet to leave you alone to conclude your day’s work. You seem a little worn out, but focused on what’s happening in the room of the adobe house. My mother is in labor, my grandmothers are nervous, cheering her. The midwife is unyielding, accustomed to all this. Cries of pain and tears, sweat and blood. I let out a cry, I breathe, I breathe and cry. My grandfather hears me from the yard, anxiously waiting for me while weaving a chair with broken legs. He hears my cry and crosses himself. He thanks the heavens that I’m alive. My grandmother comes out yelling “He has arrived . . . It’s a boy!” Then my grandfather yells to you, “Come, hurry up, you have a baby! You have a son!”

You forget your fatigue and run to meet me. The dog follows you, and you hurry your pace. The wind blows your hat, but you do not care. You run to see me. Before entering, the midwife clouds you in rosemary smoke, according to her to remove the bad spirits and bad air. Finally you enter the room, but you cannot see me because it’s dark. You blink and the first thing you see is my mother smiling, her black hair, wet with sweat. You look at her side and there I am. The midwife congratulates you and tells you, “In the field the birds are dancing, thrushes, because you have someone who will plant with you, you have someone to accompany you!” You draw near, quietly, and watch me. I do not see you but I feel you; I note your smell and your breath. I complain a bit, as if to greet you. And at the door your father, my grandfather, weeps at seeing you again being a father, again being a man.

After this fantasy, a memory crossed my mind, and I think it is the first real memory I recall. I see you one morning waving goodbye to my mother. She sleepily welcomes a kiss, I, sleepy as well, lie on the floor on a mat and look at you, as you smile nervously. You tell my mother, “Take care of the kids. I’ll come back later.” My mother answers, “Go with care.” And for five years I did not see you, five years that every night, all nights, my mother held me, hugging me, perhaps to protect herself, and bear your absence, perhaps to protect me.

Already six years old, and with my imagination sharp as the tip of a needle, I saw you coming up the paved road with two suitcases at your side, with your well-shined shoes and your fashionable hair. It is almost dusk, when the sun kisses the mountains, when animals climb trees, and when the light of the fireflies begins to flash in the ravine. That is the way I see you coming, and stretching out your arms you yell, “Hey kid, come here!” I was playing on the ground with some stones, stones that were my cars or motorcycles, or my horses. I get up suddenly, run to embrace you, ignoring the gravel which digs at my callused feet. You leave your bags on the ground, lifting me all the way overhead with your strong arms. You whirl me around, then I see myself flying, flying in circles I see your smiling face that says you love me, you are happy to see me, and nothing else matters.

But you were on the other side of the world, as my grandfather would say, in that place known as El Norte. He showed me the only contact you had with us, an envelope full of postage stamps, a letter, where you apologize and say how much you miss us, but it is a sacrifice for us to have a better life, so that we could have it all. I didn’t have you close, but if you were, I’d tell you that close to you I had it all.

To my father who, like every human in the world, stumbled and fell, but was able to get up and move on. This is one of the values that I learned from him.
El Parto: Primer Encuentro con Mi Padre
Leonardo Anzuces Ruiz

Es media noche y como todas las noches, parece estar todo tranquilo. En mi mente pasan varias imágenes y mis sentimientos calmados, a veces nostálgicos. Piense en todo el sistema, en todo lo que ocurre o ha ocurrido, en mi suerte, en la bendición de Dios, en mis faltas y errores, en mis triunfos y caídas, en todo lo que se presenta en la vida. Le he dado muchas vueltas a mis ideas, siempre he querido escribir algo especial, algo que no sean palabras formuladas adornadas de poemas o versos, algo que hable de nosotros, de cuando en esta vida nos reunimos, algo que diga de todo, pero que no nos hiera ni uno ni otro, es muy difícil, casi no veo los renglones de mi libreta, mis lagrimas empañan mi vista así como la edad opaca tu mirada. No creas que todo lo que voy a escribir es porque estoy resentido... no. Es necesario para estar tranquilos, quiero imaginarme de cuando nací.

Te imagino, tú quitando la mala hierba de tu sembrado, año de 1979, medio día, mucho sol, tu machete en el cinto y sombrero, el perro entre tus pies juguetón le das una liviana patada para que te deje tranquilo a terminar tu jornada. Te veo un poco fatigado, pero atento de lo que está pasando en el cuarto de la casa hecho de puro adobe. Mi mamá en pleno parto, mis abuelas nerviosas; a mi madre echando porras. La partera firme acostumbrada a todo aquello. Gritos de dolor y llanto, sudor y sangre. Suelto el llanto, respiro y grito. Mi abuelo me escucha, que en el patio ansioso me esperaba mientras tejía una silla de patas quebradas. Escucha mi llanto y se persigna. Agradece al cielo porque estoy con vida. Sale mi abuela gritando “¡ya nació!... nació hombre!” Entonces desde ahí, mi abuelo te grita “¡vén apúrate, es un niño, es un hombre!”

Se te olvida el cansancio y corre para verme. El perro te sigue y tú aceleras el trote. El viento vuelta tu sombrero, pero no te importa. Tú corres adelante para verme. Antes de entrar, la partera te fumiga con humo de romero, según ella para quitar todas las malas vibras y el mald aire. Por fin entras al cuarto, pero no puedes verme porque está obscurito. Parpadones y lo primero que ves es a mi madre sonriente. Su pelo, negro, mojado de sudor. Miras al costado y ahí estoy yo, te felicita la partera y te dice “¡en el campo están bailando los pájaros, los tordos, pues ya tienes quién va a sembrar, ya tienes quién te va acompañar!” Te aceras delicado y me ves. Yo no te veo pero te siento, apercibo tu olor y tu aliento. Me quejo un poquito, como saludándote. Y en la puerta tu padre, mi abuelo, que llora por verte a ti otra vez siendo padre, otra vez siendo hombre.

Después de esta fantasía; en mi mente cruza un recuerdo, y creo que es la primera memoria grabada. Te veo una madrugada despiéndote de mi madre. Ella adormitada te recibe un beso, yo también adormitado, acostado en el suelo sobre un petate te miro, y tú, nervioso, sonríes. Le dices a mi madre “ahí cuidas de los niños, yo luego regreso.” Mi madre te contesta “te vas con cuidado.” Y luego cinco años no te vi, cinco años que cada noche; todas las noches, mi madre se apretaba a mí abrazándome, no sé si para protegerse ella y soportar tu ausencia o era para protegerme a mí.

Ya con seis años encima, y con la imaginación en la punta de una aguja, te veía llegar subiendo por esa calzada empedrada, con dos maletas a los lados, con tus zapatos bien boleados y con tu peinado a la moda. Casi al atardecer, cuando el sol besa la montaña, cuando los animales se suben a los árboles, y cuando la luz de las luciérnagas empieza a parpadear en el barranco, así te veía llegar, y extendiendo tus brazos me gritas “¡hey muchacho ven acá!” Mientras yo jugando en el suelo con la tierra, con unas piedras, que imagino son carros, o motocicletas, o que son mis caballos, me levanto bruscamente y corro a abrazarte, sin importarme la grava que se clava en mis pies llenos de callos. Dejas tus maletas en el piso, me levantas hasta lo más alto, con tus brazos fuertes. Luego me das vueltas, entonces me veo volar, volando en círculos veo tú cara sonriente; que me dices que me quieres, que estás feliz de verme, y no me importa más.

Pero tú estabas en el otro lado del mundo. Así le decía mi abuelo, a ese lugar conocido como el Norte. Me mostraba el único contacto que tenías con nosotros, un sobre con muchos sellos postales, una carta, donde te disculpabas y decías lo mucho que nos extrañabas, pero que era un sacrificio; para poder darnos un cambio de vida, para tenerlo todo. No te tenía cerca pero si lo estuvieras, te diría que junto a ti lo tenía todo.

*A mi padre que como todo humano en el mundo, se tropezó y cayó, pero supo levantarse y seguir adelante; y, eso es uno de los valores que me enseñó.*
My America!

Betsy Lainez

Trans. Luz Aguirre

You saw me arrive, 
and the same smile left your red lips.

I admired the environment, 
the immensity of your structure, 
and seeing me with those huge eyes, 
resembling pieces of heaven, 
you wanted to say: 
you are not the only one, neither the first, nor the last.

Without asking, or wanting, 
you would have become that adoptive mother, 
self-sacrificing, and dedicated.

You have provided, and lend me your children's toys. 
You showed me your gardens, you showed me your hospitals, 
your mountains, your rivers, your lakes.

You taught me your laws and discipline. 
You let me rest on your land, 
You were self-sacrificing, gentle, and tender.

Now, now, 
your daughter that came to seek you 
and without words  
requested to be adopted, 
without laws, without lawyers, without manuscripts, 
without midwives, 
and without birth pains.

You let me attach to your skirts, 
and you covered me with your shadow.

You protected me with your immense mountains and ridges, 
you quenched my thirst with the vastness 
and the coarseness of your rivers.

You showed me the calm you carry in your veins. 
You showed me hierarchy, with which you were born. 
And you gave me open pastures to run.

My America, 
I reflected myself in the vastness of your sky-blue eyes. 
Now I have to leave. 
But not before I thank you, and tell you, 
I am returned or carried by magnetism, 
where my umbilical cord is. 
It is not a lack of appreciation, 
but the call of my spirit, 
which brings me and shows me the exploration, 
and the origin of my being.

America, America. 
I admire you, 
I respect you and I love you.

The rest of my life is not enough to let you know: 
Thank you for your ru-ru-llos, 
when I was just a child, 
and when you taught me to walk upright.

My America. 
I'm leaving, but I leave knowing that you exist, and always will, 
because you are the plentiful, the vast, 
and you are the woman who never gets tired 
and always has for everyone who comes to your pastures, 
that never sleeps 
but is always passive.

America, America 
I love you.
Llegar me viste,
y esa sonrisa de siempre se escapó de tus labios rojos.

Admiré el ambiente,
la inmensidad de tu estructura,
y al verme con esos ojos inmensos,
que parecen pedazos de cielo,
me quisiste decir:
no eres la única, ni la primera, ni la última.

Sin pedirlo, ni quererlo,
te habrías convertido en esa madre adoptiva,
abnegada, y dedicada.

Me proporcionaste y me prestaste los juguetes de tus hijos.
Me enseñaste tus jardines, me enseñaste tus hospitales,
tus montañas, tus ríos, tus lagos.

Me enseñaste tus leyes,
y me enseñaste disciplina.
Me dejaste descansar sobre tus tierras,
fuiste abnegable, suave y tierna.

Ahora, ahora,
esta tu hija que te llegó a buscar,
y que sin palabras,
te pidió que la adoptaras,
sin leyes, ni abogados, ni manuscritos, sin parteras,
y sin dolores del parir.

Me dejaste apelarme a tus faldas
y me cubriste con tu sombra.

Me protegiste con tus inmensas montañas y cordilleras,
me saciaste la sed, con la inmensidad
y la bastedad de tus ríos.

Y me enseñaste la calma que llevas en tus venas.
Y me enseñaste jerarquía, con la que tú naciste.
Y me distes los potreros abiertos para poder correr.

América Mía,
quede verme ante la inmensidad de tus ojos azules,
como el cielo.
En estos momentos tengo que partir.
Pero no sin antes agradecerte y decirte,
que soy regresada o llevada por el magnetismo,
donde esta mi cordón umbilical.
no es falta de agradecimiento,
si no el llamado de mi espíritu,
que me lleva y me enseña la búsqueda,
y el origen de mi ser.

América, América,
que tanto te admiro,
que tanto te respeto y que tanto te amo.
No me alcanzaría el resto de mi vida, para poder decirte:
que cuanto agradezco tus ru-ru-lllos,
cuando apenas era una criatura,
y cuando me enseñaste a caminar erecta.

América Mía.
me voy, pero me voy sabiendo que existes,
y que existirás siempre,
que eres la abundante, la inmensa,
y eres esa mujer que nunca se cansa
y siempre tiene para todo aquel que llega a sus potreros,
que nunca duerme,
pero siempre esta pasiva.

América, América
Te amo.
Some years ago I found my Little Honey Eyes, then after a few months I lost him. I suffered, but not so much, because I always had the hope of finding him anew.

Incredibly, one day I found him, I found him! I couldn’t believe it! He was even more beautiful than the first time I saw him.

Oh my God! How beautiful he was! My happiness was so great, so great that it didn’t fit in my body. Just only to think that I might lose him again caused an unexpected and inexplicable sadness, and only at that moment did I realize, Oh my God! I realized that I loved him and needed him at my side.

From that day, as soon as I awake, I give thanks to God for making possible his return. Return? I don’t know if one day he left, I don’t know if one day I lost him, or worse even, O my God! I don’t know if one day I had him with me. I don’t know if one day he felt my presence and my silent love. Could he have heard my internal voice that called to him in shouts and howls that I released every day, every night that I didn’t feel him near me?

My Little Honey Eyes, my Little Honey Eyes, come, I need you. I want to know where you are. I want to know if you’re okay. Are they treating you well? Are you happy? Do you not miss me? Can you live without my pampering and attention? How do you do it? Because I can’t manage it, nor do I want to live without your pampering, without your little honey eyes looking at me profoundly with that gaze so tender, so clear, so transparent, begging me: want me, love me, here I am solely for you . . .

And his tail, Oh my God! His tail! How he moved it to and fro when he heard my voice, no matter how far away I was, he reacted with his little tail straight up when he heard my voice, Oh my God! How happy it made me to feel that . . .

His barks, oh my goodness! His barks were like poems whispering in my ear: you make me happy, you give me peace, by your side I feel safe, loved, complete. Don’t leave me, even though sometimes I act badly, keep me, don’t abandon me, give me that unconditional love that only you can give to me. Please don’t leave me, don’t leave me, because without you I feel lost.

Oh my goodness! Now my Little Honey Eyes is very sad, and I don’t know how to console him. I give him all I have, I feed him my caresses, with my pampering and my love, and even then his little honey eyes still look very sad. I don’t want to think it, but I should. Does he no longer feel happy with me? Will he abandon me? Oh my goodness! Would he do it? Would he leave me again in the dark? In the uncertainty? In my desperation? In my sadness? Oh my goodness! I don’t want that. I don’t want it.

Please, please, my God, I’m desperate for someone to help me to learn to cure the sadness of my Little Honey Eyes. What must I do to keep him with his little honey eyes full of happiness by my side, I don’t want him to die . . . that sentiment that unites us and will unite us in all of our future lives. My dog, my dog, my Little Honey Eyes, my Little Honey Eyes I love you . . . I need you so much. Don’t abandon me, because without you I will die.
Mis Ojitos de Miel

Claudia Urey

Algunos años atrás, me encontre con mis Ojitos de Miel, luego pasado unos meses lo perdí. Sufrí pero no tanto porque siempre tuve la esperanza de reencontrarlo nuevamente.

Un día prodigiosamente me lo encontre, ¡¡¡Me lo encontre!!! ¡¡¡No podía creerlo!!! Estaba más lindo que cuando lo vi por vez primera.

¡Oh Dios mío! ¡Qué lindo que estaba! Mi alegría era tan grande, tan grande que no cabía en mi cuerpo. Solo pensar que lo perdería nuevamente, me provocaba una tristeza inesperada e inexplicable y solo en ese momento me di cuenta, ¡Oh Dios mío!, me di cuenta... de cuánto lo amaba, y lo necesitaba a mi lado.

Desde ese día, todos los días cuando me levanto, le doy gracias a Dios, por haber hecho posible su regreso. ¿Regreso? No sé si algún día se fue, no sé si algún día lo perdí, o peor aún, ¡Oh Dios mío! No sé si algún día lo tuve conmigo. No sé si algún día sintió mi presencia y mi amor silencioso. Habrá escuchado mi voz interna que lo llamaba a gritos o ladridos que yo daba cada día, cada noche que no lo sentía conmigo:

Mis Ojitos de Miel, mis Ojitos de Miel, ven te necesito. Quiero saber dónde estás. Quiero saber si estás bien. ¿Te están tratando bien? ¿Sos feliz? ¿No me extrañas? ¿Puedes vivir sin mis mimos y mis atenciones? ¿Cómo lo haces? Porque yo no puedo, ni quiero vivir sin tus mimos, sin tus ojitos de miel mirándome profundamente, con esa mirada tan tierna, tan limpia, tan transparente, pidiéndome: quiéreme, ámame, mírame, cuidame, aquí estoy solo para ti... 

Y su cola, ¡Oh mi Dios!, su colita como la giraba de un lado a otro, cuando escuchaba mi voz, por muy lejos que yo estuviera, él reaccionaba con su colita parada cuando escuchaba mi voz. ¡Oh dios mío! qué feliz me hacía sentir eso... 

Sus ladridos, ¡Oh Dios mío! sus ladridos eran como poemas susurrándome al oído: tú me haces feliz, tú me das paz, a tu lado me siento seguro, amado y completo... y no me dejes, aunque algunas veces me porté mal, consérvame, no me abandones, dame ese amor incondicional que solo tú me lo puedes dar. Por favor, no me dejes, no te dejes, que sin ti me siento perdido.

¡Oh Dios mío! ahora mis Ojitos de Miel está muy triste y no sé como consolarlo, le doy todo lo que poseo, lo alimento con mis caricias, con mis mimos y mi amor y aun así sus ojitos de miel se ven muy tristes. No quiero pensarlo pero debo de hacerlo. ¿Ya no se siente bien conmigo? ¿Me abandonará? ¡Oh Dios mío! ¿Lo hará? ¿Me dejará nuevamente en la oscuridad, en la incertidumbre, en mis desesperanzas, en mis tristezas? ¡Oh Dios mío! No quiero eso. No lo quiero.

Por favor, por favor ¡Dios mío!, estoy desesperada que alguien me ayude a saber cómo sanar la tristeza de mis Ojitos de Miel. ¿Qué debo de hacer para conservarlo con sus ojitos de miel llenos de felicidad a mi lado?, no quiero que se muera... ese sentimiento que nos une y que nos unirá en todas nuestras vidas futuras. Mi perro, mi perro, mis Ojitos de Miel, mis Ojitos de Miel cuánto te amo... cuánto te necesito. No me abandones que yo sin ti me muero.
Barbershops bring me bad memories. That's why I keep my hair long.

My bad relationship with them (the barbershops) has nothing to do with fear of scissors or with the memory of a chopped cut done in poor taste.

You see: it is only that I never knew my father, or rather, I saw him only once.

One evening while lying on my stomach playing with my cars, my mother called me and said, “Get ready, your father is coming to take you to cut your hair.”

I didn’t know what to think and turned back on my stomach. The bell rang. Mom opened the door and from her mouth came three words: “Yeah . . . come in.”

I was there, still lying on my tummy on the floor, when suddenly before my eyes a pair of strange shoes appeared. A hoarse voice (strange) greeted me. A strange hand helped me up (I looked at his face with the fear reserved for observing a solar eclipse). He took me to a strange car. We went through strange streets.

Finally we reached our destination: Barbershop “The Sailor.” The place was very spacious with sea motifs, ships painted on the walls. I remember a breasty blond mermaid riding a seahorse. I remember fish nets hanging from the ceiling. I felt trapped.

On one of those red plastic-covered chairs, a boy sat, his face like a humiliated prisoner of war.

An old man in thick glasses and white coat wasbusily cutting his victim’s hair left and right, as if to dispel his soul. The boy seemed to be hypnotizing himself in the mirror to prevent such degradation. (A child sees in the mirror something very different from what an adult sees.)

The child came down off the throne of the wretched. The barber shook his apron heavily to prepare it for his next victim. I got up on the chair. Other kids looked at me.

The old man turned to my father. “How do you want it?” My father exclaimed with some certainty, “Short, nice, like a young man.”

Before the mirror I was a spectator of my imposed transformation. I felt like a piece of property. I wanted to disappear for a moment. I set my eyes on a giant ship’s wheel on one of the walls of the place. I imagined myself taking that big wheel with both hands and steering this ship towards my escape, with all these pirates behind me talking about economics, politics, and things that do not shine in my universe. The barber stopped cutting. He passed a brush with baby powder on my neck and shoulders. “What do you think?” said the old man to my father.

He just nodded. “Like a young man, right?” 

We left. During the ride home, Dad gave me life lessons that to this day I can’t remember. The car stopped. Mom met me at the door of the house. I got out of the car, and it just left. My mother touched my head as if trying to find a thorn.

Dedicated to the work of Alice Miller.
About the Authors

**Luz Aguirre** has lived in New York for more than twenty years. She was born in Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico. She is utterly in love with her culture and lives it to the fullest in this marvelous city filled with *Mexicanidad*. She has a wonderfully supportive family and is the mother of a nine-year-old. She has participated for a year in the workshop led by Mary Ellen Sanger at Mano a Mano, where she also works. A contributor to the *Los Lunes* blog, she hopes someday to write about urgent issues, such as immigration.

**Leonardo Anzures Ruíz** is Pueblan to his core, forced into exile by the political, economic, and social crises that prevail in beautiful, wounded Mexico. He emigrated to the United States bringing a backpack full of dreams, which has now become a suitcase full of nightmares. He works in a kitchen to pay his expenses and is an actor and writer for pleasure in the city of New York. The city closed its doors to him—but he has been able to sneak underneath, if only to bring the message of his work to the whole community. Leo has been an active member of Mano a Mano since its early days and has performed widely with La Carpa street theater throughout the city. His piece “Birth” is part of a larger unpublished work, *Las Memorias de Facundo* (*Memories of Facundo*). He is seeking a publisher for his manuscript and asks that helpful inquiries be directed to him at anzurestlan@gmail.com.

**Claudia Urey** is from León, Nicaragua, and has been in New York and New Jersey since she arrived in the United States seven years ago. She says her mother is the most important person in her life. From an early age, Claudia has worked to help those most in need. She currently works in a program that gives assistance to Latino immigrants and cites among her driving passions, justice and reading.

**Betsy Lainez** is from El Salvador and has been in New York since her arrival in the United States almost thirty years ago. She credits her mother with being the pillar and inspiration of her large family of brothers and sisters. Betsy enjoys her career that gives support and assistance to those around her.

**Ricardo Hernández** was born in autumn by San Francisco Bay. His mother is from Chihuahua and his father from the State of Mexico. His first childhood memories are as follows: seaweed, Candlestick Park, and Curious George books. In the late ’70s, as a seven-year-old child, he enters Mexican territory where he realizes for the first time the existence of a wide variety of insects and fruits, in particular bees and mangos. He completes all of his basic studies in the State of Jalisco, sponsored by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In Guadalajara, he undertakes his university studies and begins his intellectual and artistic formation. He comes to New York City in 2000, where he can be found cycling through the streets of Manhattan and doing yoga in the East Village. He is a singer, song writer, and creator of the musical group Beboluz. He can be reached at ricardohernandezramirez@gmail.com.

**Claudia Urey** is from León, Nicaragua, and has been in New York and New Jersey since she arrived in the United States seven years ago. She says her mother is the most important person in her life. From an early age, Claudia has worked to help those most in need. She currently works in a program that gives assistance to Latino immigrants and cites among her driving passions, justice and reading.
When you walk onto the property of artist Ferenc Keresztesi, one of the first clues you might have that this is a Hungarian household is the dog. Ámos, a large animal covered in thick, white fur, is a kuvasz, one of the oldest of all dog breeds. The kuvasz is thought to have come to Hungary when nomadic Hungarian tribes brought the dog with them from the Central Asian steppes to settle the Carpathian Basin in the ninth century. Traditionally bred as work dogs, they were loyal protectors, guarding herds of livestock, as well as the families that owned them. Occasionally, noblemen were given a kuvasz as a special honor.

These days, Ámos provides more companionship than protection to Ferenc and his wife, Éva, at their farm home located among the rolling hills in the river town of West Coxsackie, New York. Daily chores on the farm—tending to the garden and looking after the numerous chickens, goats, geese, sheep, and turkeys on the property—take up much of their time. Lucky visitors might even catch a rare glimpse of a Transylvanian naked-neck chicken, an old Hungarian poultry breed that is considered to be extremely meaty and is not often seen in North America.

These uniquely Hungarian breeds have become a subtle expression of Hungarian identity for Ferenc and Éva. Like the delicious jam-filled palacsinta (Hungarian pancakes) Éva makes for lunch or the occasional items of traditional Hungarian embroidery that decorate their household, such expressions are a conscious way for them to connect with their heritage. Ferenc’s Hungarian wood-carvings function in a similar fashion. The traditional graveposts and gates that he crafts allow him to express his identity as a Hungarian and engage with cultural history.

Ferenc in Transylvania

For Ferenc, that engagement has meant an artistic connection with the oldest layers of Hungarian culture. Ferenc was born in 1964 in the northwestern Romanian town of Halmeu (Halmi in Hungarian). The city is located in Transylvania, a region that has always been historically complex and culturally diverse. Although the region is in Romania today, it was part of the Hungarian nation from the time of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin in the year 896 until shortly after World War I, when the Treaty of Trianon gave the region to Romania. The strong Hungarian cultural presence is kept alive today by traditional practitioners who have worked hard to maintain their identity.

Ferenc’s father worked as a furniture maker, and it was only natural that Ferenc learned a few things from his father about the business. He learned how to work with wood, making furniture and also restoring it. Yet after graduating from school, it was difficult for him to advance further as an ethnic Hungarian in Romania, so
he went into the army. Even there, Ferenc realized he could not advance to the highest levels. He was transferred to an air force pilot training center in Caracal, outside of Bucharest, where he was employed as a carver. He mostly worked with harder materials like marble and cement, carving statues, monuments, models, and other such items. He estimates that he carved sixty three-dimensional wall sculptures that depicted significant moments in military history.

Such work laid the foundation for his great interest in the artistic interpretation of history. He also began to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the complex cultural dynamics of his homeland during his years in the army. He was once assigned to work on a carving of Icarus, the mythological Greek figure who fell to his doom after flying too close to the sun. Ferenc eventually included a large bird with a scepter and a sword in its claws. In Romania, the coat of arms includes an eagle with a scepter and sword in its claws. But for Hungarians, a very similar looking bird, the turul, is a mythological bird that plays an important role in the nation’s creation myth. The turul looks very much like a large eagle or falcon, and it is usually translated in English to one of these two, even though there are other words in Hungarian that directly translate to eagle (sas) and falcon (sólyom). The turul is also thought to represent the Árpád clan, the first ruling clan of the Hungarian nation, and in particular, Attila himself, the renowned Hun leader.

At the time, neither Ferenc nor his Romanian superiors were fully aware of the symbolism. But with his interest piqued after he left the army, he met a fellow wood-carver who was more well-versed in the wood-carving traditions of the Transylvanian region. As Ferenc began to study with him, he understood what a rich legacy there was. He was particularly struck by the cultural heritage of the Székely people, believed to be among the earliest of the settlers from the East to reach the Carpathian Basin.

The Székely claim to be direct descendants of the Huns, although their origins are debated, with some scholars claiming they are of Turkic origin, others claiming they are of Avar ancestry, and still others claiming that they are simply Magyar tribes who came to the area before the 896 conquest. Regardless of their origins, many Székely cultural traditions reflect the earliest beliefs of the pre-Christian Hungarian tribes, including a cosmology focused around worship of the sun, moon, and other elements of nature. This cosmology was reflected in the Székely people’s material culture, in everything from how their houses were laid out in the village to their use of the sun, moon, and other natural symbols as motifs in their folk art.

**Székelykapu**

A good example can be found in the beautiful Székelykapu (Székely gates) of Transylvania. Gates were built as additions to village homes, largely with a functional purpose: to keep
the outside world out and guard the privacy of the domestic dwelling. In an agricultural economy, the gates also served to keep animals from roaming inside. Made out of local wood such as oak, they were intricately carved with symbols and sometimes painted, as well. Built even into the twentieth century in some parts of Transylvania, highly embellished gates eventually served the secondary function of demonstrating the household’s prosperity. The motifs carved or painted into the gate often included symbols like the sun and moon. Tulips were also a popular folk-art motif. Tulips are the national flower of Hungary, and many consider the tulip as evidence of the eastern origins of Hungarian tribes, since the tulip was introduced to western Europe by the Turks.

After picking up restoration work here and there, Ferenc continued his research into Székely wood-carving traditions like those found in the Székelykapu. In 1988, he moved to Hungary, where he obtained work at the Hungarian Office of Monument Preservation, restoring churches and castles. He also paid the bills by building office furniture. Ferenc moved to the United States in 2000 to work for Sotheby’s. At the time, Sotheby’s had a Capital District location, and he worked there doing carvings, restoration work, and gilding, supplied with a letter of support from the Romanian army attesting to the quality of his work. When Sotheby’s closed the upstate branch, he moved to New York City to follow the work, but found that big city life did not appeal to him. So he moved back to the Capital District, settling in Troy and picking up restoration and carving work wherever he could.

He decided to open his own studio and gallery, where he could continue to explore his artistic research into Transylvanian folk art. He carved a wooden gate modeled after the traditional Székely gates and displayed it in a 2002 exhibition of his work at the Arts Center of the Capital Region in Troy. His carved gate includes some of the same motifs found in the more traditional gates, including various flowers and sun and moon images. When his future wife, Éva, came to his studio to see his work, she immediately felt a connection with the gate, and as she says, “Something in my heart spoke to me.” The gate eventually found its place at their 2005 Albany wedding.

**Kopjafák**

Some other items in the 2002 exhibition were Ferenc’s intricately carved kopjafák (wooden graveposts). Wooden graveposts are not unique to Hungary, but as in other locations, they played an important role in traditional culture. Warriors from the Székely region often used javelins and spears in battle, and when a warrior died, he was honored with a javelin stuck into the ground to mark his grave. Typically, information about the warrior was carved into the javelin shaft by a wood-carver.

Wooden grave markers were later used for others in the village, as well, with many local and regional variants coming into existence. The common element was a fairly complex semiotic system of information about the deceased, relayed in the post’s size, shape, color, arrangement, and symbols. For example, smaller posts might have represented the death of an infant, while taller ones indicated adults. Rounded tops, or flowers on the top, usually indicated a female, while pointed or crown-like tops might have indicated a male. Symbols were also employed. For example, a carved “X” was thought to ward off evil spirits, while the...
sun symbol represented the ancient object of worship.

In his book on Hungarian folk beliefs, Tekla Dömötör noted the importance of the system of communication represented by the grave-posts: “The residents of a village can always find their way about in their own cemetery, and then know what is signified by the form and color of the posts” (Dömötör 1982, 264). Especially for people who may not have been able to read or write, it was a critical way to communicate information. But in addition to the purely functional purpose, other scholars have noted that this kind of expressive system allows for remarkable individual creativity within the communally bounded form. In a 1979 article, Tünde Zentai claimed: “This interpretation of grave-signs might furthermore throw light on the way that creativity works within the boundaries of what we call folklore. The final shape of any product of folk art is first of all determined by the traditional demands of the community and its communicative values. Personal messages of the creative imagination could only be allowed to come through within this framework.”

Ferenc and Hungarian Tradition

The wooden gate and graveposts Ferenc carved for his 2002 exhibition are highly creative and aesthetic examples of older traditional forms. The graveposts are remarkable examples of a sub-type of columned post that is the same on all four sides. According to Ferenc and the research he has done, the wood itself is also a kind of symbol. Ferenc explains, “Wood has a life cycle, just as a human being has a life cycle. We live, we grow old, and we die. Other materials like stone do not have such a life cycle; they are hard and permanent.” It is another example of the pre-Christian belief system of the ancient Hungarians.

Ferenc has a strong affinity for ancient Hungarian culture—which is not surprising considering that his given name was “Attila.” Although he goes by Ferenc and not Attila in everyday life, he is also sometimes referred to as “Attila” by friends and family because of his enthusiasm for these very old Hungarian traditional expressive forms. For him, artistically engaging with these genres serves a couple of purposes. On one hand, it provides a more keenly aesthetic outlet that supplements his everyday work as a carver and restorer. Since 2005, he has worked for Ferenc Restoration, a company that his wife and he started together. Yet he makes a clear distinction between the woodwork he creates for work, such as the restoration work that pays the bills and even the goat milking stand he made for use on his farm, and the woodwork he creates as art. His Hungarian wood-carvings are as much art as are the oil paintings, three-dimensional sculptures, and other fine works that he produces. On the other hand, it allows him to maintain a connection to his Hungarian cultural heritage and history. Even among his artistic works, which include sculptures commissioned by local churches, the Székely gate and graveposts hold a special meaning for him. Though not Székely himself, he strongly identifies with these ancient cultural expressions as a Hungarian and especially as a Transylvanian.

Indeed, in the contemporary context, these forms now tend to function as a kind of symbol of Hungarian identity precisely because of their designation as very old traditional forms in Hungary. As such, they serve as identity markers for those like Ferenc who wish to maintain a connection with heritage. In some cases, such objects can represent an entire group of people. Both Székely gates and gravepost were objects selected to represent Hungarian culture in the dedication of the Magyar Millennium Park in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2003. Another recent trend has been the creation of Székelykapu for gifting in sister city celebrations.

These contemporary uses of old folk forms demonstrate that function changes over time, particularly with expressive forms considered to be among the oldest. For Ferenc Keresztesi, the traditional gates and graveposts he carves fulfill an important function in his life. They are an expression of cultural identity made for himself and for others who desire to share in the expression of that identity.

References


Lisa Overholser is staff folklorist at the New York Folklore Society, where she manages the mentoring and professional development program and contributes to many other projects and initiatives. She holds a Ph.D. in folklore and ethnomusicology from the University of Indiana.
Bee’s Knees and Cat’s Whiskers

BY JOHN THORN

Miss Doherty’s assignment to her sophomore section of English at Richmond Hill High School was to write a single-page essay on “My Favorite Books.” My response, back in 1960, was to award the prize to Heinrich Harrer’s My Seven Years in Tibet, the book I had most recently read; mild approbation to Arthur Conan Doyle’s Hound of the Baskervilles and mysteries in general; and short shrift to the entire genre of military age, and I have come to like Miss Doherty to Marshall was “colloq.” (colloquial), and I have neatly bypassed Miss Doherty’s censors—and more importantly, my own—and defaulted to my own voice, my own ear, and my own love of words once all the rage, but now quaint: swill (first appearance in print, 1897), crummy (1859), nifty (1868), jerk (1935), groovy (1941).

The power of patois is that it comes from the bottom up, without social sanction, often from special-interest subcultures (surfers, techies, druggies) or ethnic or sexual minorities, and always with an amused slant stance toward majority culture. Most of it vanishes rapidly—indeed, so rapidly that even a generation later we are left to wonder what the catch-phrase meant in the first place. The derivation of off-color terminology was particularly amusing to trace when I was a schoolboy, and my enduring interest in such sleuthing is one of the many ways in which I have proudly arrested my development.

Other men may lust after Maseratis, iPads, and trophy wives; I have my microfilm reader, my Harry Potter magnifying glass, and my compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. For me adventure is at all times but a step away. Although I am a nerd (1957; probable origin, a character in a Dr. Seuss book of seven years earlier, If I Ran the Zoo), I am not singular in such pursuits. I have a good many friends who would proudly describe themselves as geeks (1875). One, Priscilla Astifan of Rochester, wrote to me about baseball’s nautical terms (on deck, in the hold, around the horn), saying, “It’s fascinating the way old references prevail even when the associations that initiated them are long gone”—a fine observation.

I love these archaisms or vestiges, too. It’s downright hilarious that sportswriters today will write, “Beckett was knocked out of the box,” or “New York notched three runs in its half of the inning.” Not a mother’s son of them seems aware that we haven’t had a pitcher’s box since 1892, and we haven’t counted runs by scoring notches into a stick since the 1840s.

Peter Morris convinced me that his explanation for the derivation of the baseball word fan was correct: that the term was originally used in derision, as an insiders’ (players, managers, owners) dismissal of outsider wannabes (rather recent, 1988). The idea of ceaseless tongue-flapping being a metaphorical fan seems right, and the controversy of fanatic versus fancy as the word’s source seems contrived and incongruent with the class character of the baseball set. Imagine looking upon a crowd of several thousand people all fanning themselves: might you not refer to the congregants themselves as fans? Or maybe the name comes from the incessant chatter and debate by which true baseball devotees are known.

In a similar example of synecdoche, in which the name of the part is transferred to the whole, today a visibly athletic male (or oddly and increasingly, and no longer disparagingly, a female) is termed a jock. This word derives not from a horse jockey, but from the jock strap worn to support the male genitalia in active sport. Okay—but where does “jock strap” come from? Not from the racetrack, I suggest, but from Jacques Striep, a supporting character in Robert Macaire, an obscure 1830s play by Benjamin Antier. Ya heard it here first.
Button accordions made by Italian craftsmen and sold to the Irish market in New York City are the subject of a research project that grew out of a lecture I give on the McNulty family. The McNultys, based in New York, were the hottest Irish act on the East Coast from the late 1930s through the 1950s. The button accordion has always been a popular folk instrument for Irish music, and Ann “Ma” McNulty—who learned to play in County Roscommon, Ireland, before she emigrated here in 1910—had five of these amazing little instruments, each tuned in a different key.

We would like to know who actually made the parts and completed instruments, which accordions were made in New York City and which were imported, and how these manufacturing patterns changed across the twentieth century.

Two of the major accordion brands were Baldoni and Walters. Ma McNulty had one Baldoni, two Walters, and two Superiors. Superior was a small company run by Frank Umbriaco that made primarily piano accordions. My colleagues and I have only been able to locate five of their button accordions. All three of these companies had retail shops in Manhattan at the following addresses: Baldoni
Bartoli Company, 60 Mulberry Street (1908); Frank Walters, 1504 3rd Avenue; and Superior Accordion Company, 205 East 116th Street (1932) and 171 East 116th Street (1938). The Iorio Company manufacturers also built some Irish accordions. They were located at Baxter Street (1907), Prince and Broadway (1919), and the ninth floor of the Carl Fischer Building at 80th Street and 4th Avenue (1935–47).

These Irish accordions—or “boxes,” as they are commonly called—usually had ten keys or twenty notes; push (in) and pull (out) were different notes. They also had two to four bass keys, four to six sets of reeds, and elaborate engraved decorations with a harp, shamrocks, the Irish and American flags, and the player’s name all in rhinestones. Some had more sets of reeds and more buttons. The double-row instruments with nineteen or twenty-one keys started to become more popular in the 1940s. The second row is tuned a half note from the main row: for example, D/C#. This allows the player more options for variations and the ability to play easily in more than one key, with a full chromatic scale available.

Many of these instruments have been photographed and documented, and others have been overhauled and are still being played today.

The story of who actually built these instruments, however, remains obscure.

The name “Walters” is not Italian. Who was Frank Walters, and why was he in the Irish accordion business? It needs to be confirmed that some of the early (1920s and ’30s) boxes were built by the Iorio Company, which manufactured mostly piano accordions at its factory in New York City. At its peak, the Iorio Company employed about eighty workers building accordions. Some of the parts, like the reeds, may have always been imported from Italy; as time went on, more and more of the parts may have been imported, until after World War II, when manufacture in New York stopped altogether, and entire instruments were imported from Italy.

Similarities among Italian-made instruments and some of the Baldoni and Walters accordions sold in New York suggest that some of the New York Irish button accordions were built in the Italian factories of Moreschi and Sonola in Italy. There may have been other Italian factories, as well, that built instruments for one or both
A nineteen-key Baldoni accordion, circa 1950, like the one played by Jerry O’Brien of Boston, who recorded for Copley records. Jerry was one of Joe Derrane’s teachers and made several recordings with Joe. Photo: Ted McGraw

Several of these black Baldoni pre-war boxes exist. We don’t know where they fit in the chronology or who made them. Photo: Ted McGraw
of the New York retail shops and other shops like O’Byrne DeWitt in Boston. It also needs to be confirmed that all of the Superior accordions were built in New York.

In short, we would like to know who actually made the parts and completed instruments, which accordions were made in New York City and which were imported, and how these manufacturing patterns changed across the twentieth century.

It’s this story of the Italian emigrant craftsmen in New York City and their relationships to their counterparts back home in Italy that is being researched by me, Paul Groff, Hugh O’Rourke, and Peter Cashman. We are all players, and two of us have done restoration work on the old boxes. There are additional photographs on my web site showing the internal parts of a Baldoni and a Superior: www.tedmegr.com (under button accordion pages). We believe that there may be a wealth of extant information on the companies and people involved in this industry, and we hope to enlist the help of Voices readers—especially those living in New York City—in uncovering it. In addition to gathering information about the manufacture of these instruments, I am trying to help the McNulty family locate Ma McNulty’s two Walters accordions, both labeled with the name Ann. If you can provide any information or assistance, please contact me at emcgraw@rochester.rr.com.

Ted McGraw, a retired physicist-engineer, has been host and producer of two weekly radio programs for thirty-five years. He performs on button accordion, teaches Irish programs in schools, and represents the Irish community at the New York State Folk Arts Roundtable. He has lectured on the digitization of recordings and has authored numerous articles on Irish music. A noted collector, McGraw currently chairs the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann North American Archive committee.

Submission Guidelines for Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore


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 orthographies 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 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 Eileen Condon, Voices Editor (e-mail preferred): econdon@ctrm.org or c/o Center for Traditional Music and Dance, 32 Broadway, Suite 1314, New York, NY 10004.
Older Singers and Old Recordings

BY DAN MILNER

Last July, I spent a few days at Pinewoods Camp in Massachusetts in the good company of a number of fine singers, including three from England: Tim Radford of Hampshire, and Anni Fentiman and Dave Weber, respectively from County Durham and Yorkshire. Len Graham, originally from Ireland’s County Antrim, was there too, along with Colleen Cleveland from Brant Lake, New York. Colleen and I had met only once before, at the annual Eisteddfod in New York City, and I was thrilled to hear how her singing had matured in the past few years.

Colleen is the granddaughter of Sarah Cleveland, one of the Northeast’s most outstanding song carriers of the twentieth century. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, on New Year’s Day 1905, Sarah’s forebears were all from Ireland: Creedons and Linehans from County Cork, and Wiggins and Henrys from Ulster. Her repertoire was both broad and deep and contained many rare gems—not that she was unique in that regard, but highly noteworthy, because she amassed a collection of some four hundred traditional songs and ballads, filed in her memory and backed up in a number of chapbooks. They included old traditional ballads found in the Child collection, British broadsides, and folk songs from Canada and the United States.

A brace of songs from the many hours of Sarah’s singing taped by Sandy Paton has been reissued as Ballads and Songs of the Upper Hudson Valley (Folk-Legacy CD-33). It contains a splendid selection from her repertoire, including “To Wear a Green Willow,” often called “The Nobleman’s Wedding” in the north of Ireland; “Queen Jane” or “The King’s Dochter Lady Jean,” number 52 in the Child canon; and “Molly Bawn,” about a young woman who changes herself into a swan in order to follow her lover, only to meet with a tragic end. This CD is an important recording of American traditional singing, and every New Yorker who loves folk songs should have a copy.

Sound recordings are important because they provide not just words and tunes, but articulate how traditional singers use their voices to tell ancient and topical tales. One of my favorite New York State recordings is Lawrence Older’s Adirondack Songs and Ballads, recorded by Sandy Paton in 1963 and reissued as Folk-Legacy CD-15. Most of its twenty-four tracks bear the mark of British heritage, but there are three French-Canadian pieces as well, including a paddling song and two dance tunes.

Lawrence Older left school early to follow the trade his family had pursued for generations. In the June 1966 issue of New York Folklore Quarterly, he profiled himself as someone who preferred to work with a single partner or alone rather than in a larger-scale commercial logging operation. Self-sufficiency and moderation ring out in that autobiographical sketch as loudly as axe blows resound in the forest. Not surprisingly, the album opens with his fine rendition of “Once More A-Lumbering Go.”

To the music of our axes, we’ll make the woods resound, And many a tall and lofty pine comes tumbling to the ground. At night, around our good campfire, we’ll sing while cold winds blow; And we’ll range the wild woods over and once more a-lumbering go.

And there’s a classic early vaudeville song:

Pat Malone forgot that he was dead, He raised up in his coffin, and he said, “If you dare to doubt me credit, you’ll be sorry that you said it! Drive on or else the corpse will break your head.”

Bill Bonyun, born in Brooklyn and a resident of Brookhaven on Long Island, was a singer and educator who used folk song as a medium for teaching history. Bill established the music department at Old Sturbridge Village, Massachusetts, and founded Heirloom Records, which issued themed recordings such as The American Revolution, The Civil War through Its Songs and Ballads, and Songs of Yankee Whaling. I bought a copy of Roll and Go: The Shantyman’s Day Aboard a Yankee Clipper years ago. Built around a conversation between an “old salt” and a “green boy,” I still find it highly entertaining. Elementary school teachers should try to get a copy for their classes. Heirloom Records’ web site is www.thecclc.org/heirloom_records. The Folk-Legacy site is www.folklegacy.com.

Frank Warner, who lived at Old Brookville was one of the foremost figures of the American folk scene during the mid-twentieth century. Born in Alabama and raised in Tennessee and North Carolina, Frank, together with his wife, Anne, collected tirelessly in the Northeast and elsewhere from such inimitable folk as “Yankee” John Galusha of Minerva, New York, and Lena Bourne Fish of Black Brook, New York, and East Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

Though the pinnacle of Frank’s visibility may have come when he appeared in the 1957 western film Run of the Arrow, starring Rod Steiger, his truly important accomplishments are his and Anne’s fieldwork—archived at the Library of Congress’s American Folklife Center—samples of which are available on CDs through Appleseed Recordings at www.appleseedmusic.com; their book, Traditional American Songs; and his work on behalf of children at the YMCA. I had the great pleasure of meeting Frank once, at his home on Long Island in 1965. He was an impressive fellow and, it should be mentioned, an active member and former president of the New York State Folklife Society. Our Singing Heritage: Folk Songs Collected and Sung by Frank Warner (Elektra LP 153) is my favorite of Frank’s recordings. The album’s back cover bears a ringing endorsement by Carl Sandburg. Impressive, indeed!
Folk Arts Champion: Bess Lomax Hawes, 1921–2009

BY ROBERT BARON

Bess Lomax Hawes, who decisively shaped American public folklore in the late twentieth century, died in Portland, Oregon, on November 27, 2009, at the age of 88. All Americans are indebted to Bess for her visionary leadership of the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Her major accomplishments also included directing programs at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, folk song and children’s folklore scholarship, and delightful singing and songwriting. New Yorkers had a special relationship with Bess. She lived here as a young woman, and as director of the NEA Folk Arts Program, she made possible indispensable support for our folk arts programs during the formative years of their development.

Like everyone in my generation of public folklorists, I knew Bess as a wise, loving, and sometimes painfully pointed mentor. She never hesitated to give candid encouragement and criticism of our work. I spent many hours talking with Bess during the development of the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) in the 1980s, getting advice—both requested and unsolicited—about policy and program design and administration, hearing about her experiences at the NEA, and giving her feedback about her own granting program. Our program was one of many developed around the country, created through a grand plan conceived by Bess to support NEA-seeded programs in every state arts council. It was quite challenging to establish and institutionalize our program. The initial application to the NEA to fund the New York position resulted from the advocacy of Martin Koenig and Ethel Raim of the Balkan Arts Center (now the Center for Traditional Music and Dance), coupled with Bess’s behind-the-scenes work to prod NYSCA to apply for a folk arts coordinator position. As she did in many states, Bess kept a close eye on the NYSCA program to see that it was maintained, and when the folk arts position was threatened with...
elimination, she weighed in with all of her formidable persuasive powers and inimitable moral authority.

Bess was masterful about countering the elitism of the arts world, which was far more pervasive at the time than it is now. In her extraordinary Sing it Pretty: A Memoir, she recounts:

The fledgling Folk Arts Program had to wade through the usual thicket of misconceptions about the folk arts. …Even at the National Endowment for the Arts, the most unassailable of these was and is the widespread notion that the singular function of traditional aesthetic systems is just to hang around for a while, being a stable bedrock and providing nutrients for the growth of later complexities, later styles, and later inventions…. I found that there was an ever-present comic misanga hanging about the whole idea of the folk arts—an insidious, creeping, straw-hatted, “Oy, veh,” “Wall, I swan” déclassé stereotype…. I laid down a rule for myself and, hopefully, all who might follow me: from this day forth … no federal public expression, written or verbal, should allow the folk arts… to be portrayed as either comical or pitiful. They should be spoken of as sentient, strong, and intimately keyed into the essential structures of their own particular cultures. (2008, 129–30)

The NEA’s National Heritage Fellowships, initiated by Bess, highlight the strength and majesty of the nation’s best traditional artists. Well over twenty New Yorkers have been honored as National Heritage Fellows since this program began in 1982, with recipients including Chuck Campbell, Rosa Elena Egipciaco, Martin Mulvihill, Konstantinos Pylarinos, Sandman Sims, and Dave Tarras.

Bess spent much time in New York at the beginning of her career. Born in Austin in 1921, the daughter of John Lomax and Bess Bauman Brown Lomax, she grew up in Texas. She studied at the University of Texas for a year when she was just fourteen and then moved to Washington, where she worked with her father and brother Alan Lomax on editing Our Singing Country, listening with Alan to songs played at full volume over and over again in an attic office at the Library of Congress. After traveling around Europe, she enrolled at Bryn Mawr College. As a student at Bryn Mawr, she visited Manhattan for rehearsals of the CBS radio program Back Where I Come From, produced by Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray, and frequented the New York Public Library and museums. She moved to New York City after graduation. While living here in the early and mid-1940s she became a key member of the Almanac Singers, worked in the music department of the Office of War Information, and married fellow Almanac Singer Baldwin “Butch” Hawes.

In 1947 Bess moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, with Butch and Corey, the first of her three children, who was followed by Naomi and Nick. She taught music to adults whom she met as fellow parents at a nursery school and wrote songs with fellow Progressive Party members. One of these songs, “Charley on the MTA,” written with Jacqueline Steiner, was about a subway passenger trapped on the train because he didn’t bring enough money to pay the fare, collected after exiting the transit system because of an irritatingly complicated, recently instituted procedure. The song became a hit in its diluted Kingston Trio version in 1959.

Bess relocated to California in 1952. She began to publish academic articles about folklore and taught at California State University at Northridge for many years. In 1970 she received her M.A. degree from the University of California at Berkeley, studying under Alan Dundes. Her master’s thesis was a definitive study of a song all of us have sung so many times, “Happy Birthday to You.”

Bess’s work at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife began when she directed a program on California traditions. She then became assistant director for programs for the Bicentennial Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, and she stayed in Washington to direct the NEA’s Folk Arts Program (later renamed the Folk and Traditional Arts Program) until her retirement in 1992. She was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Bill Clinton in 1993.

Singer, songwriter, cultural leader, administrator, teacher, and scholar, Bess was a remarkably versatile and accomplished person. She had a strong moral compass, reminding us through both advice and personal example about our primary responsibilities to the artists and communities that sustain traditions. Her approach to folklore was beautifully epitomized in Step It Down: Games, Plays, Songs, and Stories from the Afro-American Heritage. Written in collaboration with the outstanding Georgia Sea Island singer Bessie Jones, this book related Jones’s knowledge as a tradition bearer, a student of the tradition, and as a dynamic force in maintaining local children’s folklore traditions. “Mrs. Jones,” we learn, “does not accept tradition uncritically. She looks at procedures with the thoughtful and analytical eye of an educator; she is concerned, ultimately, with results. For this reason, though she is a tradition carrier, she does not hesitate to say when she thinks the ‘old peoples’ were wrong” (1972, 5). Step It Down was at once a pioneering work of collaborative scholarship, a collection of an important corpus of children’s folklore, an analysis of these traditions based on Bess’s own scholarly interests in children’s folklore, and a vehicle for teaching people to practice these traditions. It erased the boundaries between academic and applied scholarship and honored Bessie Jones as a scholar in her own right.

Often when one would talk to Bess she would take a deep breath and think for a moment after a slightly audible sigh. Maybe you can hear my own sigh now, in sorrow for her passing and wistfulness at how much more there is to say about this remarkable woman.

References


Robert Baron directs the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) in New York City.
Digging Deep

BY LIBBY TUCKER

When I was a little girl, my parents told my sisters and me that if we dug deep holes in the dirt of our backyard, we might get all the way to China. Taking this folk saying literally, we created mountains of dirt with our metal spoons. At dinnertime, when we whined that we didn’t want to eat our fish stew, our parents threatened, “We’ll send your dinner to the starring Chinese!” No Chinese children crawled out of our backyard hole. Discouraged, my sisters and I put down our spoons. Instead of digging up dirt, I became a folklorist who delves into the intricacies of oral tradition.

After three decades of hearing stories about China from my Chinese college students, I finally took a trip to their homeland. In April, my husband and I participated in a two-week tour of three cultural capitals: Shanghai, Xi’an, and Beijing. None of the members of our tour group had ever traveled to China before. When our tour director asked how many of us had tried to dig holes to China and heard about starving children there, most of us raised our hands. “Times have changed,” he told us. “Now you might hear Chinese people tell kids to send their food to the starving Americans.” This neat reversal made us think about the progress since Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. My fellow tour-group members and I marveled at the array of fine restaurants and noticed the McDonalds and KFCs springing up like kudzu in the urban landscape. Some of them were open twenty-four hours a day.

At our tour’s beginning, I expected to hear ghost stories. My Chinese students had told me so many! Our Shanghai guide, however, explained that modern Chinese people do not take ghosts seriously. “Only superstitious people believe in stories like that,” he told us. “People from the country don’t know any better. See this zigzag bridge? Long ago, people built these bridges to keep ghosts from following them. Ghosts are clumsy and stupid. They get mixed up easily.” I contemplated the zigzag bridge, wondering about stupid ghosts. No matter how inept those spirits were, they seemed to have inspired the building of many bridges.

“Do people still worry about ghosts?” I asked our Beijing guide as he led us through the artfully constructed maze of the Forbidden City.

“Oh, no!” he told us. “Ghosts are no problem now. But long ago, craftsmen polished jade very carefully to keep ghosts away. If you wore many jade bracelets, you could keep ghosts from choking you while you slept.”

“Don’t some people still struggle with choking ghosts?” I asked, remembering the terrible “sitting ghost” in Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior.

“No, they don’t!” he said firmly. Realizing that I’d been asking too many questions, I stopped, but others in my group asked plenty of others. We were an inquisitive crowd, eager to learn as much as we could.

A few days later, we visited part of the Ming tombs, where a high metal threshold protected the entrance. “If you let your feet touch the threshold,” our Beijing guide said, “ghosts cling to your feet, so some people lift their feet high.”

At last, recognition of ghosts! But not for long. “That was, of course, long ago,” our guide told us. “Country people—not like people in our city now.” As we drove back to Beijing, we saw countless high-rise apartments: some occupied, others under construction. We had learned that China had more construction cranes than any other country. Modernization and expansion seemed more important than folklore of the supernatural.

We understood, however, that family-related customs and festivals had deep meaning for Chinese people. The last part of our tour took place on Tomb-Sweeping Day (Qing Ming, literally “Clear Brightness”). On this spring holiday, as on American Memorial Day, people visit their families’ graves to tidy things up and leave flower arrangements. We watched men and women hurry toward train and subway stations, holding bright flower arrangements and tall twig brooms.

On the last night of our trip, as we drove back to our hotel from the restaurant where we had celebrated our upcoming departure, we finally discovered how ghosts fit into contemporary Chinese life. I felt so tired that I almost missed our tour director’s quiet remarks about a person he had just seen at the side of the road. We had been up late the night before, eating crispy starfish, eels, scorpions on sticks, and other exotic foods. Our trip was almost over, and we had to get money together for tips. Would our suitcases be too heavy? Would we—

“Look,” our director said quietly. Craning my neck, I saw a small fire on the sidewalk. An elderly woman wearing a hat leaned over the flames, lighting small pieces of paper one by one. “She’s doing this because it’s after 10:00 p.m.,” our director explained. “Between ten and midnight, ghosts of our ancestors come out, and we burn things to give them. Do you wonder why she burns pieces of paper that look like money? This is spirit money, so her ancestors can buy things. If you want to give something to a person you can’t see, you have it make it invisible. I will do the same for my father when I can.”

After this moving explanation, none of us said a word. We had learned the meaning of ancestors’ ghosts and did not want to disturb the night’s peace with more questions. Sometimes you don’t need to dig deep to discover what matters most. If you wait and listen, the answer will find you in its own good time.

Hindus often say that there can be no town or city without a temple. Similarly, no house is complete without a domestic mandir, or temple. A mandir enlightens the house and the minds of those living in the house. In my study of the interior decoration of Hindu homes in the United States, I encountered a domestic altar in every home, decorated in bright colors and placed in a sacred space. This essay describes the significance, placement, and decoration of the Hindu mandir. Mandir means place of worship in Hindi, the national language of India. A mandir can refer to a public building where people go to worship, like a church, but also to domestic altars dedicated to Hindu gods that people place in their homes. My research is based in a residential community called Ravens Crest in Plainsboro, New Jersey, which is located in the New York metro area near Princeton, New Jersey.

Ravens Crest is a large complex of one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments. Many in Ravens Crest work in New York City. They prefer to live in Plainsboro, however, because they point out that it has good schools. Plainsboro has the second largest community of people from India in United States, topped only by Edison, another town in New Jersey. According to the 2000 census, Plainsboro has a population of 20,215, with 16.97% describing themselves as having Indian ancestry. Women I met in Ravens Crest said that, in the past ten years, the population of Indians has increased in

*Mandir set up in a traditional mandap kept on a corner of the kitchen counter and lit by an electric bulb. All photos: Puja Sahney*
Plainsboro and especially in Ravens Crest, as many people from India with information technology backgrounds have come to the United States on temporary projects. Indians in Plainsboro like living in Ravens Crest, because it is economical and offers good storage space.

My husband, Suraj, and I arrived in Plainsboro in May 2010 from Salt Lake City, Utah. Although I was pursuing a Ph.D. in folklore at Indiana University, I moved to Salt Lake City after completing coursework because Suraj was doing his Ph.D. at the University of Utah. We moved to Plainsboro for the summer because I wished to conduct dissertation fieldwork on Hindu interior decoration in the United States, and Suraj had been offered a summer internship with Siemens Corporate Research in Princeton. We chose to live in Ravens Crest because it has a large population of Indians, and we were able to sign a three-month lease. We did not have a car during our stay in Plainsboro, so I conducted a large part of my research in Ravens Crest.

My interest in interior decoration began with my adviser Henry Glassie at Indiana University, who has done considerable work on vernacular architecture. According to Glassie, interior decoration is increasingly important today because people no longer design the exterior of the houses in which they live, so they turn to interior decoration to express themselves. This is especially true for Hindu immigrants who buy—or, in the case of my informants, rent—homes built for an American lifestyle. Analyzing interior decoration in Ravens Crest therefore offers an opportunity to understand the life and culture of the Hindu community in the United States.

The Significance of the Hindu Mandir

When I first began my research at Ravens Crest, I struggled to find potential informants whose homes I would be able to observe. In time, I learned that there are small parks within the community where people come in the evening with their children. At one such park—close to my apartment and also adjacent to the community swimming pool and tennis courts—I met several women to whom I explained my study. These women were young mothers between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five and had been living in United States between two to fifteen years. India is a very diverse country. It has twenty-eight states, and each state has its own language, food, and dress, with cultural practices varying further between North and South India. Hindu religious practices are mostly common to all states, but different Hindu deities are favored in different states. For example, lord Ganesh is favored in the central western state of Maharashtra, lord Krishna in the central western state of Gujarat, goddess Durga in the northeastern state of Bengal, and lord
Venkateshwara in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

At Ravens Crest, I met women from both North and South India. My paper is based on religious beliefs and practices that I found to be common to all Hindus, regardless of their home states in India. I explained to the women I met that I was studying the way Hindus from India decorate their homes in the United States in order to understand the life and culture of the community. Upon hearing my topic, many women invited me into their homes.

Inside their homes, I observed that most living rooms consisted of two couches set alongside the wall facing a TV, with a coffee table in the middle. On one side of the room, near the kitchen, stood the family dining table. The walls were decorated with family pictures, children’s artwork, or birthday party decorations that had not been removed. In each home, I found a domestic mandir, most commonly placed in a corner of the kitchen or near the dining table.

The Hindu mandir houses the idols of various Hindu gods and goddesses, called murtis, before which the family prays daily. When a family moves into a new home, the first thing they do—before moving in the furniture—is place a murti. This murti is often of lord Ganesh, because he is considered the god of beginnings and also the god who removes obstacles. Murtis are made of metal (often bronze) or even clay. Along with murtis, mandirs often include pictures of gods and goddesses, called tasvir in Hindi, either plastered to adjoining walls or framed and kept on stands. These murtis and tasvirs of gods and goddesses are placed on a red or orange cloth, because these colors are considered auspicious in Hinduism.

Murtis are more expensive than pictures and photos of gods; therefore, in poor households in India, one finds more tasvir than murtis. All my informants were married to IT professionals with middle-class incomes, but in many apartments I entered, I found more pictures than murtis in the mandir. Due to “weight problems” on the aircraft, many families had been unable to carry murtis from India, while others pointed out that their murtis were made of glass, and they feared that they might break on such a long journey. Some bought murtis from temples in the United States, while others brought them from India a few at a time, each time they went home for a visit. Some informants explained to me that they prefer murtis from India because they are cheaper. Also, in some families, parents give murtis as wedding gifts, so these murtis have sentimental value. Many women said that they left these murtis in their in-laws’ mandir when they came to the United States, because they were not sure how long they will live abroad. In spite of this uncertainty, however, others brought their murtis with them.

In India, the mandir is housed in a small pyramid-shaped structure called a mandap, which can be made of many materials, but is most commonly wood or metal. The mandap’s pyramid-shaped roof with a pointed top is important, as it is believed to attract magnetic energy. Hindu temples have a similar pyramid shape, and the primary deity of the temple is placed under this roof. The magnetic energy attracted by the roof’s shape is believed to infuse the murti with energy.

Women said that another reason to house the deities in a mandap is that it is shaped like a house. Just as we live in a house, a god should also be given a house, because gods should have a roof over their heads. Sometimes houses in India come with a separate small room, usually near the kitchen, that can be dedicated to worship. This room, about the size of a queen-sized bed, has a shelf intended for worship. Women explained that the mandir should be set up at a height above an average man’s chest when he is sitting down, so that the deity is above when the devotee prays. Traditionally, Hindus always pray while sitting, not standing. As one of my informants said, “We do so much work standing. We should take out at least a few minutes a day to sit down with god and pray to him peacefully.”

I discovered that more than 90 percent of the homes in Ravens Crest lacked mandaps.
In their absence, some women had made symbolic pyramid-shaped roofs out of cut paper, but most mandirs were instead placed in small wooden cabinets, bookshelves, or built-in wardrobes. The women said that due to the recession, and also the fact that their husbands are here working on temporary IT projects without green cards, they may have to return to India at any time. Consequently, they did not want to purchase one of the expensive mandaps sold in Indian stores in the U.S. or shipped from India. Another reason for not wanting to invest in a mandap was that if the family had to leave, they would never want to sell their mandap, and they feared that any family to whom they may give it may not treat it with equal respect. For this reason, they preferred to set up their mandirs on shelves or in cabinets.

Because Hindus traditionally sit to pray, a mandir is always set up on the floor or on a low shelf. In front of the mandir is placed a mat called an aasan in Hindi, on which the devotee should sit. The aasan is believed to help devotees concentrate on god and also keeps their clothes clean while sitting on the floor. One woman shared her belief that one’s prayer does not reach the deity if one does not sit on the mat in front of the mandir. I was therefore surprised to find that most families had set up the mandir on top of bookshelves and cabinets, rather than closer to the floor. Even those who had mandaps had placed them on top of bookshelves or on kitchen counters. My informants wished to keep the mandir—especially the lamp—out of their small children’s reach, which is more of a challenge in small, single-family American homes than in many Indian homes.

Every Hindu mandir includes a central lamp called a deepak that is lit morning and evening, or sometimes left constantly lit. Hindus light the deepak in the mandir in the morning as soon as they shower, and then again in the evening between six and seven. The morning deepak symbolizes the morning light that has dispelled the night’s darkness. It is also lit to banish ignorance and darkness of the mind with light. In the evening, the deepak is lit once again to light up the house, which will soon be consumed by darkness. Some women said that they keep the deepak lit all the time. As soon as it goes off, they light it again. These women explained that one must not leave the god in darkness. Most families I observed had bought a small electric light and placed it over their mandir. This bulb was left lit all day long. Others had bought small electric lamps shaped like traditional Hindu diya (clay lamps) that were placed at the mandir. These electric bulbs and diyas were in addition to the central deepak, which is lit daily by the woman of the house, except during her monthly period, when the deepak is lit by her husband.

In India, where homes are commonly made of concrete bricks, lighting the daily deepak is not a problem, but in the United States, most houses are made of wood and may catch fire easily. In different homes, I observed that, depending on the location of the mandir, people took different precautions.
with lighting the deepak. In India, people use a large amount of ghee, or clarified butter, to keep the deepak lit longer. Due to the danger of fire in U.S. houses, Hindus put only a small amount of ghee or oil, so that by the time the devotee finishes the prayer, the deepak goes out. Some families cover the deepak with a large open glass shade, place it on a plate, or set it in a small bowl of water. Others paste some aluminum foil on the shelf or wall on top of the deepak to prevent the smoke from spoiling the wooden shelf or wall above.

**Placing the Mandir in the Home**

The placement of the mandir in the house is also very important. Women I spoke with said that ideally, if means allow, Hindus should dedicate a separate puja (worship) room to the gods, where the mandir is placed and the family worships either individually or as a group. As I mentioned earlier, houses in India sometimes come with a puja room already built in by the architect. However, adjustments can be made when such a room is not available. The mandir should always be placed in the most pure, or shuddha, room. Although these topics are not openly discussed in the community, Hindus generally believe that sexual activity and menstruating women are impure. For this reason, Hindus never place the mandir in the master bedroom, where a couple is sexually active. A menstruating woman always avoids coming near her home's mandir, which cannot be avoided in the master bedroom where she sleeps. Similarly, mandirs should never be placed in living rooms, because female guests may have their periods.

In the absence of a separate puja room, the next best place to keep the mandir is the kitchen. For Hindus, the kitchen is a shuddha space. All members of the household are encouraged to enter the kitchen only after a bath. Women in India avoid going into the kitchen when they are menstruating. Since many women in India live in extended families with their in-laws and sisters-in-law, they do not need to go into the kitchen; for those few days, the food is cooked and served by other ladies of the house. Women also avoid eating from utensils used by the rest of the family, using separate utensils set aside for those days. When mothers or mothers-in-law visit the United States, they often cook for the duration of those days. Menstruating women even avoid bodily touch with the rest of the family. The stress on shuddha, or purity, is so strong for some Hindus that, after a shower, some men and women go straight from the bathroom to the mandir with wet hair to pray in their purest state.

In the United States, however, women live in nuclear families with their husband and small children for a large part of the year. Gender roles are strongly defined in these households, and women cannot avoid entering the kitchen to cook daily meals for their families, so they make certain adjustments to the customary practices. Mandirs are placed in a corner of the kitchen, and women avoid that corner, if possible. Others placed the mandir in the corner of their dining table and avoid that corner during their cycle. One woman previously kept her mandir in a shelf in the passage near the bedrooms, but if she needed anything from any other shelf, she had to wait for her husband to get home in the evening and ask him to get it for her. For that reason, she bought a wooden cabinet for the mandir and placed it in a corner next to the dining table. Some women said that they close the doors of their cabinet during their monthly cycle. All women said that even though they cannot avoid entering the kitchen or cooking near their mandirs here in the United States, they do not light the deepak or touch any items in their mandir during their cycle. In a few instances, where families lived in two-bedroom apartments, women had placed the mandir in the second bedroom, often in one of the wardrobes. These rooms were their small children's bedroom, children's playroom, husband's study, or music room—in short any room, they said, that could be avoided during the duration of their cycle.

The direction that the mandir faces is equally important. A mandir traditionally faces east, where the sun god comes out. However, some of my Hindu informants said that the murtis in the mandir should face west, so that the devotee faces east while worshipping them. Some said that east, west, and north are all equally suitable, but all agreed that a mandir should never face south. South is the kingdom of Yama, the god of death, so by facing the mandir southward, one is welcoming death, illness, and disease into the house. The decision on the placement of the mandir was also influenced by whether the family is vegetarian or eats meat and eggs. Hindus consider meat and eggs polluting, because they involve the death of living beings. In most cases I found the mandir near the kitchen or dining table. In the few instances where I found the mandir away from these locations, women explained that they cook meat and eggs in the kitchen, and they do not like to cook them so close to the mandir. In these cases, either a second bedroom was chosen or the mandir was placed in a corner of the living room. In some homes, the families were vegetarian, and therefore the kitchen space posed no threat to the shuddha or purity of the mandir. When the mandir was placed in a non-vegetarian kitchen, the women said that one way to maintain the shuddha is to ensure that the deepak is not lit while meat or eggs are cooked or else to close the mandir’s cabinet doors.

**Decorating the Mandir**

While the placement of the mandir did not vary much from one apartment to another, due to limited space and the apartments’ similar layout, each woman applied her own personal aesthetics in her mandir’s decoration. The mandirs were usually placed high on a bookshelf or over a cabinet, with the murtis displayed on a throne or some kind of raised platform. The women said that murtis should never be placed directly on the wooden surface of a mandap or in bookshelves and cabinets. The murtis should be shown respect by placing them on raised platforms called sinhasans. In some cases where women did not have sinhasans, they had placed murtis on a cloth or paper, usually red. In most mandirs, I observed that families had placed at least four to five murtis or tasvirs of different gods. One of these murtis is usually the family deity that the family worships more
Hindus believe that no home can exist without Ganesh, because he is the god of beginnings. He must be worshipped before any other god. Ganesh is also the god who removes obstacles, so his presence in the house is considered important. Lakshmi is also present in all mandirs, because she is the goddess of wealth. Bal Krishna is most commonly given during weddings, as his presence is believed to bless the household with children. Some of my informants had also placed pictures of their parents and ancestors in their mandirs, to offer them the same respect as gods.

The murtis are arranged in no particular order; they are simply placed wherever there is space. The women observed that mandirs grow over the years, since murtis are common gifts exchanged during weddings and festivals, and no one returns gifted murtis. Their mothers and mothers-in-law have mandirs three times larger than their own. Many of these older women have given murtis from their mandir to their young daughters and daughters-in-law. The murtis are kept in the mandir with other items used in Hindu worship, like the deepak, thal (plate), ghanti (bell), and religious books that contain mantras. Depending on the space available, women placed these items either in front of the murtis or on a shelf below. Other items, like ghee, cotton, buldi (turmeric), and kunkum (red turmeric or saffron powder) that are used to light the deepak or offered in prayer are also kept on one of the shelves below. Apart from these items that I found in all mandirs, I observed that women had also individualized their mandirs. For example, one woman had placed a horseshoe on one side of her mandir. She explained that a horseshoe brings luck when nailed to the floor of the main entryway, as is common in India. Since it could not be nailed into the apartment’s entryway floor, my inventive informant had placed it in her mandir.

Hindus believe that if you keep god well, he will keep you well in return, so women go to great lengths to decorate their mandirs and make daily offerings to the Hindu gods. Such daily offerings include food and flowers. Some women make daily sandpaintings using rice flour or chalk to honor the gods. These drawings are called by different names all over India. In North India, they are called rangoli, and in South India, kolam. Several women said that in India they make daily sandpaintings outside their main door, as well as on the floor in front of the mandir, but in the United States, they restrict it to festivals only. American homes pose a challenge for these paintings because they are often carpeted, but some women have nevertheless continued the practice of making daily sandpaintings. Instead of making them on the floor, they use as a suitable platform small granite stones intended for crushing masalas or wooden surfaces called chakla in Hindi, used for making chappatis. The women make these sandpaintings on a daily basis and place them on their mandir before the murtis.

Fresh flowers are also offered daily. Many women I met grew these flowers in pots in their patios. Every god has a different color preference. Ganesh likes the colors red and orange, for example, so women grow red roses and orange marigolds for him. Severe winters in this region pose a problem for growing the flowers, so during winter, they buy flowers from the market. In some homes, the women prefer to use artificial flowers, since fresh flowers are not easily available all year round in the United States.

A second reason that mandirs and homes are decorated and women spend considerable time keeping their homes clean is because Hindus believe that it brings wealth and prosperity to the house. It is believed that goddesses Lakshmi and Daridra are sisters. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, while Daridra is the goddess of poverty. Lakshmi resides in a home that is kept clean and beautifully decorated, while Daridra resides in a home that is unclean. The belief is encouraged by elders to teach an important lesson: if one keeps a house clean and tidy, it will prevent illness and disease. On the other hand, an unclean house will attract illness and disease, and the household will lose considerable wealth in medical expenses.

On Diwali, an important Hindu festival, Hindus perform Lakshmi puja, and clean their houses in order to welcome Lakshmi. They make rangoli outside their doors and hang torans on their doors. A toran is a garland hung from one end of the main door to the other. Traditionally, it was made of fresh mango leaves and marigold flowers—both auspicious items used in Hindu rituals—but these days, no one has time to make fresh torans. Artistic torans can be bought from shops and hung on the door to welcome Lakshmi. Although Lakshmi puja is performed during Diwali, everyone wants Lakshmi in their home all year long. Therefore, Hindus value keeping their homes clean and beautiful and display torans and rangoli outside their homes as symbols of welcome and prosperity throughout the year.

A mandir is central in every Hindu home, and no Hindu home is complete without one. When a woman gets married, she is given murtis and puja ki samagry (items used for daily puja) by parents, in-laws, and guests in recognition of the central role she plays in maintaining the well-being of the household. Hindus believe in keeping their homes clean, tidy, and well-decorated to welcome goddess Lakshmi into the house, bringing wealth and prosperity. They value their religious practices and traditions and continue them as much as possible in the United States. However, as my research has shown, when these practices are not possible for architectural or environmental reasons, or due to a different lifestyle, Hindus are flexible in their attitudes and accommodate their religious and traditional practices through creative means.

Puja Sahney is a Ph.D. candidate in folklore at Indiana University in Bloomington. She lives in Salt Lake City, where she has conducted fieldwork on the ways Hindus decorate their suburban homes. She is now writing a dissertation on Hindu homes and religious practices. She is also interested in festivals and women’s rituals. Her master’s thesis at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, examined an annual ritual from North India during which married women fast for a day to pray for the longevity of their husbands. Copyright © Puja Sahney.
As I write this first column relating to environment, vernacular architecture, and maritime culture, it is a very hot and humid July day here on Long Island. Across the street from our office on Manhasset Bay harbor are several boatyards and yacht clubs, which have had a long and complicated cultural history. Before English and Dutch settlers came to this area, indigenous peoples harvested clams, oysters, scallops, blue fish, striped bass, and other shellfish and finfish species. They helped teach the Europeans how to harvest these gifts from the sea, using modest craft made from local trees.

Beginning in the 1800s, new companies created shoreline enterprises to take advantage of the fish and provide commercial services to the growing river transportation industry servicing New York and New England. Whaling ports, such as Cold Spring Harbor, welcomed boat builders, while Patchogue encouraged ferry and steamboat companies to build and maintain their ships in the protected harbor. With the development of the Long Island Railroad, a new recreational maritime industry emerged, transporting well-heeled New Yorkers, including Teddy Roosevelt and Cornelius Vanderbilt, to marshland hotels for hunting adventures. They financed their own private boats, housing them at their new waterfront estates, where they lived alongside baymen, boat builders, and other “bay rats.” It was not long before a variety of boatyards evolved, each reflecting the personality and social class of its patrons. Baymen kept and worked on their boats along the streams and rivers, while yachtmen trusted their crafts to yard managers. One such place is South Bay Boat Repair in Patchogue.

The yard was originally founded around 1892 as the Bishop Boatyard by George Bishop, a ship’s carpenter. Bishop built a variety of boats, ranging from warships to oyster steamers, commercial fishing boats, rowboats, skiffs, and cruise ships. The boatyard built a boat for John Doxsee of the Deep Sea Fish Company in Islip, used for harvesting fish from ocean trap nets; a fifty-foot scow for Captain Forrest Burr of Oakdale; and a fifty-three-foot oyster steamer, the Standard, for the Westerbeke Brothers’ oyster company. During Prohibition, the yard was a commonly used site for shipping illegal liquor, as were other yards on Long Island.

The yard built several warships for the U.S. Navy during World War II, along with recreational sailboats. After the war commercial fishing boats, including dragger and tong boats, were built at the yard. In 1947 Bishop sold the yard to Eddie Wayne and boat builder Stanley Grodeski. Wayne worked on Blue Point Oyster Company boats, Davis Park Ferry boats, Jones Beach scenery barges, and dragger boats. During the 1960s, the yard built several dozen fourteen-foot rowboats for the State Park Commission that were rented to park patrons. Edward’s son George purchased the yard in 1973, selling it in 1979. The current owner is Art Volkman.

The yard continues to specialize in repairing wooden craft, due to the dedication of Charlie Balsamo, who has worked at the yard since 1958. Beginning in the 1970s, most yards stopped building wooden boats, as fiberglass boats became popular. On Long Island, however, there is a marked tradition of using contemporary and historic wooden craft. The yard works closely with owners, advising and supplying hard-to-find historic materials. Among its customers are local baymen, such as Eddie Nagle, who worked on the bunker fishing boats in Greenport and also clammed in Great South Bay; wooden boat enthusiasts; and owners of pleasure and cruise ships. According to patrons, “Charlie could always do whatever you needed done. Charlie is the best in the business. Charlie always took the time out to explain things.”

Sadly, in 2009 the current owner removed the historic marine railway, which transported heavy wooden boats into the “barn” where Charlie worked on the craft, to make room for a marina. While Balsamo continues to guide boat owners, this has meant that larger boats can no longer be accommodated. It also means that the future of the yard is in doubt, as craftsmen like Charlie become an endangered species. Yet this yard is a survivor—many other historic boatyards have been replaced by condominiums, restaurants, and marinas.

In an effort to raise awareness of these cultural sites, we invite you to write us about your favorite boatyard, as we prepare an exhibit for 2011. Happy yard hunting!

The Hudson River has been the focus of hundreds of writings over the four centuries since Henry Hudson’s failed quest for an inland passage to Asia through the North American continent. *Hudson River Panorama: A Passage Through Time* adds to that body of literature a unique, beautifully illustrated, and well-presented history of the great river and its impact on the peoples of New York State.

The Albany Institute of History and Art, founded in 1791, is one of the longest continuously operating historical organizations in North America and has been a prominent institution in the Hudson River Valley for more than two hundred years. In anticipation of the 2009 Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial, an international celebration that stretched from New York City up the Hudson River and through Lake Champlain to the Province of Quebec, the Albany Institute devoted over three years to concentrated research on topics related to the Hudson River. The result was an exhibition, a variety of accompanying educational programs, and the present volume, which serves both as the exhibit’s catalog and as a stand-alone panoramic view of the history of the Hudson through a new interpretive prism. The popularity of the Hudson River Panorama exhibit was so great that the Albany Institute extended it an additional year. This book shares with the popular exhibit a clarity of interpretation and exceptional illustrations.

To find illustrations for the themes in the Hudson’s history, a research team of Tammiss K. Groft, W. Douglas McCombs, and Ruth Greene-McNally mined the Albany Institute’s renowned collections, examining hundreds of artifacts, artworks, and rare archival documents. So extensive are the institute’s holdings from the Hudson Valley that an immediate challenge was to establish interpretive criteria that would narrow selection to the most striking illustrations of key events, people, and ideas that could be related to broader narratives of Hudson River history.

The book, which includes a foreword by the Albany Institute’s director Christine M. Miles and an essay by distinguished historian John R. Stilgoe, is organized around four major themes: “natural history and environment,” “transportation,” “trade, commerce, and industry,” and “culture and symbol.” Largely paralleling the organization of the museum exhibit, these themes serve the reader well as an introduction to many of the essential events and figures in regional history. A volume this small, however, should not be mistaken for a comprehensive history. That is not the purpose of this book. Any deeper understanding of the details of this history will require further study, and a good starting point for such study would be the texts listed in the selected bibliography.

Although one of the authors, Tammiss Groft, holds an advanced degree in folklore, the authors clearly did not intend *Hudson River Panorama* as a folklife survey. Yet there is much that will be of interest to any reader of *Voices*. The interaction between people and the Hudson’s landscape over time presents an opportunity to study the constant interplay between traditional folklife and popular culture, particularly after the Erie Canal transformed the Hudson into the primary cultural conduit between the vast interior of North America and the entire rest of the world through the Port of New York. The book’s illustrations are packed with information about Hudson Valley folkways, such as fishing, farmstead layout, and ice harvesting.

*Hudson River Panorama* succeeds in drawing together and presenting a number of themes in regional history in a well-organized narrative, illustrated by artifacts and artworks selected from one of the oldest and most extraordinary museum collections in the United States. Each part of the larger Albany Institute project commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of Henry Hudson’s voyage up the river is an important contribution to our understanding of the Hudson River through time. *Hudson River Panorama: A Passage Through Time* is a beautiful book that will certainly provide much enjoyment and no doubt some enlightenment to almost any reader. It will make a fine addition to the library of any historian or folklorist and will be at home on any New Yorker’s coffee table.

—Daniel Franklin Ward, Eric Canul Museum


It was with great excitement that I received this new CD and listened to it. When I heard there was a project that used traditional Caribbean musical forms for songs about Mary Magdalene, I knew I had to have it. I enjoy traditional music, and I am also interested in the topic of women such as Mary Magdalene and Mexico’s La Malinche, whose stories, although once powerful, tend to evolve and transform through history in ways that end up portraying them in a negative light. This CD is Raquel Z. Rivera’s tribute to the Magdalene and an attempt to reclaim some of her history and power.

Rivera wears many hats: a Ph.D. in sociology, researcher for the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, author of the 2003 book *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*, poet, and journalist. As a musician, she is a founding member of the Puerto Rican roots music group Yerbabuena and the all-women group Yaya, which performs Dominican salves and Puerto Rican bomba. In this new endeavor she is a singer and songwriter fronting the group Ojos de Sofía, which boasts an amazing roster of some of the best New York City musicians in various Latin music fields, including the National Heritage Award percussionist Juan Gutiérrez, percussionist Obanilú Allende, guitarists Yasser Tejeda and Bryan Vargas, pianist Desmar Guevara, and vocalist Sandra Garcia (also a former member of Yerbabuena).

The songs on the CD include genres from Puerto Rico: aguinaldo, seis, and bomba; salves from the Dominican tradition; and a Cuban danzón (although the piece’s percussion pattern seems more related to a form called a caballo, a rhythm used throughout the region that mimics the gait of a horse). I noticed some of the press describes the group as “Caribbean neo-roots music,” but if you are a fan of traditional music, don’t let this label fool you. Rivera and Ojos de Sofía are bringing these traditional forms into the twenty-first century. These genres, like other forms and expressions, are constantly in flux, and these songs reflect a new sensibility. It is exciting to see a new generation taking up our folk music and reinvigorating it. At one time, young Puerto Ricans growing up in New York City would play the Cuban conga drums; now in the parks and casitas, they are playing the Puerto Rican barriles and pandere	
tas of bomba and plena respectively, thanks in large part to people like Juan Gutiérrez.

In press materials, Rivera explains her interest in honoring the figure of Mary Magdalene on a personal level, as well as exploring her as a Christian icon evolving from a supporter of Jesus, to the “Apostle of all Apostles” and Gnostic teacher, to a repentant prostitute who with her tears and
an alabaster jar of oil washes the feet of Jesus. Rivera also explains that, along with aguinaldos and salves, she wanted to include the songs of the Fiesta de la Cruz (Feast of the Holy Cross). Practiced on both islands, worshippers sing the rosario cantado, devotion songs to the Virgin Mary. Many of these forms are religious in nature, and some especially are for Marian devotion. Rivera sees the songs as a “parallel Marian devotion . . . for the other Mary, the Magdalene.”

The songs on this CD come from both sacred and secular traditions. The religious song forms on this CD include the salve (literally “hail,” or a hymn to the Virgin Mary) of the Dominican Republic, drawn from the Catholic invocation Salve Regina, linked to the rosary. In the Dominican Republic salves are usually sung during relaciones, celebrations for patron saints. The aguinaldo, or Puerto Rican Christmas carol, has its origins in the Christmas carols called villancicos, which were songs in Spain devoted to exalting the miracles of the Virgin Mary. The principal characteristic of the aguinaldo is a four-line (copla, or quatrain), seven-syllable verse. Though the villancicos remained popular in Spain, it is in Puerto Rico that the Spanish hexasyllabic meter really took root, so Puerto Rico has this unique verse form. The Puerto Rican bomba is also included on this CD; at one time, it too may have been a sacred form.

The CD opens up with the beautiful “Nuestra Señora de Lexington,” a seis fajardeo, with Rivera’s tribute to La Magdalena in her local guise as Our Lady of Lexington Avenue. The lyrics are set to a traditional décima verse—the décima is a ten-line, octosyllabic verse originated by the Spanish court poet Vicente Espinel in 1591 and prevalent throughout Latin America—and like other lyrics on the CD, bear allusions to the biblical, historical, and mythical Mary Magdalene. “Nuestra Señora de Lexington” includes, “La que en nuestro beneficio con sus lágrimas redime/She who redeems us through her tears.” In the Bible the repentant sinner is redeemed through tears, but here she has the power to heal others with them. The last verse calls her the “Teacher of the apostles,” referring to the Gospel of Mary Magdalene from the Coptic Gnostic work Pistis Sophia, where she had this role.

In the second song, “Al pie de la cruz” (“At the Foot of the Cross”), a verse gives the traditional interpretation of her, “Ella ungió los pies del Maestro, Fiel a su Jesús, vivo o muerto/She anointed the Teacher’s feet, Loyal to her Jesus, dead or alive.” But the same song also gives an empowered vision of her: “Pedro lo negó, nunca ella, Discípulo amado, Madgalena, Judas a Jesus traicionó, Madgalena nunca lo abandonó/ Peter denied him, never she, Judas betrayed him, Madgalene never left him.” Rivera questions the traditional interpretation that leaves Mary Magdalene with a bad name, yet notes that a male apostle like Peter who does Jesus wrong is nonetheless venerated. A few of the songs also have lyrics that refer back to the number seven, echoing the CD’s title—perhaps in reference to the seven demons Jesus cast out from Mary Magdalene, but again reenvisioned not as redemption for Mary, but in honor of her and her wisdom as compañera of Jesus and her role as a teacher.

Whether you are interested in the CD’s topic or are just a fan of Puerto Rican and Dominican music, you will enjoy this CD and have a chance to listen to the latest in our musical heritage.

—Elena Martínez, City Lore


I would venture to guess that about thirty seconds after the Internet was “invented,” the first folklore appeared online. Certainly it was a short distance from the Xerox lore of Alan Dundes and Carl Patger to the same lore being transmitted by e-mail. As the online world grows, so do the possibilities for creating, transmitting, studying, and analyzing folklore, as well as for utilizing the Internet to distribute information about more “traditional” forms of folklore.

**Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World** explores the folkloric aspects of the World Wide Web through a discussion of the ever-changing nature of folklore as lived and practiced—and the not-so-changing nature of folklore scholarship. While folklorists are quick to recognize new avenues to explore, we are not always quick to shift our definitions to work with them. This edited volume looks at the definitions of folklore and how they must change, given the rise of the Internet and changes in human interaction. The book nicely mixes this important discussion of redefining folklore interaction with examples and analysis using that redefinition. Simon Bronner builds on this in the first chapter, “Digitizing and Visualizing Folklore,” encouraging folklorists to reconsider what is considered traditional, not only in terms of topic but also in terms of transmission. The online world opens endless doors of possibility for exploring new folk groups (such as bloggers) and new ways of conceptualizing, visualizing, and presenting folklore.

Subsequent chapters dive into specific examples of folklore, folkloric groups, and interactions on the Internet. In “Guardians of the Living: Characterization of Missing Women on the Internet,” Elizabeth Tucker explores the use of the Internet to commemorate missing women and facilitate sharing of information regarding their cases. She points out how these sites in many ways follow the formula for legends in general, and legends about young women succumbing to bad ends in particular. Her focus is not solely on the details of the cases of missing women as provided by the web sites, but also on the communities of concerned strangers and people who knew the victims that are created by sharing information and memories. She concludes that the community building around relating information and warning other young women by example warrants further study.

In “The End of the Internet: A Folk Response to the Provision of Infinite Choice,” Lynne S. McNeill explores the myriad choices users face on the Internet, as well as the differing interactions of native versus non-native users of the Internet. She uses the work of Marc Prensky, who coined the term “digital natives” for those people born near or after 1980; digital natives are fluent in computer language and practices, in comparison to those who were born before and had to adapt to digital life. She grounds this in a discussion of a digital folklore meme, the “End of the Internet”—a series of pages that claim to be the last page of the Internet—a place the user reaches when there is no more World Wide Web to explore.

The use of the forward as a method of transmission for e-mail humor is the focus of “The Forward as Folklore: Studying E-mailed Humor,” by Russell Frank. One of the concerns of folklorists in the digital age is the method of transmission and how it shifts from face-to-face to something seemingly far less personal. Frank considers the topics and types of jokes that tend to be featured in forwarded humor. He compares forwarded humor to joke web sites, finding that forwarded humor more closely resembles traditional forms of joke telling.

William Westerman looks at a style of Wikipedia contributor expression in “Epistemology, the Sociology of Knowledge, and the Wikipedia User Box Controversy.” He
provides an overview of the behemoth and quagmire that is Wikipedia, the open-source encyclopedia. He then takes a closer look at the userboxes or personal banners used by Wikipedia contributors. These appear to be opportunities to relate to Wikipedia users’ beliefs that are not necessarily relevant to the entry, but are deemed important by the contributor—and issues of trust and the trustworthiness of information can arise when bias appears.

Robert Glenn Howard delves into the use of the Internet as a tool in spiritual warfare in “Crusading on the Vernacular Web: The Folk Beliefs and Practices on Online Spiritual Warfare.” Persons who consider themselves spiritual warriors against those who do not share their interpretation of the Bible use the Internet to tell their story and to garner both sympathy and believers. He discusses the potential public pitfalls of these web sites, which also single out “demons” or unbelievers for attention, leading to a discussion of the nature and proliferation of intolerance on the Internet.

The Internet as vehicle for memorialization and commemoration of the dead is the focus of Robert Dobler’s chapter, “Ghosts in the Machine: Mourning the MySpace Dead.” In his discussion of the use of the social networking site MySpace for remembering the dead—usually young adults—he compares and contrasts these digital memorials to the roadside memorials we see all too often in our travels. His discussion of motion and stasis in comparing the two and of grief patterns is very compelling and warrants further study, perhaps leading to a good fieldwork project for students.

In the final chapter, “Public Folklore in Cyberspace,” Gregory Hanssen provides a history of public folklore in cyberspace, starting with using databases to catalog information at the beginning of broader computer use to more recent uses, such as mounting exhibits on the Internet that will reach more people in virtual space than in physical space. He discusses the uses and potential of the Internet for public folklorists, both for sharing information within the profession and with a host of other users, such as educators and folklore groups. The appendix is a web resource for public folklore.

The ideas and redefinitions of folklore that this collection suggests are compelling, well laid out, and presented skillfully. I would recommend this book to any folklorist thinking about folklore scholarship and practice in the twenty-first century. I also suggest this book as a text for a class on new avenues for folkloric inquiry. I would even use it in an introductory class toward the end of the course, after grounding students in more “traditional” folkloric studies.

—Elinor Levy, Raritan Valley Community College


I came upon this CD of songs to which one might want to dance a jig, by Irish musician and musicologist Dan Milner, in an indirect way: I have been on a search for a pirate shanty for my historical novel about women pirates. This has several, one or two of which I particularly like for my purpose, as well as others that I enjoy for their own sakes.

I immediately zeroed in on one whose subject matter was most familiar: “Granuaile.” She’s Grace O’Malley, a real sixteenth-century pirate whose life was portrayed in the Broadway musical The Pirate Queen. It wasn’t what I wanted for my book, although I liked the song. Milner’s notes indicate that “Granuaile, historically, has long been synonymous with the Irish nation.”

I decided to consider some other songs for use in my novel. “The Flying Cloud” seems a perfect choice. Sung by Dan Milner, it is a wistful ballad about the life of pirates on a ship, including a graphic description of the shackled slaves held below deck. The lyrics certainly capture the essence of pirate life. The song matches the descriptions I’ve encountered throughout my years of research about the exciting and sometimes bloodthirsty renegades.

A second song that I love because of its beautiful melody is “The River Lea,” about a seaman “willingly” deciding to give up life at sea. During the 1700s, those pirates agreeing to follow the order of King George to give up the life of piracy and settle down on land were granted clemency; those who refused were hanged. “The River Lea” is not about a pirate, but it beautifully captures the conflicts in the heart of a longtime seaman deciding to settle down on the shore.

This CD is a collection of mostly Irish pirate songs, but some songs also touch on other law-defying citizens—not to mention those who were dispossessed by the government, or simply life. Dan Milner has an Irish background and “grew up in a singing family.” Milner’s autobiography begins with his hardscrabble childhood, which is reminiscent of Frank McCourt’s. I think he should expand it and certainly include more about his deceased parents and brother, Liam, whom he wishes to “meet again one day back in Ballybunion.” Milner’s backup musicians and singers include Tim Collins, Bob Conroy, Brian Conway, Gabriel Donohue, John Doyle, the Johnson Girls (an all-woman maritime singing group), Joanie Madden, Susan McKeown, Mick Moloney, and Robbie O’Connell.

The other songs on the CD are “The Ballad of O’Braudair/Out on the Ocean,” about a seventeenth-century pirate who found his end by hanging. “Saucy Ward” is about one John Warner, who persuaded a ship’s crew to take up piracy. I particularly enjoyed “Get Up, Jack, John, Sit Down/ Miss Thornton’s” as a song to sing or play with a child—it’s absolutely delightful and delicious. According to Milner, a New York lyricist, Edward Harrigan, composed it for his musical Old Lavender in 1885.

“Larry Maher’s Big Five-Gallon Jar” is about an infamous innkeeper. He reminded me of the mother of one of my pirates, Moll Read, who was also an innkeeper—she offered a little prostitution on the side, as well as rum. “Bold McCarthy (The City of Baltimore)” is about the Liverpool poor who immigrated to New York. Many of those who “chose” piracy were desperately downtrodden; piracy offered a less despicable and detestable way of life. “All for Me Grog” is a more recent Irish song (around 1960), recorded by the great Liam Clancy. “Castle Gardens (Sixty Years Ago),” as Milner explains, “coincides with the working life of the Castle Garden Emigrant Landing Depot, the predecessor of Ellis Island.” One of the most historically interesting songs is “The Lowlands Low,” an eighteenth-century smuggling song, as well as a “rallying cry published five years before the Easter Uprising.”

Dan Milner and his accompanying artists are consummate professionals. Irish Pirate Ballads and Other Songs of the Sea is a great CD just for listening. History through music also makes it a great addition to the classroom.

—Carol London, Touro College
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For additional information or to find out how to become a delegate, please contact Lisa Overholser at lisa@nyfolklore.org.