



## NCTA MAJOR PROGRAMS

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Traditional Arts (NCTA)**  
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### **Mission**

The National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) is a private, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the presentation and documentation of folk and traditional arts in the United States. Founded in 1933, it is the nation's oldest producing and presenting organization with such a focus. Its programs celebrate and honor arts that are deeply rooted cultural expressions - music, crafts, stories and dance passed down through time by families, communities, tribal, ethnic and occupational groups. The NCTA stresses quality and authenticity in presenting traditional artists to the public in festivals, national and international tours, concerts, radio and television programs, films, recordings and other programs.



Photo by Michael G. Stewart

### **Major Programs**

#### **The National Folk Festival**

First presented in 1934, the National is the oldest multi-ethnic festival in the country and pioneered most of the techniques now used by presenters of cultural programs. The first production to employ a cultural specialist (Vance Randolph) for the fieldwork necessary to bring artists from ethnic communities to public stages, the National had among its planners pioneer folklorists such as Sarah Knott, Zora Neale Hurston, J. Frank Dobie, George Pullen Jackson, George Korson, Arthur Campa and Ben Botkin. It is a traveling festival that is produced in partnership with communities around the country. Presented for three years in each host city, the National Folk Festival's tenure lays the groundwork for locally produced festivals and events that continue after the National moves on. To date, the National has been presented in 26 cities. Musicians and craftspeople from every state in the Union and most U.S. territories have participated in this "moveable feast of deeply traditional folk arts." Presented to audiences free of charge over a three-day period, National Folk Festivals since 1987 have had audiences upwards of 150,000. Butte, Montana is the current host city for the 70th, 71st and 72nd National Folk Festivals, 2008-2010.

#### **The Lowell Folk Festival**

A free, three-day annual event that is an outgrowth of the National Folk Festival's presence in Lowell from 1987, '88 and '89. The NCTA continues to partner with the City of Lowell, the Lowell National Historical Park and the Lowell Festival Foundation in the planning and production of this multi-ethnic festival featuring six stages, crafts and foodways areas, and attracting audiences of up to 200,000 annually. The festival has become one of the largest and most important traditional arts festivals in the nation. It helped to fuel a renewal and revitalization effort that has transformed this historic New England mill town.

#### **The American Folk Festival**

This free, multi-ethnic festival in Bangor, Maine, builds upon the successes of the 2002-2004 National Folk Festivals held in this city, where annual attendance grew from 80,000 to 145,000 in three years. The National's successor festival, the American Folk Festival on the Bangor Waterfront, is presented on a beautiful site along the Penobscot River in downtown Bangor. Now five years old, it is attracting 170,000 attendees annually, and features multiple stages of traditional music and dance, crafts, regional and ethnic foods, a children's area and a folk arts marketplace. The NCTA continues as a partner in the production of this event.

*Above: National Folk Festivals embrace and celebrate the heritage and traditions of all Americans.*

### **The Richmond Folk Festival**

The 67th-69th National Folk Festivals in Richmond, host city from 2005-2007, were presented downtown along the James River on a site that includes the historic Civil War-era Tredegar Iron Works. In 2007, attendance at the 69th National was 175,000, setting an all-time record. At the request of local partners, the NCTA remained deeply involved as the community launched the Richmond Folk Festival in 2008, an unqualified success that drew 185,000 downtown to participate.

### **Touring Programs**

Since it began organizing national tours of folk, ethnic and tribal arts in 1978, NCTA tours have traveled to 49 states, and performed in hundreds of community centers, high school auditoriums, and major concert halls. These tours have received consistent support from the Folk & Traditional Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts. Additionally, NCTA has served the Arts America Program and Exhibits Division of the United States Information Agency and other organizations as a consultant and presenter of traditional American music and dance tours abroad since 1974. Tours organized by the NCTA have taken American performers to 31 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Near East, the Caribbean and the former Soviet Union.

### **Blue Ridge Music Center**

Located on the Blue Ridge Parkway in southwestern Virginia, this new National Park Service facility is dedicated to honoring and celebrating the rich, living musical traditions of the Appalachian region. Open seven days a week from May to November, the Center is programmed and operated by the NCTA. A weekly concert series featuring traditional Appalachian music at the Center's outdoor amphitheater is presented throughout the summer months. The Music Interpretive Center features daily informal, live music sessions, documentary films, youth music programs, dances and a host of other events and activities.

### **National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships**

This is the highest honor our government bestows upon traditional artists. Each year, 10 to 13 individuals from across the nation are chosen to be honored as "national living treasures." For over 25 years, the NCTA has worked with the NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Program on a cooperative basis to manage and coordinate a week of activities honoring the recipients, and to produce the annual free gala public concert featuring the fellowship awardees.

### **National Park Service Programs**

Since 1970 NCTA has had a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service to help plan new parks, conduct ethnographic studies, organize crafts and museum exhibits, train park personnel in cultural presentation techniques, and help local non-profit groups organize cultural events in national parks. This work is supported by a line item for the NCTA in the Department of the Interior's budget. NCTA has been involved in the cultural planning of such parks as:

- Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in Louisiana, which developed a series of cultural centers to present Cajun, Isleño, African-American and Native American cultural traditions;
- Blue Ridge Parkway, where the new \$12 million Blue Ridge Music Center dedicated to Appalachian music has recently been completed. In addition to live music programs, the facility will house permanent exhibits that trace the origins of this music to the meeting of the African banjo and European fiddle in colonial times;
- Lowell National Historical Park (Lowell, MA), an urban park that interprets the American Industrial Revolution and the ethnic groups that were its foot soldiers;
- Chamizal National Monument (El Paso, TX) a bi-cultural performing arts park situated along the Rio Grande on the Texas-Mexican border;
- Nicodemus (KS) National Historical Park, where the NCTA has assisted in collecting oral histories and materials concerned with Nicodemus, Kansas, the oldest black community west of the Mississippi River. Ex-slaves from Kentucky homesteaded this tiny town after the Civil War;
- New Orleans Jazz Historical Park, where the NCTA assisted the park with the creation of an educational set of compact disc recordings that focused on the history and development of jazz in New Orleans;
- New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, which interprets the diversity of cultures associated with the city's whaling industry and maritime history.
- Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, a working cattle ranch that preserves these symbols and commemorates the role of cattlemen in American history.

## Artists Services

Since its inception in 1933, the NCTA has been committed to bridge-building between highly deserving artists and the general public. The artists served during decades of festival and touring work have frequently been disadvantaged by minority, ethnic or regional status, or performance in a language other than English. Often as a result of initial participation in an NCTA-produced event, significant new opportunities for performing present themselves to these artists. The NCTA assists traditional artists through a variety of means to take advantage of such opportunities.

## Services to governmental agencies and the field

NCTA assists federal and state agencies and other non-profits with a variety of services. Some examples of long-term contractual relationships include:

- National Endowment for the Arts
  - Administering on-site evaluations of grantee programs and technical assistance
  - Administration and production of the National Heritage Fellowships program
- DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities
  - Providing technical services and site evaluations for projects by the Commission's Folk Arts Program
- The Library of Congress
  - Programming and producing its Neptune Plaza Concert series for 10 years
- The Smithsonian Institution
  - Programming and production assistance to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.
- Folk Masters from the Barns of Wolf Trap
  - Logistical support for this 12-part concert and National Public Radio series devoted to great traditional music from the Americas and beyond.
- National Medal of Arts and National Humanities Medal
  - Produced, at the request of The White House, the Constitution Hall award ceremony honoring those who have made outstanding contributions to American cultural life and thought that was hosted by the President and First Lady.
- America's Millennium Celebration
  - Worked in coordination with the District of Columbia government, The White House Millennium Council, The National Park Service and the National Park Foundation to organize a nationally televised gala concert and fireworks display at the Lincoln Memorial, and "Main Street Millennium" on Constitution Avenue.

## Traditional arts on film, video, audio recordings and radio

Over the years, NCTA has produced many documentary programs featuring ethnic and folk arts:

### • Films and videotapes

- *The Dance of Tears* - an award-winning 90-minute documentary film about a Cambodian dance troupe and its escape from genocide.
- *The Last Performance* - a 50-minute documentary concerned with the resettlement of Laotian court dancers in the U.S. and their decision to stop performing.

### • Programs for public television

- *Masters of the Folk Violin* - an hour of live performance from this wide-ranging tour.
- *Poets, Politicians and Other Storytellers* - narrative arts by masters
- *Louisiana Creole Families* - a study of zydeco and Creole jazz in live performance.
- *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* - great blues and gospel artists in live performance
- *Masters of the Steel String Guitar* - six American guitar styles contrasted in live performance.
- *California Generations* - documentary on this historic commissioned tour celebrating the generational transfer of traditional arts within contemporary California's native, immigrant and ethnic communities. Live performances by California masters representing eight cultural traditions.
- *Masters of the Banjo* - live tour performances featuring master players from a variety of traditions

### • Public radio specials and live broadcasts

- *The Green Fields of America* - a two-hour national broadcast about fieldwork for this Irish-American tour with excerpts from a concert.
- *The Border Festival* - 3 live three-hour holiday broadcasts from stages at this multi-cultural festival.
- *Mountain Music Homecoming* - two hours of live performance from a concert of this Appalachian music and dance tour.
- *The Old Puncher's Reunion* - a two-hour broadcast of talk and music from this tour that brought together 6 cowboys from different American cattle-raising traditions.

- *Masters Of The Folk Violin* - a two-hour special about the various violin traditions represented in this far-ranging tour.
  - *Masters Of The Steel String Guitar* - a two-hour special about six American guitar styles with performance examples by master players.
  - *Juke Joints and Jubilee* - a two-hour Black History Month special about blues and gospel music and juba dance forms presented in this tour.
  - *American Roots Fourth of July* – an annual day-long Independence Day concert/celebration and three-hour National Public Radio program broadcast live nationwide from the grounds of the Washington Monument featuring blues, gospel, Hispanic, Native American, Cajun, klezmer, bluegrass and more, performed by traditional artists from across the U.S.
  - *Masters of the Banjo* - a two-hour special featuring concert performances by seven master players of this much-loved American instrument with African roots.
  - *Folk Celebrations* – Six hour-long traditional music specials distributed nationally on public radio drawn from live recordings at NCTA tours and festivals.
  - *The Lowell Folk Festival* – A 13-part public radio series celebrating the musical and cultural diversity at the Lowell Folk Festival through live festival recordings.
  - *The National Folk Festival* – A 13-part public radio series featuring great performances from over several decades recorded live at the nation’s oldest multicultural festival.
  - *Echoes of Africa* – Four one-hour programs exploring the richness of African American traditional music forms, including gospel, piedmont blues, Kansas City-style jazz, juba and tap dancing through NCTA tour and festival live recordings.
  - *Folk Tours*– Four conceptual one-hour programs featuring live recordings from acclaimed NCTA tours.
  - *“Live from Boarding House Park”* – WGBH Boston’s annual six-hour live broadcast from the Lowell Folk Festival.
  - *The American Folk Festivals in Bangor, Maine* – Maine Public Radio’s annual ten-hour live, streamed broadcast.
  - *The Richmond Folk Festivals* – Virginia Public Radio’s annual ten-hour live, statewide festival broadcast.
  - *The National Folk Festival in Butte, Montana* – Montana Public Radio and Yellowstone Public Radio 13-hour live statewide broadcast.
  - *The National Heritage Fellowships* –a nationally distributed annual special produced by WDUQ Pittsburgh that features highlights from the gala public concert hosted by Nick Spitzer of *American Routes*.
- **Audio recordings**  
Live concert recordings from NCTA touring programs:
- Masters of the Folk Violin (Arhoolie Records)
  - Masters of the Steel String Guitar (Arhoolie Records)
  - Masters of the Banjo (Arhoolie Records)
  - The Cowboy Tour (Rounder Records)
- Individual recordings of fine traditional artists**
- John Cephas and Phil Wiggins (Alligator Records)
  - Carroll Best (Rounder Records)
  - Fontella Bass (NCTA’s Silver Spring label)
  - John Dee Holeman (NCTA’s Silver Spring label)
  - Brendan Mulvihill and Donna Long (Green Linnet)
  - Eddie Pennington (County Records, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)
  - Will Keys (County Records)
  - Billy McComisky (Compass Records)
- The “Heritage Collection”**
- A diverse 21-CD series traditional music recordings produced by the NCTA for Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores®
- **Publications**
- *A Guide to the Crooked Road: Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail* by Joe Wilson  
A guide to live traditional music sites in Southwest Virginia with double CD
- The NCTA Collection**
- The NCTA maintains an archive of original audio recordings of traditional music dating from the 1930s, with extensive materials from the 1960s forward. It contains classic recordings of now legendary artists as well as the only extant recordings of many artists. The NCTA began using professional portable recording equipment for fieldwork recordings and for "live" stage recording of concert and festival productions some thirty years before other presenters of folk and tribal arts. So, the material in its archive tends to be of far better quality than is common in archives. A multi-year project to preserve, copy and digitize the entire collection is underway. All materials through 1999 have been preserved to date and are now housed at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress.