

By Michael O'Sullivan
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEA Honors Traditional Artists

On Monday, the National Endowment for the Arts announced the recipients of its 1997 National Heritage Fellowships, honoring 11 American folk artists. In a September ceremony here in Washington, the winners will receive awards of \$10,000 in honor of their achievements as practitioners and teachers of the traditional arts.

According to NEA Chairman Jane Alexander, the 16th annual Heritage Fellowships recognize "masters whose extraordinary talents spring from the heart of home and community."

The 1997 winners are Edward Babb, a gospel musician and bandleader from Jamaica, N.Y.; Charles Brown, a blues pianist, singer and composer from Berkeley, Calif.; Gladys LeBlanc Clark, a Cajun spinner and weaver from Duson, La.; Wenyi Hua, a singer of Chinese opera from Arcadia, Calif.; Ali Akbar Khan, a North Indian string player and raga composer from San Anselmo, Calif.; Ramon Jose Lopez, a wood carver and metal-

smith from Santa Fe, N.M.; brothers Jim and Jesse McReynolds, bluegrass musicians from Gallatin, Tenn.; Phong Nguyen, a Vietnamese musician and scholar from Kent, Ohio; Hystercine Rankin, a quiltmaker from Lorman, Miss.; and Francis Whitaker, a blacksmith and ornamental ironworker from Carbondale, Colo.

In other news, the NEA announced last week the appointments of Wayne S. Brown as the endowment's director of music and opera and Douglas C. Sonntag as its dance director. Foremost among their responsibilities will be the oversight of all grant applications in their respective disciplines.

From 1986 to 1996, Brown served as executive director of the Louisville Orchestra and last summer produced the music programming for Atlanta's Cultural Olympiad. Sonntag, who began working for the NEA in 1986 as a program specialist, has been its acting director of dance since last year.

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"1997 National Heritage Fellowships Celebration and Concert"

Earlier this year, when the National Museum of American Art attempted the multiculti thing in "American Kaleidoscope," it ended up with a collection of articles that kowtowed to the show's premise at the expense of the makers' identities. Don't expect such self-effacement at tonight's event

honoring this year's recipients of the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellowships. If past evenings are any indication, it's a good bet that for every expression you take to heart there's another you'll find somewhat forbidding. And that's a good thing. Terence may have written, "Nothing human is alien to me," but he was living in a rather small world. We know our world to be filled with such varied folk as bluegrassers Jim and Jesse McReynolds, Chinese Kunqu opera singer Hua Wenyi, *santero* and metalsmith Ramón José López (pictured), gospel-shout trombonist Edward Babb, North Indian sarod player Ali Akbar Khan, African-American quilter Hystercine Rankin, blacksmith and ornamental ironworker Francis Whitaker, West Coast R&B pianist Charles Brown, Vietnamese musician and scholar Phong Nguyen, and Acadian/Cajun spinner and weaver Gladys LeBlanc Clark. That the world (or even a single country) contains more experiences than any one person can assimilate (never mind master) may be daunting, but it's welcome news indeed. NEA naysayers should note that, at the deepest level, the agency's recognition of these traditionalists and its support of such bomb-throwers as Andres Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Holly Hughes amount to the same thing: You're not supposed to like everything, but everything's out there. At 7:30 p.m. at George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium, 730 21st St. NW. FREE. (202) 682-5428. (Glenn Dixon)

the Crafts Report®

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NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP AWARDS:

Eleven master artists have been awarded the 1997 National Heritage Fellowships — the National Endowment for the Arts' most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts. Among the fellowship recipients are four craftspeople: Gladys LeBlanc Clark, Cajun spinner and weaver; Ramón José López, santero and metal-smith; Hystercine Rankin, African American quilter; and Francis Whitaker, blacksmith and ornamental ironworker. Each is a guardian of generations-old folk art, representing unique aspects of America's culture.

The Fellowships include a one-time endowment of \$10,000. Since 1982, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has named more than 200 heritage fellows.

A presentation ceremony is scheduled for Sept. 23 at 2 p.m. at the White House, where First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will present the awards to The 1997 National Heritage Fellows. On Sept. 25 at 7:30 p.m., the work and music of the Heritage Fellows will be featured in a free public concert at George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium in Washington. The presentation ceremony is by invitation only. For tickets or additional information about the public concert, call the National Council for the Traditional Arts at (301) 565-0654.

Anyone can nominate an artist for this award. For more information on the heritage fellowships, or to nominate an artist for this award, contact the NEA's Heritage and Preservation Division, Room 720, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20506-0001, (202) 682-5428.

Hystercine Rankin: Blankets

QUILTS ARE OFTEN ACCEPTED AT FACE VALUE, APPRECIATED FOR THEIR BEAUTY, COLORFUL PATCHWORK AND INTRICATE DESIGN. OR PERHAPS FOR THEIR USEFULNESS AS WALL HANGINGS OR AS WARM AND DECORATIVE BED COVERINGS. BUT FOR SOME, QUILTS MEAN MORE THAN THAT. THEY EXPOSE FEELINGS DEEP INSIDE THE ARTIST'S PSYCHE, REVEALING POWERFUL EMOTIONS. "MEMORY QUILTS," AS THEY ARE CALLED, DEPICT ACTUAL EVENTS AND CAN HELP THE ARTIST DEAL WITH THEM. THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN AN ELOQUENT MEANS OF EXPRESSION FOR 67-YEAR-OLD HYSTERCINE RANKIN OF LORMAN, MISS.

In 1991, Rankin received the Susan B. Herron Fellowship, the state of Mississippi's highest award in the arts. She also appeared in the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife in 1996. This year, Rankin is a recipient of a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Rankin learned her quilting techniques — the string quilt, star quilt, nine-patch and flower garden — from her grandmother, a strict teacher. A flawed quilt was not acceptable; perfection was expected of Rankin. "If you did something wrong, you pulled it out," says Rankin.

She says she never relied on quilting to earn a living, nor did she ever expect to gain success from her craft. She learned the tradition to survive, to

provide comfort and warmth for her eight brothers and sisters.

The harsh reality and immediate responsibility of taking care of her family fell on Rankin's shoulders at an early age after the tragic murder of her father. She was immediately put to work. "I was 12 years old, and my grandmother told me my playin' time was over," she recalls. "It was time to quilt to keep the young ones warm."

One of Rankin's first storytelling quilts is part of her collection of "memory" quilts. It describes the day her father was murdered at the hands of a white man who she says was never brought to



Hystercine Rankin

Made of Memories

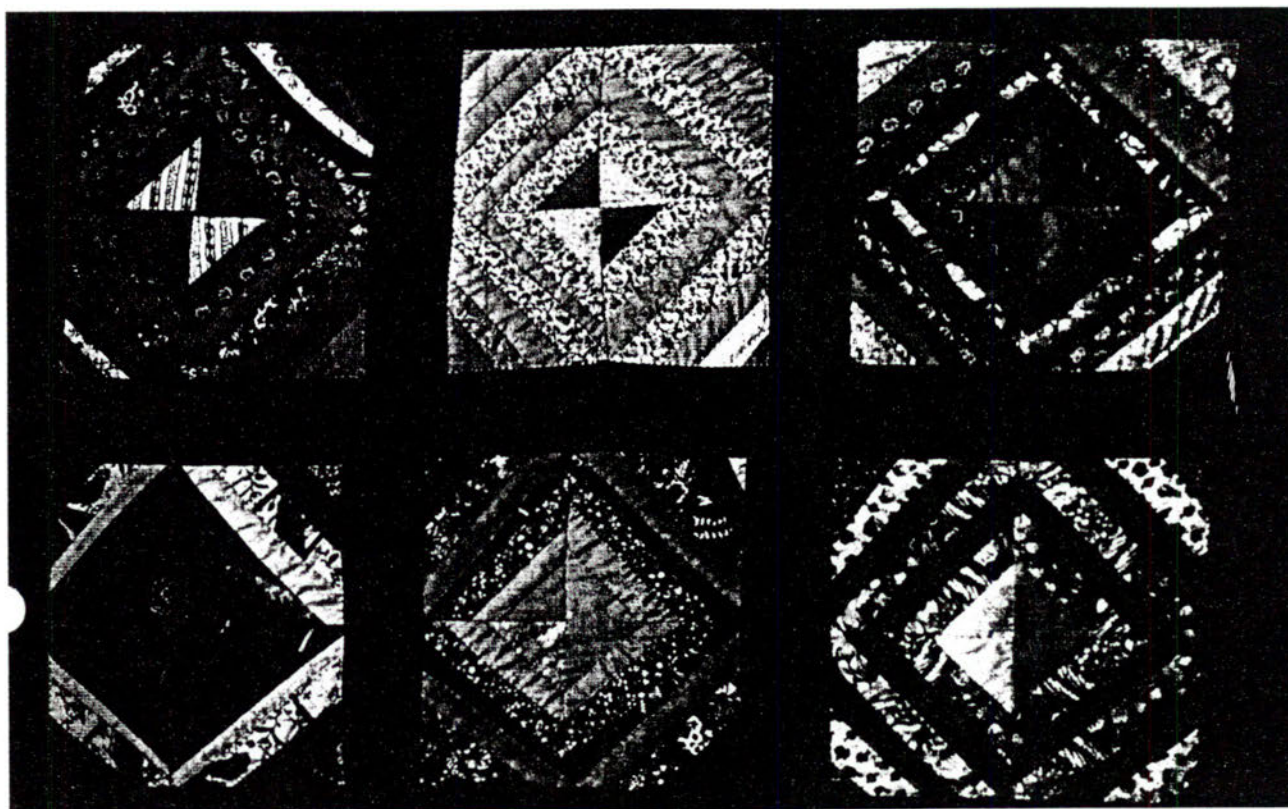


Photo by Roland Freeman

justice. Rankin explains, "I did the quilt to tell people about it. I did a quilt of him laying on the highway. I used reds to show the colors of bloodshed." On the quilt a stitched narrative reads, "I will never forget that morning. He sent me to the spring ... as I went to dip the water, I heard the four shots that killed my father."

Rankin married in her late teens, and her workload increased enormously. Her mother died of cancer, and she and her husband were left to raise her siblings. After the siblings grew up, Rankin and her husband reared seven children of their own. She quilted vigorously to supply her children with warmth.

Everyday experiences and her surrounding environment are what inspires her work. In another "memory" quilt, Rankin reveals her country

upbringing. She thought of the idea while sitting on her porch on a September day. "I thought, if I wasn't here under the fan, I would be picking cotton. So I did a quilt of about 20 blocks about cotton and farm work. I put strips of material together with loops. [The loops] reminded me of chains and slavery," Rankin explains.

Other work depicts scenes like a sunburst bursting through the clouds, plowing the fields with a mule, and a jungle vine inspired by forest scenery.

Her favorite quilts to make are string quilts, which are strips of material sewn between blocks. She makes the strips from old clothing, and anything else she has lying around the house. "It reminds me of the hard time I had growing up," says Rankin. "Use what you have

A traditional string quilt by Hystercine Rankin.

To Find Out More:

Hystercine Rankin can be contacted at
(601) 437-5234.

— old shirts, dresses, anything with good strips to offer.”

Rankin always considered her work a necessity to keep her family warm, but women in the community began to recognize its artistic merit. It wasn't until the local junior high school invited Rankin to be a resident artist that she began to realize her own artistic abilities.

In 1988 Rankin began teaching and exhibiting her work at The Mississippi Cultural Crossroads, an arts organization in Port Gibson. She continues to work there today, teaching young women the art of quilting. She also exhibits her work at the site for tourists to view and to purchase.

Rankin's philosophy is that every quilt is meant for one particular owner. “One quilt hung there for a long time and people wanted to take it down. Then a woman came through and told me that of all the quilts that were hanging, that one had to be for her,” says Rankin. She disagrees with fellow exhibitors when they suggest taking a slow-selling quilt off display. “I say leave the quilt there, because it is for one person, and maybe that person just hasn't made it here yet.”

Since the start of her teaching career, Rankin has exhibited her quilts throughout the South. Although she also does some custom work which takes three to four weeks to finish, her primary customers are tourists browsing at The Mississippi Cultural Crossroads.

Despite Rankin's recognition as an accomplished artist in her field, she still does not consider herself a craftsperson. “It helps out with hospital and medical bills,” says Rankin. “It's enough to know you can pay the bills.”

Apart from creating her memory quilts Rankin's most gratifying moments come from teaching at The Mississippi Cultural Crossroads. She enjoys it when young mothers master the technique and announce that they will take the finished product home to furnish their beds.

“That's a happy time when they take that quilt and walk out that day,” says Rankin. “A very happy time.” **TCR**

● *Kirsten Schmidt is editorial assistant of The Crafts Report.*

Francis Whitaker:



Francis Whitaker.

WITH A CAREER SPANNING 75 YEARS, 90-YEAR-OLD FRANCIS AMERICAN BLACKSMITHS." HE CALLS HIMSELF A MASTER TRADITIONAL CRAFTSPERSON. AWARDS THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, INCLUDING THE 1995 COLORADO GOVERNOR'S HONORARY DOCTORATE IN HUMANE LETTERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AND FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS.

One of four children, Whitaker says he was destined to be a craftsman. After he was born in Woburn, Mass., in 1906, his father had an unexplained feeling that of all of his children, Whitaker would be the one to work with his hands, to be artistic. His father's hunch was right.

At age 15, Whitaker was offered an apprenticeship to work under Samuel Yellin, a premier blacksmith of that time, in Philadelphia, Pa. After being exposed to this craft, there was no turning back. "The first time I got a piece of iron hot and hit it with a hammer, I was hooked," says Whitaker. "I have been fascinated with the process all my life."

The architectural work Whitaker creates — fireplace tools, fire screens, railings, chandeliers, etc. — has not changed from when he first started creating. But, he continues to add fresh and new designs, while still using traditional methods. "I am continually inspired by the two great masters under whom I learned — Samuel Yellin in Philadelphia, and Julius Schramm in Berlin, Germany," says Whitaker. "And of course the entire background of traditional art."

After working with Julius Schramm, he returned to the United States and opened a blacksmith shop in Carmel, Calif., in 1933. In 1963 he moved his shop to Aspen, Colo.

Whitaker's career as a blacksmith and ornamental ironworker was established by word of

mouth and continues to thrive that way today. He does not advertise. Commissions come into his shop; usually his customers want items for their homes. A customer brings a design or an idea of their own, which Whitaker custom makes.

To Whitaker, designs and ideas in blacksmithing are endless creative outlets. He compares his work to that of a musician's. "I tell my students there are four strings on a violin and 84 notes on a piano, but look at what composers can do with those four strings and 84 notes," says Whitaker, pointing out that it's not the materials you work with, but how you use them that really matters.

Custom blacksmith design is not Whitaker's only attachment to the field. He considers himself a lifelong teacher of his craft. In 1988, he founded the Francis Whitaker Blacksmith School, and he also taught blacksmithing for 20 years at the John Campbell School in North Carolina. During his time at the John Campbell School, he expanded its blacksmith shop from one forge to 13. He retired from teaching there in June 1997, but continues his teaching career closer to home. "I teach high school at the Colorado Rocky Mountain school in Carbondale, Colo. I have been doing this for seven years. We make functional items for the campus: ladders, chandeliers, railings, coat racks, etc.," says Whitaker.

To Find Out More:

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(970) 963-9144.

by Kirsten Schmidt

Master Blacksmith

WHITAKER IS KNOWN AS "THE DEAN OF
WHITAKER HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN ARTS, AN
A 1997 NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP

"I tell my students that I have done most of my best work since the age of 70, because I have become a master of technique. I have played with technique much as a pianist or violinist plays [to perfect his or her technique]."

Whitaker recalls facing his greatest challenges from 1932-1935, during the Great Depression. At that time he would do anything and everything he could to earn money. Since then, he has faced obstacles, but mostly in reference to his creations. Although a piece may be difficult, it is always enticing. "Challenges disappear when you become a master, then pleasure comes along," Whitaker explains.

Whitaker's most ambitious piece is a balcony railing on Red Mountain in Aspen, Colo., which he made about 15 years ago. It consists of compound curves and elaborate scrollwork. It was complex work, and Whitaker learned a lot while creating it: "I learned that railings were so designed because women wore hoop skirts and could stand at the rail, and the outward bow at the bottom of the rail let their skirts stay level."

As a lifelong blacksmith, a master craftsman, and a recipient of many awards, Whitaker is content just knowing that his work is admired. "When you live long enough, you get recognition," says Whitaker. "That is nice." **TCR**

• *Kirsten Schmidt is editorial assistant at The Crafts Report.*



An outdoor balcony divider by Francis Whitaker, in Aspen, Colo.

Ramón José López Explores

BY NATURE, ARTISTS ARE DEEPLY CONNECTED TO THEIR WORK. THEY ARE MIND. AND THE TIES THAT BIND ARTISTS TO THEIR ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONSIDER THAT WHEN RELIGION ENTERS THE EQUATION, SELF-EXPRESSION TAKES ON NEW SELF-EXPRESSION AND DIVINE INTERVENTION INTERMINGLE? RAMÓN JOSÉ LÓPEZ THE LINE IS CROSSED, BUT CREATING ART THAT HAS A CONNECTION TO HIS NATURAL AS DRAWING AIR TO BREATHE.



"San Ysidro Labrador," by Ramón José López.

Ramón José López
can be contacted at
(505) 988-4976.

López was recently bestowed a National Heritage Fellowship Award for his work as a santero. He is one of a dedicated group of artisans who create the images of saints, or *santos*. Though *santos* have just recently begun to increase in popularity, especially in the Southwest, the tradition of *santeros* and *santos* predates the first Spanish settlements in the United States or Mexico. In fact, *santeros* have been creating two- and three-dimensional images of saints as expressions of faith for more than 400 years.

A small number of the most primitive *santos*, painted on buffalo hides, still exists in museums and private collections. But the work of *santeros* has evolved since then, and each evolution has been a blend of old traditions and new adaptations borne of necessity and the availability of materials.

Despite the use of new and different materials, traditions have held strong, says López, because the *santeros* have such a deep connection with the creation of their images. To create the images of saints, he says, one must have a deep sense of family and faith. Otherwise, they will not be able to achieve the sense of spirituality that the work must possess.

A major influence in López's work was that of deceased santero Horazio Valdéz. "He inspired all of us," he recalls fondly, "just as he was inspired by earlier *santeros*. All of this work continues to inspire us.

"I am only one artist," says López. "There are many excellent artists here in the Southwest. All

of us inspire one another to become better and develop our skills and our art."

While López sees a heightened public appreciation for the work of *santeros*, as well as an expanded market for iconography, he points out the importance of maintaining tradition and faith in the work. "I have seen people who have started to create *santos* simply because the market has expanded," he says. "In many I have seen a transformation both in the work and in the person. That transformation of renewed faith and a sense of tradition really shows in the work. And most artists who create religious work experience that. You can see the happiness in them."

López has been creating *santos* for 25 years, and sees it not only as a connection to his faith, but as a connection to his own heritage. His grandfather, who died shortly before López was born, was also a santero. "They tell me I look like him, and that I'm a lot like him in many ways," López says affectionately. "My grandfather was a carpenter. He built a chapel in Santa Fe, called *La Capilla de San Ysidro*. It was built for the local farmers, and it was the center of our community at the time. I spent much of my childhood there, not only to pray and attend mass, but to play with other children. All the kids played there. It was a wonderful, beautiful place, in a beautiful setting. We still use it for a yearly procession. It really takes you back in time.

"I grew up around these images, they are truly a part of my life," he adds, "so creating them now is just natural for me."

by Bernadette Finnerty

His Faith, Artistically

BOUND TO IT BY SPIRIT, HEART AND
MULTIFARIOUS. BUT ONE HAS TO
MEANING. IS THERE A POINT WHERE
ISN'T SURE HE UNDERSTANDS WHERE
STRONG CATHOLIC FAITH IS AS

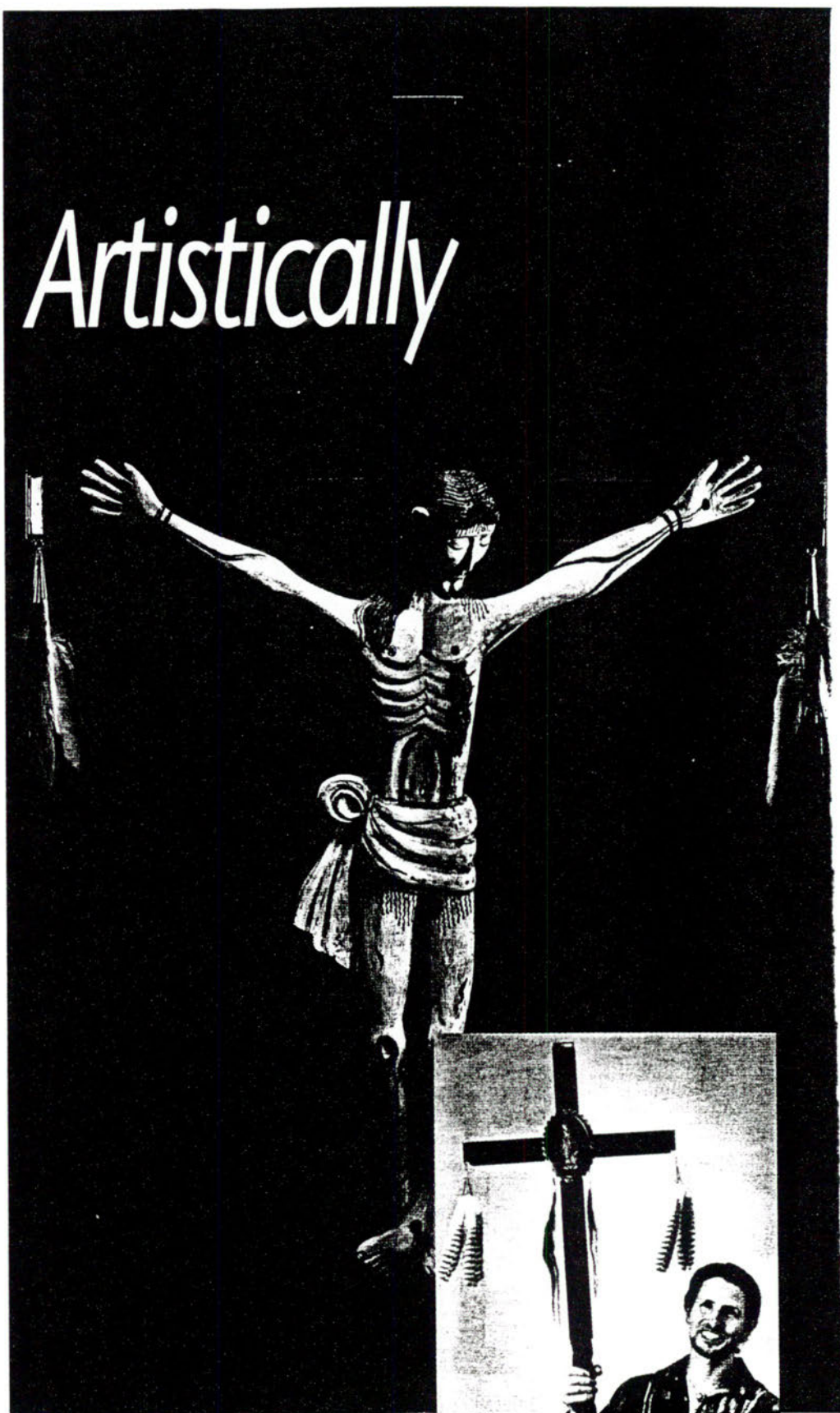
Like his grandfather, López is also a carpenter. He builds traditional adobe homes, made of real adobe mud blocks, not the wood-framed replicas common in Santa Fe today. Lopez says he enjoys building with his hands. He does so in addition to creating his santos, his jewelry and other kinds of art work.

López isn't quite as enchanted with the business of being an artist. In fact, he's cut down recently on the number of shows and fairs he does. There was a time when López would do up to 25 craft shows a year with his jewelry. Now he does about two shows per year. "I'm getting older now, and I can't keep up that pace anymore. I want to be able to spend time with my family." López lives in Santa Fe with his wife Nancy and four children: Leon, 20; Lilly, 19; and twin boys Bo and Miller, 14.

"Besides, you can tend to lose the satisfaction of creating the work when you have to produce so much of it to sell." He has continued building traditional houses because of his love of the process, and his work as a santero has remained constant. López also creates other religious art, such as chalices.

Most of López's religious work is now sold through commission to museums, churches and private collectors. **TCR**

Jernadette Finnerty is editor of The Crafts Report.



(Above) A highly detailed cross by
Ramón José López.

(Inset) López carrying one of his
creations, the Saint Francis' Cathedral's
1992 processional cross.

Gladys LeBlanc Clark.

THE CREATION AND USE OF HANDMADE TEXTILES WAS PASSED ON FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION AMONG THE CAJUN PEOPLE. THIS TRADITION OF SPINNING AND WEAVING CLOTHING, BLANKETS AND OTHER NECESSITIES HAS SURVIVED LONGER IN THE CAJUN CULTURE THAN IT HAS IN MOST OTHERS IN THE UNITED STATES. WHILE OTHER CULTURES QUICKLY ADOPTED THE CLOTHING OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, MANY CAJUN FAMILIES STILL WORE HANDSPUN, HANDWOVEN PANTS AND SHIRTS. BUT, AS EARLY AS THE MID-1900s, CAJUN WEAVERS HAD BECOME SCARCE. TODAY, GLADYS LEBLANC CLARK IS ONE OF THE FEW WEAVERS CARRYING ON A TRADITION ADAPTED OVER A CENTURY AGO.



Gladys LeBlanc Clark with some of her finished work.

Clark, a 78-year-old Louisiana native, has been honored with a 1997 National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for her spinning and weaving. She was awarded the Acadian Folk Heritage Award from the Acadian Arts Council in 1996, and was a master teacher in Louisiana's folk arts apprentice program.

Born into a family of spinners and weavers, Clark learned to card and spin by the time she was eight. Taught by her grandmother and mother in the traditional Cajun technique, Clark mastered the "over-under," plain-weave style (called Tabby) that her ancestors originated in France and Canada using wool and linen. As the Cajun (originally called Acadian) refugees from Acadia, a former French colony of eastern Canada, settled in Louisiana, they adapted this traditional weaving style using the cotton native to their new land.

Today, Clark helps her husband, as she has for most of her life, raise cotton on their farm in Duson, just outside of

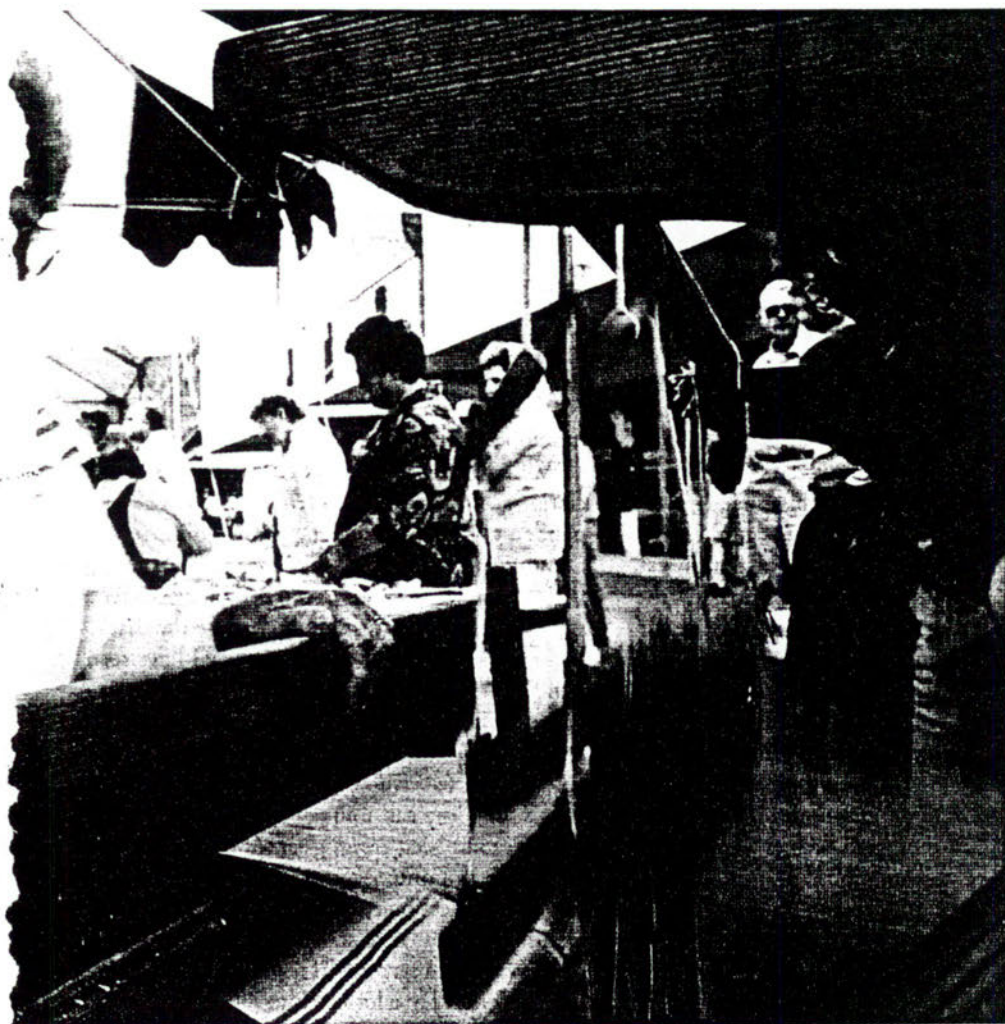


Lafayette. From their fields, Clark takes the cotton, removes the seeds by hand, and then cards it (disentangles the fibers) to prepare it for spinning. "There's no cotton gin in the neighborhood, so we'd have to go to the center of Louisiana to use one; I just remove the seeds by hand," Clark explains. She spins the cotton on her own wheel and then sews on her 12-inch loom.

For Clark, the convenience of having her own equipment is important, though

by Noelle Backer

Weaving Cajun Tradition



Gladys LeBlanc Clark demonstrates her technique at an outdoor fair.

Photo by Peter C. Piazza

perhaps not as social as sharing with others as in the past. She didn't own her own loom until after she was married. When Clark was younger, her grandmother had a loom that she would lend out to friends or family when they had spun enough yarn to make a blanket, for example. They'd dismantle the big Cajun loom and carry it to someone else's house to be used until the work was finished.

Clark also remembers the sense of

community that spinning and carding with others used to instill in her. "We had carding parties all the time — all the ladies would get together like quilting bees; we'd borrow chairs from all the neighbors, and sit around in a circle. We'd have cookies and lemonade," she explains. "We'd do the carding then, and my mother and I would do the spinning later at night."

Today, the circle of Cajun weavers has

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Cajun Tradition

(continued from page 21)

grown smaller. Clark explains, "In our weavers' guild, we have about 20 or more weavers, but most of them do patterns and that kind of thing. As far as the weaving the Cajun's would do, not too many people are still doing it at all."

A couple of years ago, Clark was inducted as an honorary member of the Acadiana Weavers Guild, which, she explains, she had originally not been able to join: "I didn't join at first because they would meet only at night, and I wouldn't drive at night; then they made me an honorary member, and Elaine Bourque began picking me up so I could attend the meetings, and she still does today." Bourque had been Clark's apprentice, and Clark says, "She has learned to card and spin the way my mother did."

To share her family's tradition with others, Clark also demonstrates her craft at fairs, such as the Louisiana Native Crafts Festival, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife and the Louisiana Folklife Festival. "I go to festivals, and I bring my loom and my spinning wheel," she explains. "I card and I weave. Then, I'll sell what I've woven. ... I also take a supply that people buy from me, and I can also mail things to people if I don't have specifically what they want."

Festivals have been fun *and* successful for Clark, but they weren't always her primary selling venue. Originally, a market for the traditional French-Canadian textiles was recognized by a woman named Louise Olivier, whose influence became one of the greatest on Clark's work. Olivier organized Louisiana State University Extension's Louisiana Handicraft Project, which sought new, non-local markets for the Cajun work. Clark explains, "Years ago, my mother would weave blankets. I'm one of nine children, and my mother wove [traditional] blankets to give each of us when we got married. Miss Louise Olivier found a market for this work — people who wanted old French styles and the kind of thing my mother was doing." Clark, too, began making work to sell. "I did a lot of sewing before that," she explains, "and because of Miss Olivier, I did more weaving and spinning instead of sewing; I still do some sewing, but mostly spinning and weaving."

Olivier continued her promotion of their work for many years. "Miss Olivier found stores, department stores, and some other places that would buy our work; but ever since she passed away, this has mostly dropped off. Now [aside from the fairs] I just pretty much make something when someone wants it. I also sell to one or

two other people who have gift shops."

Adherence to tradition limited Clark's work in the sense that most things she made were brown or white, or both — made from brown or white cotton; dyed fabrics were not traditionally used in Cajun styles. Clark explains, "I'd weave brown cotton placemats with white trim, table runners and, more recently, some scarves — but mostly plain, traditional Cajun styles."

But within traditional boundaries, Clark has had some room to experiment. "A few years ago, I made placemats for a doctor," she says. "He wanted a little more color, so I added a little more brown to the white, white to the brown, and then after that I started doing a little bit more with [the colors]." The scarves were not a traditional form either, Clark explains: "The idea came from a friend who had visited France and brought some of my brown table runners to give as gifts to her relatives; one of the girls had put the table runner around her neck; my friend told her it was for the table, but she kept wearing it on her coat. So, that's how I began making scarves — from the table runners. I just added some knots on the ends, like macramé."

But for Clark, weaving has never been a primary source of income; she was never concerned with creating more appealing products to increase demand, only to provide someone with what they wanted in this traditional form. Nor did she ever consider making it her full-time career: "I was helping my husband — that is the reason. We were growing cotton, so I worked in the field with him whenever I could. We didn't raise a big family — we had one son; but later we started raising rice, so I'd cook for the men that helped in the field; and we raised chickens and cows, and all that always kept me occupied. I've lived on a farm all my life; that is what I did."

Why continue making and selling this traditional work? "I just love to do it," Clark says, "really." And her favorite aspect of her craft? Spinning. "Weaving is OK, but spinning to me is the best thing," she says. "And when I go out demonstrating, people seem to be a lot more intrigued with the spinning; they can't imagine how I can take a little bit of cotton and make yarn come out. Especially from the brown cotton, which has much shorter fibers; it's never been worked with to improve it like white cotton has. The brown is a lot harder to spin, but I can make a pretty fine thread from it."

Clark still demonstrates the Cajun style of weaving, taking her loom and spinning wheel to house gatherings or classrooms, but mostly she enjoys the quiet repose her work can bring: "I can just sit in the living room carding and weaving while I watch my soap operas. I've always loved that." **TCR**

Noelle Backer is associate editor of The Crafts Report.

To Find Out More:

Gladys LeBlanc Clark
can be contacted at
(318) 984-1695.

WEAVING
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Jim & Jesse named Heritage Fellows

By TOM ROLAND*Staff Writer*

Grand Ole Opry bluegrass duo Jim & Jesse will receive a rare honor as National Heritage Fellows from the National Endowment for the Arts on Sept. 23 in Washington.

The McReynolds brothers will receive the honor, along with a \$10,000 award, from first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at the White House. Two days later, they'll perform along with 10 other 1997 winners at George Washington University's Lerner Auditorium.

"It means a lot for any artist to win something like that," mandolin-playing Jesse McReynolds said yesterday. "It's better than the CMA awards, I guess, because it took us 50 years to get it."

Members of the Grand Ole Opry since 1964, Jim & Jesse celebrated their 50th anniversary as performers this year. They first performed on WNVA radio in Norton, Va., and signed with Capitol Records in 1952. From 1965-72 *The Jim & Jesse*

Show was nationally syndicated on TV. In 1993, they were added to the Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

"We were just carrying on the tradition that our grandfather started in 1927 when he recorded on the Bristol Sessions," Jesse said. "We're still doing it after 50 years, and I guess that made an impression on someone somewhere."

Two hundred nominations were submitted for this year's National Heritage Fellows, said Dan Sheehy, director of Folk & Traditional Arts for the NEA. Sheehy indicated nominees are recognized for their authenticity, artistic excellence and their "contributions to their tradition and to the art of the United States at large."

Unlike many other awards, the National Heritage honors are garnered through a third-party nominating process, rather than through the efforts of the artists or their associates.

"The whole process is set up to kind of reach into these communi-

ties, find nominees that speak to the core of American traditional arts, and not have to rely on the artists being self-promoters or go-getters," Sheehy noted.

Previous winners with Nashville connections include bluegrass pioneers Bill Monroe, 1982; Earl Scruggs, 1989; and Ralph Stanley, 1984; Grammy-winning guitarist Doc Watson, 1988; gospel vocalists The Fairfield Four, 1989; bluegrass fiddler Kenny Baker, of Cottonwood, Tenn., 1993; fiddle player Johnny Gimble, 1994; and banjo player Will Keys, of Gray, Tenn., 1996.

Among the other 1997 winners are gospel trombonist Edward Babb, African-American quilter Hystercine Rankin, and R&B performer Charles Brown.

"It's a great honor to get something like this," Jesse McReynolds noted. "Maybe we made a mark somewhere that'll help somebody do what they're doing — to keep patient, keep at it and eventually it'll pay off." ■



Style

Raga Riches From India's Ali Akbar Khan

By Joseph McLellan
Special to The Washington Post

The first raga played by Ali Akbar Khan Saturday night in the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater, "Baga Sri Kannada," was nearly an hour and a half in length—as long as a Bruckner symphony and considerably more subtle and complex.

There were only four musicians onstage: Khan, his wife and son (who played in the background) and tabla (drums) player Swapan Chandhuri, who engaged in a dialogue with Khan that sounded simultaneously like a meeting of minds on the highest level and an intense competition to see who could play faster and more intricately and perhaps catch the other party out of step.

Khan is recognized in India, and by many elsewhere, as one of the greatest musicians of our time—less well known than Ravi Shankar, perhaps, but not less respected by connoisseurs.

His instrument is the sarod—a plucked string instrument with some strings that play melody, others that simply (or complexly) vibrate, and two resonating chambers that produce contrasting types of sound. It has a family resemblance to the somewhat larger sitar but a personality of its own. The technique of playing it is handed down orally and by example from guru to student, and the difficulty of mastering it is legendary.

A brief note in the Kennedy Center's program quotes Khan on the challenge of the sarod: "If you practice for ten years, you may begin to please yourself, after 20 years you may become a performer and please the audience, after 30 years you may please even your guru, but you must practice for many more years before you finally become a true artist—then you may please even God." He has been practicing for more than 70 years.

In the "Baga Sri Kannada," and in

the shorter, less complex "Bhoop-Maand" which completed the program, Khan began with slow, contemplative music, elaborately ornamented, the notes wreathed in an aura of vibrations that blurred the boundaries between one note and the next, and with long glissandi that made a whole scale sound like a single note.

The music gradually became faster, more tense and even violent, the rhythms more complicated and imbued with a sense of urgency, the interactions with the tabla player more tricky and tightly coordinated, driving the music to a series of climaxes that were punctuated but not interrupted by outbursts of spontaneous applause.

The concert was presented by the Embassy of India to commemorate, in the words of Ambassador Naresh Chandra, "50 years of freedom and democracy in India," and the music—in its intricate blend of freedom

and discipline—did supply a sort of example for the spirit of a functioning democracy.

Chandra called Khan "an all-time legend in our country" and noted that he will receive a National Heritage Fellowship award Sept. 23 at the White House. Sometimes, an award honors the person who receives it, he said, but in this case, "he does honor to the award."

CITY LIGHTS

August 15–21, 1997

16

SATURDAY

When, as a young man, **Ali Akbar Khan** received the title “ustad” (master musician), his father reportedly laughed. A half-century later, no one could doubt the designation: Khan, who plays the 25-string sarode, may be the most influential classical Indian musician alive. Based in California for more than 30 years, Khan has both taught and performed extensively, transforming Western understanding of Indian music—and winning a MacArthur “genius grant” and an NEA National Heritage Fellowship (to be awarded next month). Part of the official celebration of 50 years of Indian independence but open to the public, this concert will demonstrate the intricate counterpart that has earned Khan another appellation: “the Indian Johann Sebastian Bach.” At 7:30 p.m. at the Kennedy Center’s Eisenhower Theater. \$12.50–40 (proceeds benefit the India Cultural Center). (202) 467-4600. (Mark Jenkins)

From War Zone To Musical Mastery

Son of Mekong Delta farmer preserves

Vietnam's rich country sounds | By BARRY KAWA

Phong Nguyen plucks the string on the *dan bau*, an exotic-looking monochord, manipulating the pliable water buffalo horn to shape each note.

He rides the delicate Asian strains to the rice fields of his native Vietnam. He lands in the fertile Mekong Delta, where families gather in their yards after dinner with their

dan baus and moon-shaped lutes. He glides atop the rugged plateaus where the elders tell their life stories through their unique songs.

Nguyen is racing the present to preserve and retain Vietnam's rich musical past. He's fighting the modernization of Vietnam, where pop singers and ballroom dance have invaded the cities.

He's trying to keep the sweet melodies alive for the more than 1 million Vietnamese immigrants who have fled to the United States since the fall of Saigon in 1975. Many young Vietnamese Americans would never know their musical heritage without Nguyen's persistence.

"A musical generation might be wiped out," Nguyen, 51, says gravely. "That's what I preserve."

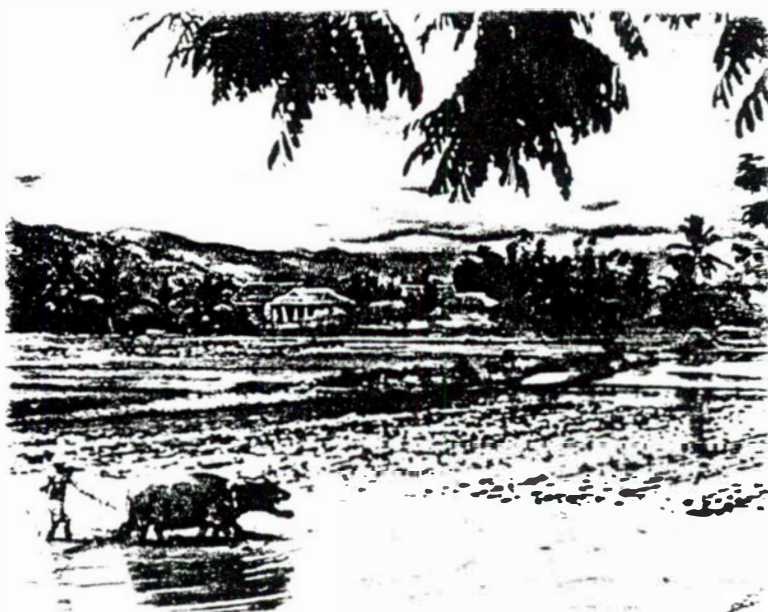
Nguyen has traveled throughout Vietnam to capture hundreds of hours of folk singers on video and audiotape. Besides preserving the priceless cultural regionalism, he also has won acclaim as a folk singer and a versatile instrumentalist.

The Phong Nguyen Ensemble has recorded two CDs that were selected as "Outstanding Folk Recordings" by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

On Sept. 23 at the White House, Nguyen and 10 other artists from across the country will receive 1997 National Heritage Fellowships, the National Endowment for the Arts' top honor for folk and traditional arts. That evening, they will be honored at a State Department dinner.

The next day, Nguyen will play his Vietnamese instruments at a concert with the other winners. Then, he's scheduled to perform solo at the Smithsonian Institution, where he'll sing folk songs and recite poetry chants.

"I'm really happy with that fellowship," Nguyen says. "I would



Vietnamese farmers plowed rice paddies with water buffalo during times of war and peace.

like to forward that to all people, not only Vietnamese, but there are still a lot of other countries in the world in which traditional musicians experience difficulty."



Nguyen was born July 15, 1946, to Tan and Mau. The 12-member family lived in Cantho, a small village 110 miles south of Saigon.

The family was well known as talented musicians who played their instruments after working in the rice fields. Nguyen began his musical training at age 5, learning to play the moon-shaped lute from his father.

When Nguyen was 7, he was sent to study with Buddhist monks at a monastery as Vietnam was battling France for its independence. He would stay with the monks for 10 years. In exchange for room and board, he had to water the flowers every evening after school. He enjoyed participating in the daily chants with the monks, which he could do for hours. He later did his dissertation

on these chants.

"I learned to chant by ear because I am in a musical tradition that mainly focuses on oral transmission. I didn't learn music with notes when I was young. I learned by ear. My teacher told me how to play that musical phrase. I imitated him."

By age 10, he began earning money in Vietnam's provincial centers as a talented folk singer.

Although his family were farmers, they still endured the bombings and the daily corpse count. Nguyen remembers one terror-filled dash where an American plane strafed him and his brother as they carried blankets and mosquito nets for their family. The plane strafed Nguyen and his younger brother Huydzung as they ran, drenching them with water as the bullets plowed into the flooded rice field.

"We are innocent people. We are not soldiers of any army, but the bullets didn't hit us," he says.

By the time Nguyen was in high school the war with the United States had escalated. A South Vietnamese helicopter crew killed his 13-year-old brother Liet while he played with other children in their village.

"We are trained in the Buddhist tradition," Nguyen says. "We try to understand human beings in all aspects. It's not that people wanted to kill for the sake of killing. But to kill because of something, for some reason."

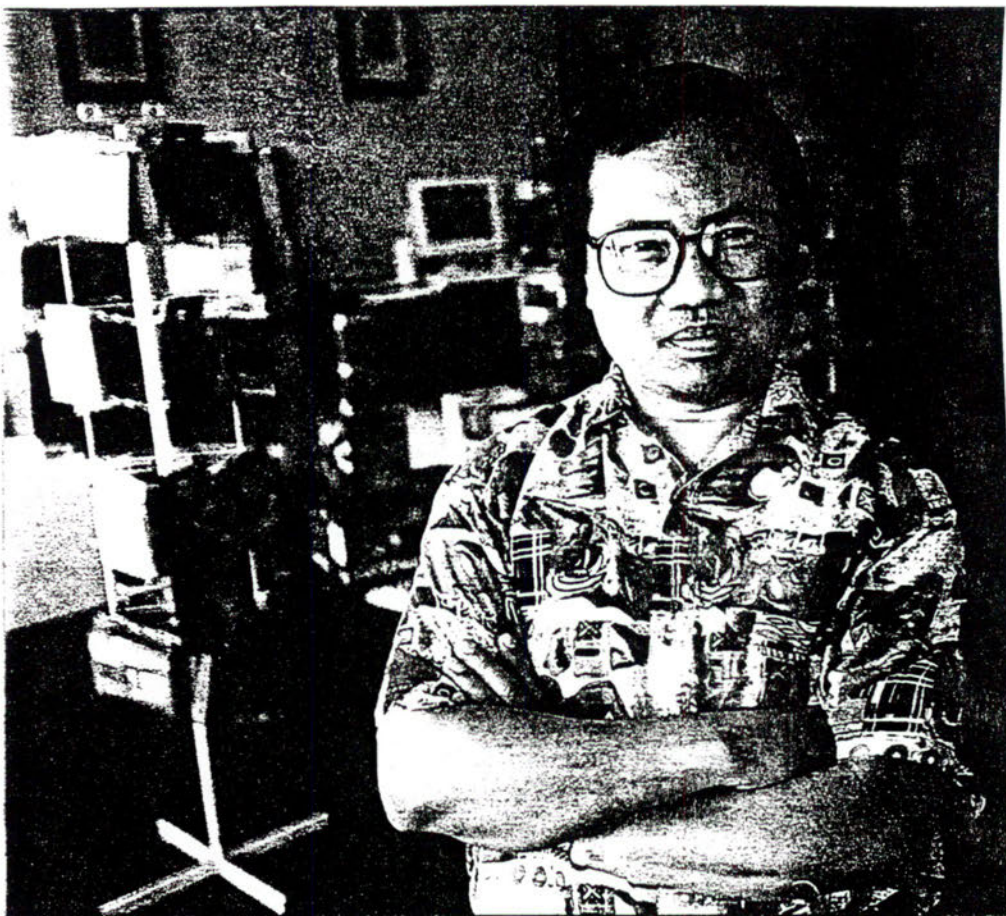
Despite the war, Nguyen befriended many American soldiers when he left his home to attend the University of Saigon. There, he recalls an "artificially normal" way of life took hold, one where most people tried to forget the war.

Although Nguyen loved music, he studied philosophy at the University of Saigon because it did not have a music program. He later became a teacher and a high school principal in Saigon.

In 1973, before the war's end, he left his homeland, accepting a musical scholarship to the prestigious Sorbonne University in Paris. There, he earned his master's and doctoral degrees in ethnomusicology.

After completing his degrees, Nguyen lived for awhile in Japan, beginning his research into the music of his homeland. He also began performing throughout the world. At last count, he has given more than 200 concerts in Europe, Asia and the United States.

He also taught at the University of Washington, the University of Pittsburgh and the University of California at Los Angeles before moving to Kent in 1991 with his wife, Tuyen, an accomplished pianist.



Nguyen recently opened a computer store in Chester Township.
"It has almost nothing to do with music and musicology."



At Kent State University, where Nguyen holds the title of visiting professor, he worked with Dr. Terry Miller, co-director of the Center for the Study of World Musics.

Today, Nguyen is recognized as the most prominent researcher in the world on Vietnamese music, bringing "scholarship and performing together," says Miller. While some researchers espouse "jargon-laden, theoretical prose," Nguyen performs.

"He is very much involved as a musician making music and understanding real living things," Miller explains. "He is not an ivory tower theorist. All his knowledge is based on real experiences with real people."

While conducting major research projects in the mid-1980s, Nguyen visited large Vietnamese communities in the United States, interviewing and recording their music and songs. He feared that the music would soon be lost as the next generation became fully American.

Today, younger people and their ethnic communities are moving away from the traditional Vietnamese folk song. Although it saddens him, Nguyen understands the trend. The traditional songs evoke tales of a rural life, difficult to grasp in today's fast-moving world.

"This music requires a kind of reflection, a kind of thinking. More than just simple entertainment by pushing the button on a stereo system," he says.

In 1991, Nguyen traveled to Vietnam for a reunion with his family. It was the first time he had returned. Miller, his Kent State friend, accompanied him on the trip.

To get to his family's home in the Mekong Delta, they had to take a bus, then a long boat ride. In that rural environment, the trip took almost a day.

His parents and his seven younger brothers and sisters still work in the rice fields on their farm. They are happy, he says, with no desire to follow him to the United States.

"They are happy for me, but they don't really know what the U.S. is. They just know it's a big country and it's very far away, over the ocean," Nguyen says, laughing loudly.

While home on his family farm, he listened more than he played. After dinner, neighbors and other villagers would stop over to play their music. Nguyen watched his elderly father strum the moon-shaped lute and admitted that he cried at the memories it evoked.

"I remember every note my father used to play when I was a kid," Nguyen says. "And he's amazingly, interesting to me, my father plays exactly like I heard before. After 40 or 50 years, there is no change. He plays the same way."

Nguyen journeyed to remote sites in Vietnam on that trip, including the Laotian border, which had been off-limits until 1994.



"People felt touched that she played compositions composed by a Vietnamese."

—Phong Nguyen

Akron pianist Margaret Baxtresser traveled to Hanoi in 1994 with Nguyen. She was one of the first Americans to enter parts of Vietnam that had been off-limits since the war.

"He'll tell you about one night slipping on the mud and falling off a motorcycle down into a ditch with a 75-year-old man who was going to perform for him," Miller recalls. "They got to the recording session and they were all covered with mud."

Still, many a trip ended in defeat. Often, the two would arrive at a farm where an elderly musician had just died.

"I experienced something very sad with these musicians who pass away without being recorded," Nguyen confesses.

In 1994, Nguyen's contacts throughout Vietnam allowed him to organize the first international music conference in Hanoi. Scholars from all over the world attended to discuss tradition versus modernization.

That year, Nguyen also arranged for Akron pianist Margaret Baxtresser to perform in Hanoi's Municipal Theater. The concert, given in the weeks following the Clinton administration's lifting of the trade embargo against Vietnam, marked the first concert in Hanoi by an American artist.

All the top Vietnamese government officials attended that landmark concert. Baxtresser received a warm welcome and met all the dignitaries in a banquet after her performance.

"When I traveled with her after the concert to some provinces, people recognized her," Nguyen says. "Because they read the newspaper about her performance. People felt touched that she played compositions composed by a Vietnamese."

These days, Nguyen has traded the daily scholarly life at Kent State for the business world. He has fashioned his life after that of

his parents, who worked in the fields during the day, bringing out their instruments only at night.

So, he opened a computer store, Computer Options, in the West Geauga Plaza in Chester Township in September. His years of mastering the computer for his research work led him to a business in his next-favorite pursuit.

"It has almost nothing to do with music and musicology," Nguyen says. "But it helps in the sense that I have more contacts with people in a casual way, rather than a formal contact."

And driving to and working in rural Geauga County is not too different from where he grew up in the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam. He enjoys the 50-minute commute, remembering the rural open spaces of his youth.

"There is something that tells me that I am still a country boy," he says.

Nguyen recalls the last time he visited his family's farm. Some 20 years before, an American bomb had blasted an enormous, ugly hole in their backyard. When he next saw it, the hole had almost healed, like the scars of war.

It had been turned into a small pond, where he watched the catfish happily swimming about on his last visit.

"Many people in the U.S. think of Vietnam, they think of the Vietnam War," Nguyen says.

He stops. The sun pokes through the clouds on an overcast Sunday, glinting off the polished granite block sculptures near his home that honor four Kent State students. The effect is touching. Nguyen smiles.

"My mission is to send a message to the world that Vietnam loves peace," he says. "The war is something people had to have at some period of time. But what is essential to the lives of the Vietnamese is peace. And through music, you can get it." 

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

BOSTON -

National Endowment for the Arts Honors American Folk Artists

Kirsten A. Conover

Eleven artists have been awarded National Heritage Fellowships, the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts.

Each artist is considered a guardian of generations-old folk art representing many threads of America's cultural fabric - from rural and urban communities in eight states. Fellowships include a one-time award of \$10,000 and honor artists, teachers, innovators, and "keepers" of traditional art forms. More than 200 fellowships have been awarded since 1982.

In a prepared statement, NEA chairman Jane Alexander said, "Our highest honor in the folk and traditional arts recognizes masters whose extraordinary talents spring from the heart of home and community. With vision and dedication, these individuals pass skills from generation to generation - bringing new life to invaluable traditions and shaping a nation where our differences become our strength."

Recipients:

Edward Babb, "Shout" band gospel musician, trombonist, and band leader. Jamaica, N.Y.

Charles Brown, West Coast Blues pianist, vocalist, and composer. Berkeley, Calif.

Gladys LeBlanc Clark, Cajun spinner and weaver. Duson, La.

Wenyi Hua, Chinese Kunqu opera singer. Arcadia, Calif.

Ali Akbar Khan, North Indian sarod player and raga composer. San Anselmo, Calif.

Ramón José López, carver and metalsmith. Santa Fe, N.M.

Jim and Jesse McRaynolds, bluegrass musicians. Gallatin, Tenn.

Phong Nguyen, Vietnamese musician and scholar. Kent, Ohio.

Hystercine Rankin, African-American quilter. Lorman, Miss.

Francis Whitaker, blacksmith and ornamental ironworker. Carbondale, Colo.

Los Angeles Times

July 4
1997

Indian Classicist to Receive Folk Honors

Friday, July 4, 1997

World Music

Indian Classicist to Receive Folk Honors

By DON HECKMAN, *Special to The Times*

Ali Akbar Khan, one of the great masters of Indian classical music, will receive 1997's National Heritage Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts award honoring folk and traditional arts.

Khan, who is a master of the sarod, a 25-string, fretless instrument somewhat like the lute, will receive a grant of \$10,000 in September, when the award is bestowed.

There is a certain irony to the fact that the recognition comes in the area of "folk and traditional," since Khan and his supporters have been working to have his music recognized for the Grammy Awards in a new category acknowledging classical musics from other parts of the world, and separating them from the traditional folk and world music groupings.

But there is no denying that Khan--called "Khansahib" by his devotees--deserves the recognition.

His Ali Akbar College of Music in the Northern California city of San Anselmo is now celebrating its 30th year, with more than 7,000 graduates, and has received justified praise for its work in presenting Indian music to students from many nations. In addition to the NEA award, Khan will be featured this fall in concerts celebrating 50 years of Indian independence at the United Nations and the Kennedy Center in Washington.

At 75, he continues to be a powerful and influential musical figure.

Joyful noise to high heaven

IT WAS THE PRACTICE of Albert Edgington, a member of the United House of Prayer for All People in Harlem, to buy unclaimed instruments in neighborhood pawnshops and give them to potential church musicians.

One day, he asked Edward Babb to select an instrument, and Babb picked a trombone that cost \$25.75.

That was in 1957, and Babb was 13.

This week, one pay-off was Babb's winning a National Heritage Fellowship, worth \$10,000, from the National Endowment for the Arts.

It makes Babb, 52, a red insurance man who lives in Farwood, Queens, a living cultural treasure — in his case, for the exuberant musical style called "shout band" gospel.

"We call it making a joyful noise unto the Lord," he says.

He is the leader of the McCollough Sons of Thunder, a brass band that plays every Sunday in the House of Prayer on W. 125th St. It is the band's unrestrained, often improvised playing that drives worshipers into a foot-stamping, arm-waving, hallelujah-shouting ecstasy.

Babb also has performed in the Folk Masters series in Carnegie Hall, and tomorrow at 3 p.m., the Sons of Thunder will play in Central Park as part of its summer series.

"We'll go to heaven," he says, "and do some revelations" — his terms for "jamming" and "improvising."

There are 19 musicians — 15 of them, including Babb, on trombone — and their style was spelled out decades ago by the famous "Sweet Daddy Grace," the flamboyant, charismatic founder of the Pentecostal denomination.

Grace, who died in 1960, was a one-eyed railroad cook who was born Marcelino Manoel de Graca, in the Cape

Verde Islands off West Africa, and music was key to worship in his church.

He cited Psalm 150 as the inspiration for the band — "Praise him with a blast of trumpet," it reads in part.

It's a mandate that Babb, a church elder and bandleader for 35 years, lives by.

Not bad for a man who never took a music lesson, cannot read music, plays almost exclusively in one key — A flat — and literally imagines most of the music the band plays.

He hums melodies into a tape recorder, then mentally arranges them for each instrument in the band, which also includes a trumpet, tenor tuba and two drums, one played by Willie Williams, 78, who was a band member when Babb joined

in 1958 and who doubles as the Sunday School supervisor.

He teaches the other parts to the band at rehearsals at the church every Wednesday.

"My ability is a gift from the Lord," says Babb. "It's not something I learned."

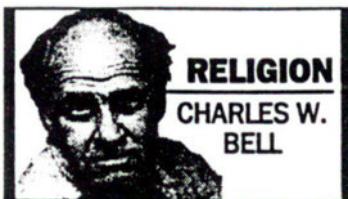
Babb was born a few blocks from the church and, he says, like many other youngsters in the church, he always wanted to play in the band.

At 13, he joined the youth band and within months asked if he could move up to the adult ensemble, then called the Heaven Band.

The bandleader at the time, Bill Cohen, told Babb to come back when he was 14.

And on his 14th birthday, Dec. 4, 1958, Babb did.

Four years later, he succeeded Cohen as director. That year, the band also changed its name, to honor Walter McCullough, who had won a series of court fights to succeed Grace as bishop.



RELIGION
CHARLES W. BELL



JOE DeMARTIA

NOTABLE: Edward Babb with trombone and trophies — and a \$10,000 fellowship.

A musicologist once went to church to transcribe the music Babb and the band played, but after the service, Babb says, the man said he couldn't — "You played too many notes too fast."

THERE ARE MORE than 130 congregations in the denomination, and each has a "shout band," but among the stars, only Babb is left. Two others, George Holland, of Newport News, Va., and Norvus Miller, of Washington, D.C., died shortly after a celebrated "Three Stars of the Kingdom" appearance in 1993.

At home, where he and wife Brenda have lived for 20 years, he plays a variety of music but has a special affection for — what else? — the Big Band sound.

"Maybe at times at church we play out of time," Babb says, "but we always play in the spirit."

Entertainment

Star Tribune

PAGE F13

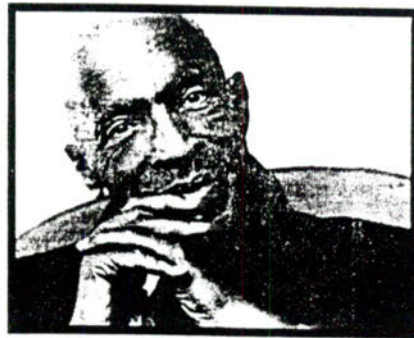
SUNDAY, JULY 13 • 1997

Highlights of the week
— and beyond

Music: Charles Brown

7:30 & 10 p.m. Mon., Dakota Bar and Grill, Bandana Square, St. Paul. \$20 early show, \$15 late show. 642-1442.

Last month, the venerable 74-year-old blues-jazz singer-pianist-songwriter picked up one of the most prestigious checks of his career — \$10,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts. He was one of 11 winners of a National Heritage Fellowship given to “artists, teachers, innovators and keepers of traditional art forms.” Recipients are nominated; no one applies. It is one of only three fellowships the NEA still gives out. (Other award winners included California-based Indian music master Ali Akbar Khan and 50-year bluegrass duo Jim & Jessie.) Brown was honored for his distinctive classy, uptown blues style — a major influence on Ray Charles — which fits perfectly into the Dakota.



— Jon Bream



Marin Independent Journal

Friday, June 13, 1997

San Anselmo musician Khan garners top honor

Independent Journal report

North Indian raga composer Ali Akbar Khan, of San Anselmo, is one of 11 artists who has received the 1997 National Heritage Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts announced yesterday. The awards are the highest given to masters of folk and traditional arts.

Khan, 76, traces his family's musical history to the 18th-century court of Akbar, a moghul emperor. He is considered a genius of the 25-string lute-like sarod.

His first American show was in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1968 he established the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael. A movie about his life was released in 1970.

Berkeley blues pianist and composer Charles Brown and Chinese kunqu opera singer Wenyi Hua of Arcadia also received the award.

Each fellowship includes a \$10,000 prize. A ceremony honoring the fellows will take place in September in Washington, D.C.



UJ file photo

KHAN: Musician will receive a National Heritage Fellowship.

Honor For Ali Akbar Khan

Sarod virtuoso Ali Akbar Khan, a living legend of Indian music, has been honored with the National Heritage Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts' most prestigious award for folk and traditional arts. Khan, 75, has lived for more than 30 years in California, where his Ali Akbar Khan School of Music and Alam Medina Music Productions label are based. In August, he will play at the UN in New York and Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., as part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Indian independence. —Bradley Bamberger, N.Y.

New Music Report[®]
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CMJ



NEWS

ALI AKBAR KHAN HONORED BY NEA

Indian classical musician and raga composer Ali Akbar Khan will receive the 1997 National Heritage Fellowship, the National Endowment For The Arts' most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts, at an awards ceremony and concert scheduled for this September in Washington, DC. The recognition will include a one-time \$10,000 award for the 75-year-old Khan, who has made the States his home for 30 years. Khan, considered a national treasure in his native India, founded the Ali Akbar College Of Music in 1967, where he has taught over 7,000 students. He is considered to be the true master of the sarode, a 25-stringed Indian instrument. In addition to this honor, Khan will be performing at two invitation-only events for the government of India at the United Nations and for the Indian Embassy in celebration of India's 50th anniversary of independence. At these concerts, Khan will be joined in performance by his wife, Mary, and his son, Alam. For more information on these events, visit Khan's official website at <http://www.ammp.com>

AUGUST 9, 1997

Billboard®

Artists & Music



by Melinda Newman

Ali Akbar Khan will receive 1997's National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in September at a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

The award honors folk and traditional arts. The Indian classical musician and raga composer is also set to perform at two events, one in New York and the other in Washington, D.C., celebrating the 50th anniversary of India's independence . . .

A-2

Nashville Banner, Friday, June 13, 1997

People in the News

Jim, Jesse McReynolds: Opry greats earn fellowship for folk talent, tradition

Gallatin-based bluegrass greats **Jim and Jesse McReynolds** will receive a 1997 National Heritage Fellowship, the highest honor given to folk and traditional artists in America.

The Grand Ole Opry members will be recognized at an awards ceremony in Washington in September.

The award "recognizes masters whose extraordinary talents spring from the heart of home and community," says Jane Alexander, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, in today's announcement of recipients.

Guitarist Jim and mandolinist Jesse recently celebrated their 50th anniversary as professional entertainers. They are known for their distinctive vocal harmonies in the tradition of the Monroe Brothers, the Delmore Brothers and the Blue Sky Boys. They grew up in Virginia, in a family of coal miners and farmers who also were musicians.

The McReynolds brothers have been Opry members since 1964.

The award carries with it a one-time cash award of \$10,000.

Among the nine other artists receiving the honor this year are vocalist and composer **Charles Brown** (in concert tonight at Caffe Milano and the subject of today's *Banner* Backbeat cover story) from Berkeley, Calif., and gospel "shout band" leader **Edward Babb** from Jamaica, N.Y.

bluegrass now

Jim & Jesse McReynolds are
1997 National Endowment for
the Arts National Heritage Fellows.

BN • MAY 1997

Jim & Jesse celebrate 50

Bluegrass and traditional country music legends Jim and Jesse were honored on March 29 at a gala event held at the Grand Ole Opry House to celebrate their 50th anniversary in music. The large host of friends in attendance included former band members and business associates from every area of the music industry.

From their first radio show in 1947 on WNVA in Norton, Va., to their current membership on WSM's Grand Ole Opry and the International Bluegrass Music Association's "Hall of Honor," Jesse McReynolds commented on the milestone: "I don't think any musical brother or family group has ever stayed together actively for 50 years, so it's possible that we may have set a record in that category". Jim added: "We'd like to think we've contributed something to the music world that might be beneficial to others, and worthy of remembrance in the history of country and bluegrass music."

The brother duo comes from a family rich in mountain music

heritage, as Grandfather Charles McReynolds was a champion fiddler who took part in the historic Bristol Recording Sessions of 1927. They brought a fluid, natural quality to their singing, quite different from the mountain sound that was heard at that time (in the late 1940's) around the area of their hometown of Coeburn, in the Clinch Mountains of Virginia. Their style of singing, with Jesse's rich lead and Jim's distinctive high tenor, resulted in a unique vocal blend that set a new standard.

It was early on that Jim & Jesse established their instrumental style, with younger brother Jesse inventing a technique that became known as "crosspicking" on the mandolin. This technique is basically described as playing with a single pick what a banjo player, at a rapid speed, plays with three fingerpicks. This and other techniques have since ranked him as an innovator and master of the mandolin.

With over 50 recording projects to their credit, the brothers have maintained a busy schedule, making over 200 appearances annually

throughout the United States. Abroad, they have toured and entertained in Japan, Africa, England, France, Germany, Finland and Holland, to name just a few. This schedule is largely due to the increasing popularity of Bluegrass festivals, which now total over 500 per year in the United States alone. And the number of new festivals continues to grow all over the world.

Future plans do not include retirement, as the demand for Jim & Jesse's music is as strong as ever, with most of 1997 already booked. The brothers would like to slow down, but not stop. The brothers were in agreement on the subject: "Music is our life, and we'd like to continue in a way where we're not traveling so much, possibly by working the Opry more in 1998".

In summing up their careers to date, Jim & Jesse shared the same feelings: "It's been an interesting and memorable experience because of the friendships we've established with so many wonderful people throughout the world".





HOW TOUGH WAS IT 50 YEARS AGO?

Times were hard for Jim & Jesse McReynolds when they started out in the music business 50 years ago. In fact, brother Jesse, whose distinctive, innovative style of mandolin playing is known as the "McReynolds" or "cross-picking" style, once had to pawn his mandolin to pay their hotel bill after performing in Danville, Va.

WSM air personality and Opry announcer Eddie Stubbs revealed this little known fact in a tribute to his heroes during Saturday's festivities.

This prompted brother Jim to note they had a choice between pawning his guitar or Jesse's mandolin. "We could get along without the mandolin," Jim joked.

Stubbs said afterward, it wasn't Jesse's good mandolin, and he did get it back later.

NO SIBLING RIVALRY FOR THE McREYNOLDS BROTHERS

Unlike many brothers acts who've had their share of public and private disputes, Jim & Jesse have performed together for the past 50 years without ever having a major fight or breakup.

The secret to their success, they told TNN's "Opry Backstage" host Bill Anderson last Saturday is their division of responsibilities.

"Jesse looks after the band, and I handle the bookings, the business," Jim said. To which Jesse added, "He drives the bus while I sleep, and I drive the bus while he sleeps."

Between them, they've won five buses in the past five decades of touring, but have managed to chalk up 50 recording projects and become legends in the country and bluegrass fields...making music history along the way.

JIM & JESSE ADD BLUEGRASS BREAK DANCING TO THEIR ACT

Opry audiences watching in the house and on TNN's "Opry Live" on Saturday were treated to a lot of bluegrass and a

little bit of dancing, courtesy of Jesse McReynolds' grandson Luke McKnight.

As Jim & Jesse performed "The Air Mail Special," one of the first songs they did when they started in the business 50 years ago, 15-year-old Luke danced along, combining some mountain clogging and buck dancing with some spinning on his back on the Opry stage.

He managed to save enough breath to sing on the duo's signature song "Paradise." Jim & Jesse and the Virginia boys performed the John Prine number at Buck White's request.

On Saturday's second show, Jim & Jesse sang "Fallen Leaves," a song written by Grandpa Jones. The song is on their latest CD *A Gift for Keith*. The album is dedicated to Jesse's son Keith who has multiple sclerosis. Proceeds from the album sales are going to him to help with medical bills.

Keith was at the Opry Saturday night, watching from his wheelchair as his father and uncle performed during the first show. He also attended Saturday's party honoring the duo.

JIM & JESSE CELEBRATE 50 YEARS IN THE BIZ

In addition to the Eddie Stubbs' tribute, BMI exec Roger Sovine presented a plaque and read a letter from BMI President and CEO Frances Preston. The Opry's Jerry Strobel read a letter from Gaylord Entertainment President and CEO E.W. Wendell. Jim & Jesse also received an engraved photo album from *Bluegrass Now* magazine Publisher and Editor Wayne Bledsoe



Jim & Jesse with BN publisher Wayne Bledsoe

and a certificate of appreciation from Country Music Association *Close Up* magazine Editor Janet Williams.

Among the guests honoring Jim & Jesse Saturday night were several former Virginia Boys, including Jesse's son Keith McReynolds and stellar musicians Vassar Clements, Glen Duncan, Jimmy Buchanan, Jim Brock, Bobby Thompson, and Carl Jackson who joined the bluegrass duo's band at age 14. Of course, the current Virginia Boys—Raymond McLain, banjo, Ray Kirkland, bass and Jimmy Campbell, fiddle—were present, too. Joining them this weekend was Mike Stevens, harmonica, who was visiting from Canada. Also in the crowd at the party was singer-songwriter-banjoist John Hartford.

Saturday night's shindig was a family affair for the McReynolds brothers. On hand to help them celebrate 50 years in the country music business and 33 years as members of the Grand Ole Opry were both brothers' spouses—Arreta and Joy McReynolds—as well as Jesse's four children Gwen, Keith, Michael and Randy and Jim's daughter Janeen and their families, which include five grandchildren. Youngest party guest was Alexander McReynolds, Jesse's three-month old grandson and the son of Randy and Beth McReynolds of Gallatin.

Not only are Jim & Jesse believed to be the only brother or family group to perform together actively for 50 years, they hold another distinction. Their fan club has had the same president for 38 years—which is another record of sorts. Jean Osborn of Tallahassee Fla., has known the brothers for 42 of their 50 years in the business and has served as their fan club president for 38 of those years. Naturally, she came from Florida to attend Saturday's party.

GLADYS LEBLANC CLARK TO RECEIVE NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWSHIP AWARD

Gladys LeBlanc Clark, Acadian/Cajun spinner and weaver from Duson, Louisiana, is among eleven master artists selected to receive the 1997 National Heritage Fellowship award, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) highest honor in folk and traditional arts. Each a guardian of a generations-old folk art, the Heritage Fellows represent many threads of America's cultural fabric and hail from rural and urban communities in eight different states. The fellowships, which include a one-time award of \$10,000, honor the recipients' work as artists, teachers, innovators, and keepers of traditional art forms.

"These masters and guardians of folk and traditional arts ensure that America's unique cultural legacy is celebrated and preserved for our children and future generations. Through the National Heritage Fellowships we honor these exceptional artists for their creativity, innovation, and perseverance in revitalizing traditions built by countless others," said Jane Alexander, chairman of the NEA.

Gladys LeBlanc Clark is a deeply traditional inheritor of the cherished and distinctive art of Acadian, or Cajun, weaving. Over the last two centuries, Acadian women created a wide variety of woven items, patterns, and textures which helped express and preserve their unique traditions. When these French-speaking refugees arrived from Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth century, Acadians adapted their traditions to Louisiana. Mrs. Clark's family were all spinners and weavers. Immersed in her richly traditional home life, Gladys learned to card and spin cotton by the age of eight. By her teens, she was an accomplished weaver. She recalls the importance of carding, spinning, and weaving to social life: "All the ladies...could spin and weave. So they would have carding parties, *la cardrie*. Everybody would bring their cards and assemble all the chairs from the neighborhood. We would card all afternoon, and they would serve lemonade and cookies. Mama would spin at night."

Mrs. Clark continued to grow, pick, seed, card, spin, and weave her own cotton on her farm with her husband Alexis, finding outlets for her goods through local stores and word-of-mouth. In the 1940s, LeBlanc family members were prominent weaving instructors in brown cotton weaving for Louisiana State University Extension's Louisiana Handicrafts Project. As awareness of Cajun culture grew in the 1970s and 1980s, Mrs. Clark regularly demonstrated her craft at public gatherings including the Louisiana Native Crafts Festival at the Lafayette Natural History Museum, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, and the Louisiana Folklife Festival. She was a master teacher in the Louisiana state folk arts apprenticeship program, and in 1996 was honored with the Acadian Folk Heritage Award from the Acadiana Arts Council.

Since 1982 the NEA has awarded over two hundred National Heritage Fellowships. An awards ceremony and concert will be held during September in Washington, D.C.

CONNECTING

ELEVEN ARTISTS GIVEN NEA FELLOWSHIPS

The National Endowment for the Arts awarded 11 artists the National Heritage Fellowship, the NEA's most prestigious honor, in folk and traditional arts. Among those awarded were New Mexican artist Ramón José López, who carves wooden icons, paints colorful altar screens and forges intricate silver jewelry. The \$10,000 fellowship is given to artists whose art savors culture and traditions. For more information contact the NEA at: 1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20506-0001. (202) 682-5570.

LATINA WINS HEALTH LEADERSHIP GRANT

The Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Program awarded \$100,000 to former Chicago Board of Education member Carmen Velásquez, whose fundraising efforts led to the building of a \$2.1 million community health center in the Pilsen neighborhood. A second center is scheduled to open in 1999. The program awards individuals who overcome obstacles to provide care to underserved communities. The \$100,000 award consists of a \$5,000 stipend for the recipient and \$95,000 for program enhancement.

For more information, contact the RWJCHLP, 30 Winter St., Suite 1005, Boston, MA 02108. (617) 426-9772.

COSSMHO BESTOWS LEADERSHIP AWARDS

The National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations held its 1997 National Hispanic Health Leadership Awards reception June 17 in Washington, D.C.

Those honored included Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.) for congressional leadership; Josefina Carbonell, president of the Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Centers of Dade County, for community-based leadership award; Dr. Nelba Chávez, administrator at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, for government, and Gloria Primm Brown, program officer at the Carnegie Corporation, for philanthropic leadership.

The awards are given annually to individuals who help improve the health and well-being of the nation's Hispanic communities. For more information contact COSSMHO at: 1501 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 387-5000.

THE TIMES

MONDAY, JULY 14, 1997

SECTION F

Fyi

BAY AREA TREASURES

Blues great Charles Brown, pictured, and Ali Akbar Khan, a revered master of North Indian classical music, have been awarded National Heritage Fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts. The \$10,000 fellowship is the NEA's most prestigious award in traditional and folk arts. The NEA will present the awards during a ceremony and concert to be held September in Washington, D.C.



Pianist and singer Brown, 74, lives in Berkeley and performs often around the Bay Area and beyond. Brown's elegant style of "ballad blues" was an influence on the young Ray Charles, and his songs have been covered by artists from Sam Cooke to Bruce Springsteen. Several have become blues classics, including "Trouble Blues" and "Merry Christmas Baby."

Khan, a San Anselmo resident, is a virtuoso on the *sarod*, a 25-string instrument that resembles the lute. In 1967 he founded the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael, where he still teaches six classes a week. The NEA fellowship is just the latest in a long string of awards for the 75-year-old musician. He is considered a "National Living Treasure" in India, and in this country he is a recipient of a "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation. This year he received his fourth Grammy Award nomination.

Acadiana weaver one of 11 to receive grant from NEA

By ANGELA SIMONEAUX
Acadiana bureau

JUDICE — Acadiana native Gladys LeBlanc Clark, a weaver and spinner, has been selected to receive a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Clark, 78, has lived in and around Lafayette Parish all of her life and currently lives in Judice. She's been growing, carding, spinning and weaving cotton since she was a girl. She learned the craft from her mother in the Coulee Ile des Cannes area.

Carding is combing the cotton fibers to prepare them for spinning.

She's one of 11 people selected to receive fellowships this year. Other recipients include two Tennessee Bluegrass musicians, a West Coast Blues musician who influenced Nat King Cole and Ray Charles, and an African American quilter from Mississippi.

"Our highest honor in the folk and traditional arts recognizes masters whose extraordinary talents spring from the heart of home and community," said Jane Alexander, chair of the NEA.

"With vision and dedication, these indi-

viduals pass skills from generation to generation — bringing new life to invaluable traditions and shaping a nation where our differences become our strength."

Clark said she is honored but surprised to receive the award, which includes a September trip to Washington D.C. for several days of awards events and a \$10,000 scholarship.

The NEA may look at Clark's spinning and weaving as the preservation of a traditional art form, but that's not exactly the way she sees it.

"I've been doing that all my life," she says simply. "I love my work."

Clark learned the craft from her mother, but her aunt, grandmother and great-grandmother all were spinners and weavers.

"In Coulee Ile des Cannes, where we lived in Lafayette Parish, all the old ladies would get together to card, just like a quilting bee," Clark said.

Clark credits Louise Olivier, who created and guided the Louisiana Handicrafts Project of LSU's Cooperative Extension Service, with the continuation of her craft.

Olivier was combing Acadiana for old

French folk songs when she discovered the cache of spinners and weavers in the Ile des Cannes area, Clark said. There were women who carded, spun and wove cotton and those who braided palmetto and wove pine needle baskets, she said.

"She made a place for the ladies to sell these things, and we all started working for her," Clark said.

Eventually, she got a loom and other equipment through the project, with Olivier's help. As awareness of Cajun culture grew in the 1970s and 1980s, Clark began demonstrating her craft at festivals, including the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage festival, the Louisiana Native Crafts Festival of Festival Acadiens, the Louisiana Folklife Festival and the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife.

Last year, Clark won the Acadian Folk Heritage Award of the Acadiana Arts Council.

"That was just a part of my life, growing up," Clark says of her craft. "It was something I liked to do."

'Jim and Jesse' are feted with highest NEA award, stipend

By CLAUDIA EDWARDS
Staff Writer

Eleven master artists have been selected to receive 1997 National Heritage Fellowships -- the National Endowment for the Arts' most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts. Among those chosen are legendary Tennessee bluegrass musicians, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, from Gallatin.

The Fellowships include a one-time award of \$10,000 and honor achievements as artists, teachers, innovators, and keepers of traditional art forms. Since 1982, the Arts Endowment has awarded over 200 National Heritage Fellowships. An awards ceremony and concert will be held during September 1997, in Washington, D.C.

"Our highest honor in the folk and traditional arts recognizes masters whose extraordinary talents spring from the heart of home and community. With vision and dedication, these individuals pass skills from generation to generation -- bringing new life to invaluable traditions and shaping a nation where our differences become our strength," said Jane Alexander, chairwoman of the NEA.

Jim and Jesse McReynolds -- the renowned brothers of bluegrass -- took the popular and longstanding vocal duet, close-harmony style to new levels. Both grew up avidly listening to this important musical tradition which is traceable to the 1890's. Born two years apart, the brothers' Virginia family was comprised of coal miners and farmers who were also accomplished mountain musicians. Their grandfather Charles recorded for RCA, and their father Claude, and uncles were all fiddlers, guitar and banjo players who performed in local string bands. Mother Savannah was a singer of ballads and gospel songs, who loved vocal harmony and taught it to her sons.

With Jim playing guitar, Jesse's skills on mandolin blossomed. He developed a crosspicking technique imitated widely, and a "split-string" style few could duplicate. Together they sang and played whatever they heard on the radio, mixing bluegrass, country, and other styles.

After starting to perform publicly, the brothers won a talent contest and roamed from one radio station to another throughout the South and Midwest. Although their careers were interrupted when Jim fought in World War II and again when Jesse was called to the Korean War, they returned to the U.S. and performing. Their big break came in 1964, when they joined the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, the most coveted job in bluegrass and country music, where they have remained for 33 years.

This year marks their 50th anniversary of performing together.

"Jim and Jesse are more than technicians, more than another first generation bluegrass band, more than keepers of a rich family tradition. They are the band that has closely held to the traditional audience for this music, they continued to play for the mill hands when others of their generation...were adopting more urbane and self-consciously traditional audiences in metropolitan areas and letting those audiences decide what was most traditional. Jim and Jesse can be hired but the can't be bought," said Joe Wilson, director of the National Council for the Traditional Arts.

In fine company

June 30, 1997

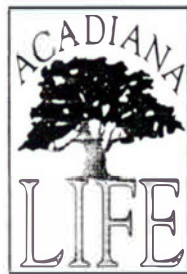
Local woman among 10 nation- wide to receive prestigious award

Walter Pierce
Staff Writer

DUSON — When yet another writer came calling at the modest frame home where Gladys LeBlanc Clark lives, she and husband Alexis were sitting in the carport cutting raw corn, a pile of cleaned cobs and bowls of cut corn at their feet. They worked quietly, purposefully, and the aroma of corn and hay from the pasture behind the house filled the carport. She would freeze the corn, she explained, to make macque-chou.

She endures the frequent requests for interviews these days with grace. Winning national recognition for her chosen art form — weaving — has been nice, she might say, but the phone won't stop ringing.

Clark's new-found celebrity has come through an unlikely source — the National Endowment for the Arts. She doesn't fit the stereotypical profile of an NEA fellowship winner. She's neither bohemian nor brooding, neither iconoclastic nor caustic. This 78-year-old wife



Gladys LeBlanc Clark at her loom.

and mother (and grandmother and great grandmother) has lived a quiet life on the farm.

But along the way, Clark has quietly woven an art form out of traditional Acadian weaving, and the NEA recognized that by making Clark one of 10 recipients of the 1997 National Heritage Fellowship — the NEA's most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts.

"I didn't expect to win at all," Clark said in her kitchen over coffee. The Heritage Fellowship carries with it a \$10,000 grant, in addition to national recognition. She was nominated for the award two years ago by members of the Acadiana Weavers & Spinners Guild, of which she is a member more by conscription than enlistment.

A humble master

Clark grew up on a farm, picking cotton and weaving it with her mother. She has spent her life within five miles of her birthplace. Back then, weaving was a chore that had to be done, not an art form that would win national recognition.

But Clark said she took to weaving; she embraced it. She just had a knack for it, and now she guards it against neglect. She follows the same steps — growing, picking, carding, spinning and weaving the cotton — that her mother and grandmother used. It's a traditional craft, and Clark's old spinning wheel and loom look just like those used two centuries ago.

Modern textiles may have replaced the weaver of necessity, but Clark's weaving has endured.

Weavers Guild member Gerald Thibodeaux, who was largely responsible for nominating Clark two years ago, described her as a living treasure for the Acadiana area.

"She's always so encouraging and patient with beginners," Thibodeaux said of Clark's presence within the guild and at demonstrations. "She consistent-

ly gives compassionate suggestions on ways to improve our efforts."

In Thibodeaux's estimation, Gladys Clark is a master weaver. When asked to elaborate he paused, indicating the difficulty in defining the term "master."

"The end product makes her a master," he finally offered, "and how swiftly she does it and makes it look effortless."

To see Clark's delicate hands work the shuttle through the loom or spin a handful of brown cotton into yarn describes better than words exactly what a master weaver is.

"She maintains a nice, even edge on the fabric that she's weaving," said Thibodeaux, who added that many novice weavers are forced to make repeated adjustments to the fabric as they work. Not so with Clark: she gets it right the first time.

Some travel required

"When they (the weavers guild) asked me if I minded being nominated, I said, 'No, as long as it doesn't deal with too much travel,'" Clark remarked.

Despite her dislike of travel, she'll have to do some soon to receive her NEA award. In September, she'll hop a jet to Washington, D.C.

"I've been there twice before," Clark said of the capital city and the Smithsonian Institute where the award ceremony will take place.

As for what she'll do with the \$10,000 addition to the Clark net worth, she is characteristically understated.

"Oh, not too much," she said. "Maybe buy a little furniture."

It's tough to coax excitement from her about these things, as if getting recognition and money for something you so enjoy doing is downright sinful. Clark seems more content to mix with her family, tend to her vegetables and, most importantly, to while away the hours at her loom in a world of her own simple yet beautiful design.

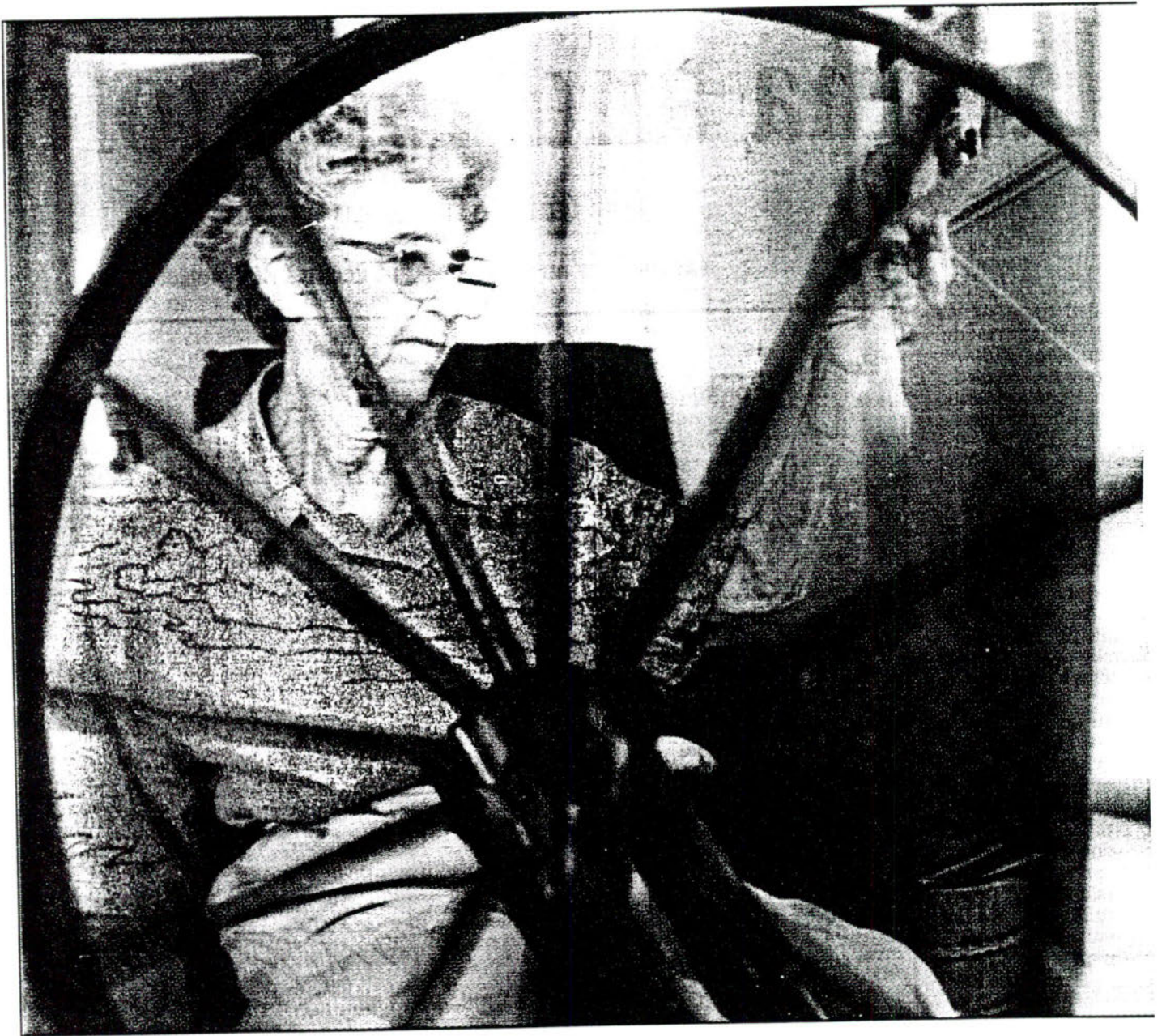


Clark uses brushes to straighten (card) the cotton before spinning it.

Photo by BRAD KEMP



Baskets of spun cotton thread on spools await weaving.



THE

Santa Fe's Monthly

m a g a z i n e

of the Arts • July 1997

UNIVERSE OF

Ramón José López,

a native of Santa Fe, has been instrumental in the revival of Spanish New Mexican silver hollowware. A self-taught metalsmith, he has been making fine jewelry from gold, silver, and precious stones for the past decade. He also carves and paints *santos* in the New Mexican folk tradition. López's work is represented in several museum collections,

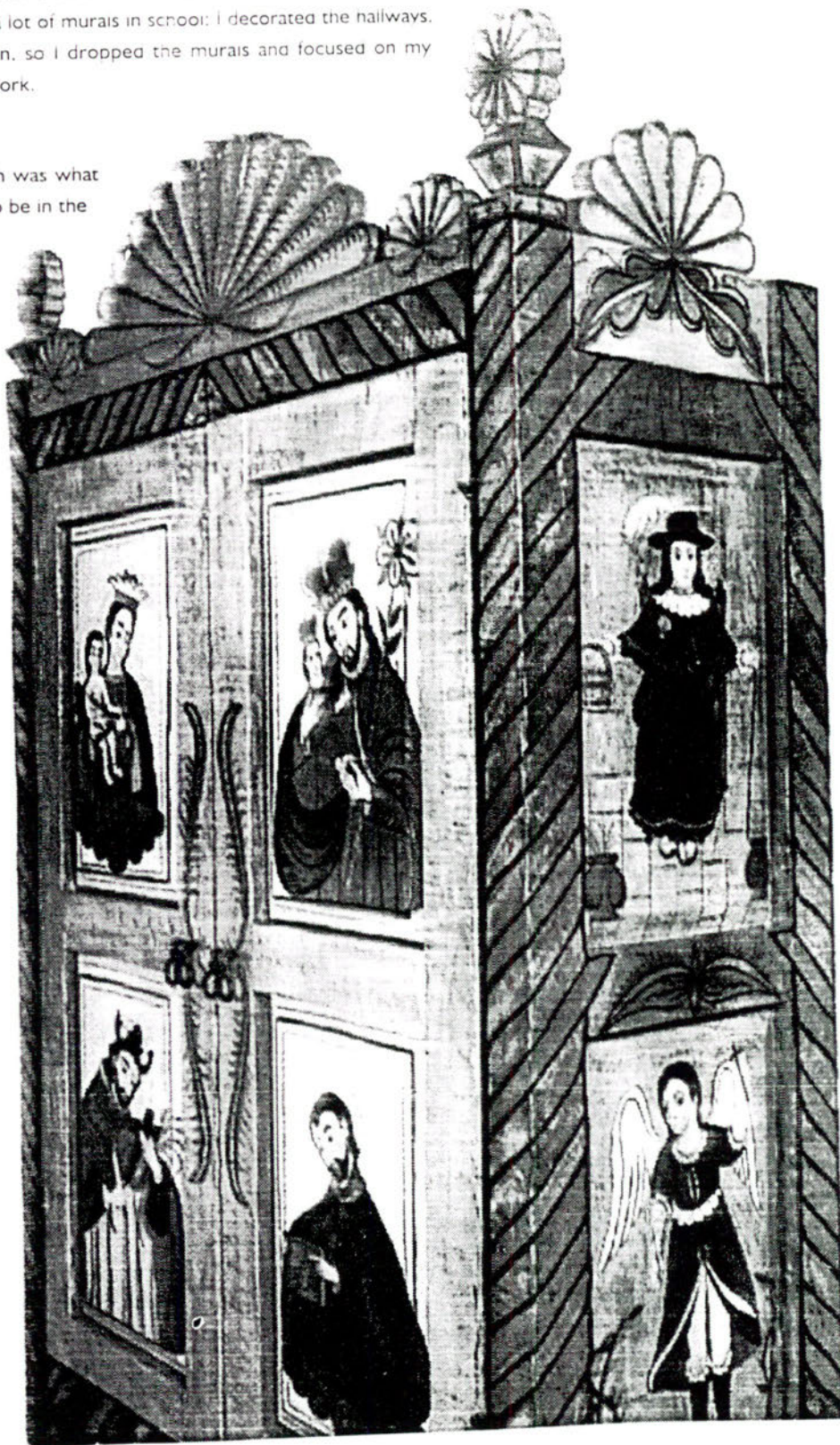
including the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, the Spanish Colonial Arts Society

Collection, and the Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos. In September, the National Endowment for the Arts will award López the National Heritage Fellowship, the NEA's most prestigious honor in folk and traditional arts.

Growing up in Santa Fe, in a Hispanic family, I was always cared for; I spent a lot of time at my grandmother's or my tia's house and was welcomed with open arms. Santa Fe was a small town then, and I'd play in the Santa Fe River in the summer. When I was 9 or 10 years old I used to do a lot of murals in school; I decorated the hallways. But I realized that I wasn't getting a basic education, so I dropped the murals and focused on my academic studies. For many years I didn't do any artwork.

SPANISH MARKET

After I got married, I began to do metalwork, which was what got me interested in Spanish Colonial art. I wanted to be in the Spanish Market, and the only way I could participate was to make Spanish Colonial artwork—mainly sterling silver jewelry, a lot of rosaries, and religious medallions. I've been involved with the Spanish Market since 1981. When I started, it was a two-day event that was held under the portal where the Indian artists usually sell their jewelry and pottery. There were only 35 or 40 artists and maybe a couple of hundred people would come out to look at our work. I was the first one to be put on the Plaza because they ran out of room under the portal. Now, there are about 325 adults and 100 children showing their artwork. It's a wonderful event, a place to enjoy the food, the music, and the art produced by local Spanish people. And, the Spanish Colonial Art Society has placed guidelines on the event—the mass production of pieces is not allowed—so standards and quality are maintained.



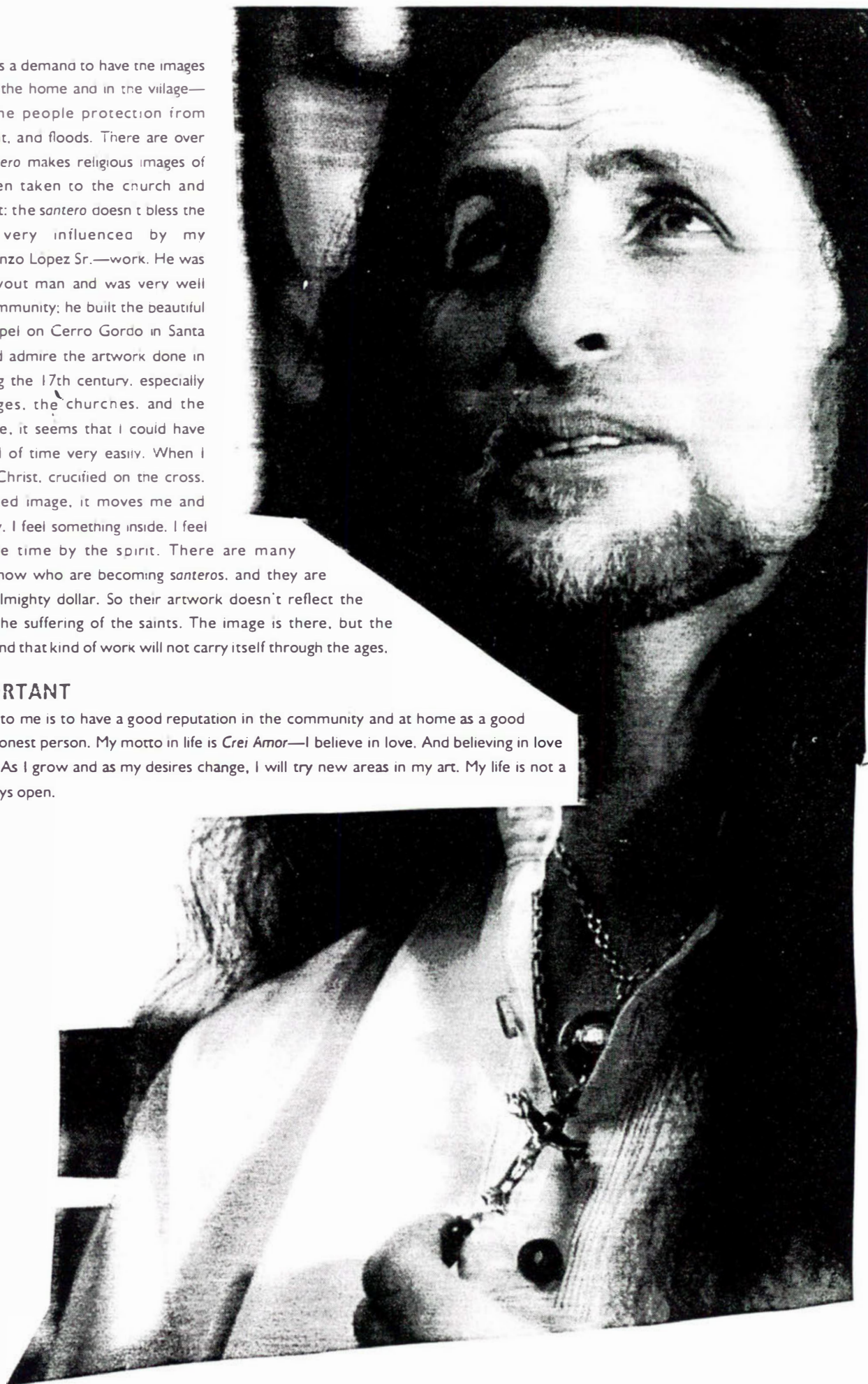
Ramón José López, *Untitled trastero ropero*, mixed media, 89 1/4 x 55 1/2 x 23 1/4," 1992

SANTEROS

In the past there was a demand to have the images of *santos* [saints] in the home and in the village—the *santos* gave the people protection from locusts, hail, drought, and floods. There are over 5,000 saints. A *santero* makes religious images of saints that are then taken to the church and blessed by the priest: the *santero* doesn't bless the images. I was very influenced by my grandfather's—Lorenzo López Sr.—work. He was a religious and devout man and was very well respected in the community; he built the beautiful stone and mud chapel on Cerro Gordo in Santa Fe. I appreciate and admire the artwork done in New Mexico during the 17th century, especially the religious images, the churches, and the architecture. To me, it seems that I could have lived in that period of time very easily. When I carve an image of Christ, crucified on the cross, and paint the carved image, it moves me and affects me spiritually. I feel something inside. I feel surrounded all the time by the spirit. There are many woodcarvers right now who are becoming *santeros*, and they are doing this for the almighty dollar. So their artwork doesn't reflect the sorrow, the pain, the suffering of the saints. The image is there, but the "heart" is missing. And that kind of work will not carry itself through the ages.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

What matters most to me is to have a good reputation in the community and at home as a good person...and as an honest person. My motto in life is *Crei Amor*—I believe in love. And believing in love gets me more love. As I grow and as my desires change, I will try new areas in my art. My life is not a shut door—it's always open.



United States Senate

June 18, 1997

Ramon Jose Lopez
P.O. Box 2495
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504

Dear Ramon:

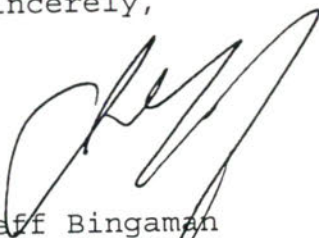
I am pleased to forward this press release, announcing your National Heritage Fellowship award from the National Endowment for the Arts'.

I congratulate you on your outstanding achievement. Your hard work and commitment is to be commended. Keep up the good work!

I wish you continued success. If I can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards.

Sincerely,



Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

JB/aet

PLEASE REPLY TO:

☐ 625 SILVER AVE., SW, SUITE 130
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87102
(505) 766-3636

☐ 148 LORETTO TOWNE CENTRE
505 SOUTH MAIN
LAS CRUCES, NM 88001
(505) 523-6561

☐ 105 WEST THIRD, SUITE 409
ROSWELL, NM 88201
(505) 622-7113

☐ 119 E. MARCY, SUITE 101
SANTA FE, NM 87501
(505) 988-6647

***Santero* Receives National Honor**

The Associated Press

A master *santero* from Santa Fe has received the highest award in folk and traditional arts from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The National Heritage Fellowship awarded to Ramon Jose Lopez includes a \$10,000 prize "and the honor of high achievement as a keeper of one of the nation's traditional arts," Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said Tuesday in a news release.

A *santero* is a traditional northern New Mexico woodcarver who creates icons in the likenesses of Roman Catholic saints. Lopez also paints altar screens and forges silver jewelry, candlesticks and chalices.

Lopez's works are displayed at The Albuquerque Museum, the Capitol and the Smithsonian Institution, Bingaman said.

Market Artist Receives National 'Heritage Award'

RAMÓN JOSÉ LÓPEZ, A LONGTIME Spanish Market *santero*, furniture-maker and silversmith, has been chosen as one of 12 artists nationwide to receive the prestigious 1997 National Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The awards, which have been given by the endowment for the past 17 years, are for extraordinary artists from throughout the United States who work in "folk" or "traditional" art-forms that are anchored in and expressive of shared ways of life.

According to Dan Sheehy, director of the Folk and Traditional Arts division of the National Endowment for the Arts, the purpose of the "Heritage Awards," as they are commonly known, is two-fold. The awards are intended to recognize outstanding practitioners who represent the highest standards of artistic excellence and accomplishment within their tradition, and to bring to the broadest public attention the diversity of American folk or traditional artistry.

"It's an honor to be recognized, and it is

very special in that it is coming from a national point of view," López says. "I think it's important to promote our culture in New Mexico. I think all of the artists participating in the Spanish Market have contributed greatly to enhancing our culture and reviving many traditions."

López will travel to Washington, D.C., in September to accept the award from President Bill Clinton. While in Washington, he also will attend a number of public and private events in honor of the Heritage Award recipients.

The National Heritage Fellowship Program was launched in 1982 by Bess Lomax Hawes, the daughter of pioneering American folklorist John Lomax. The program encourages fellow citizens to nominate folk and traditional artists who are deserving of national recognition and who meet the three criteria of artistic excellence, authenticity and significance within their tradition. López was nominated for the award by former Spanish Colonial Arts Society President Fred Cisneros. ♦

—C.P.



Ramon José López is in the national spotlight as one of 12 artists nationwide to receive the National Endowment for the Arts' 1997 National Heritage Fellowship Award.

United States Senate

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, June 10, 1997

BINGAMAN ANNOUNCES SANTA FE MASTER SANTERO AWARDED NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS' HIGHEST HONOR FOR ACHIEVEMENT

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) today announced that a master Santero carver from Santa Fe has been awarded the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) highest award in folk and traditional arts.

Ramón José López of Santa Fe has been awarded the NEA's annual National Heritage Fellowship, which includes a \$10,000 prize and the honor of high achievement as a keeper of one of the nation's traditional arts. López will appear with ten other awardees from around the country at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. this September.

I congratulate Ramón José on winning the NEA's most prestigious honor. His year's of hard work and devotion to his craft have made him a leader among a new generation of Santeros. This award truly exemplifies his dedication to tradition, skill and diversity in an age-old craft.. Bingaman said.

Using tools that belonged to his Santero grandfather, López carves wooden icons, paints elaborate altar screens and forges silver jewelry, candlesticks and chalices. López's work, which has earned him Santa Fe's Spanish Colonial Market's Grand Prize, can be found in the Albuquerque Museum, the State Capitol and the Smithsonian Institution.

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ROSWELL, NM 88201
(505) 622-7113

□ 119 E. MARCY, SUITE 101
SANTA FE, NM 87501
(505) 988-6647



ARTS NOTES

Francis Whitaker, a blacksmith and ornamental-iron worker who lives in Carbondale, is among 11 chosen for 1997 National Heritage Fellowships by the National Endowment for the Arts. Whitaker, born in 1906 in Massachusetts, took to ironwork as a teenager, worked in various locations, opened a shop in Aspen in 1963 and founded the Francis Whitaker Blacksmith Schools. He was honored in 1995 with a Colorado Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. The NEA fellowship brings a \$10,000 award. More than 240 artists applied for the program, which is only one of three individual artist honors the endowment still administers. Other winners include a blues pianist, a gospel musician, a weaver and a raga composer.



Whitaker Named National Heritage Fellow

by Anna Fariello

The 1997 National Heritage Fellowship Award in the Folk and Traditional Arts will go to master smith Francis Whitaker. Whitaker has long deserved recognition for his contribution to the field of blacksmithing in the United States, a contribution which has fostered excellence and authenticity and continues today even though Whitaker has reached his 90th birthday. Whitaker will receive a cash award and will be honored in a ceremony in Washington, D.C. this fall. In a separate honor, his work was recently acquired by the Renwick Gallery, a division of the National Museum of American Art, which collects American craft. The following text was submitted on Whitaker's behalf to the National Endowment of the Arts which makes the award:

For over 70 years Francis Whitaker has produced ironwork which is wholly authentic in the tradition of blacksmithing. He frequently uses and teaches difficult techniques, such as forge welding, techniques long abandoned by industry and hobbyists alike in favor of the easier arc weld. But Whitaker will not only show you how to forge weld, he will tell you why the traditional technique is superior to the modern one. His explanation relies on terms a layman can understand but reveals his deep understanding of sophisticated metallurgical knowledge.

Whitaker's education was likewise traditional, following a European model which has existed since the Middle Ages. In 1922 he apprenticed with master smith Samuel Yellin, whose own apprenticeship began in childhood in his native Poland. Whitaker was but 15 years old when he joined Yellin's Philadelphia firm of 200 employees, 60 of whom held the rank of smith. He must have shown promise, as young Whitaker was allowed to make rosettes for Yellin's ambitious commission for the Federal Reserve Bank in New York City. His was a modest contribution to the 200 tons of wrought iron which comprised the installation and still graces the building today. Never again would Whitaker work on such a mammoth project; instead he would carry on this tradition in relative isolation for half a century.

For the next 50 years Francis Whitaker worked alone. He operated two forges, Forge in the Forest in Carmel, California for 25 years and Mountain Forge in Aspen, Colorado for 20 more. During that time, he worked using time-tested blacksmithing techniques, such as forge welding and collaring. He seldom advertised, depending on word of mouth to circulate his reputation as the finest smith in his

region. He produced numerous commissions, some public works and restoration, but most for private residences and some for famous people, such as Leon Uris and John Denver. This was accomplished during a time when smithing, in general, declined. Fewer and fewer smiths survived the Depression, then the War, then a modern design style which eschewed ornamentation. Francis Whitaker's forges endured by employing a combination of skill, dedication and sheer persistence.

Whitaker has become known as much for his tough-minded spirit and sharply focused mind as he is for his authentic wrought iron, so much so that two renowned authors used him as models for their characters. John Steinbeck chose a young Whitaker for a character in "The Long Valley"; Leon Uris actually studied Whitaker at his forge to develop a blacksmith hero for his novel "Trinity". But Whitaker's prominence would not grow from these publications. Instead word of his work filtered into a growing community of younger smiths eager for technical information.

Whitaker recalls a momentous decision which would alter the course of his life. "In 1976 I received the call . . . a mission in life . . . I realized that I was a link between the heyday of wrought ironwork in the early years of this century and the present renaissance of blacksmithing." The "call" came about during the first of some 100 demonstrations. While teaching a traditional collaring technique to a group of younger smiths hungry for knowledge, it occurred to him that he was but one of two smiths in America that knew how to do it. For the next 20 years Francis Whitaker selflessly dedicated his life to passing his skill and knowledge on to the next generation, presenting over 100 demonstrations, workshops, conferences and master classes — all of these after he celebrated his 70th birthday.

Smithing was once a most common profession, a fact substantiated by the frequency of the name Smith in every telephone directory across the country. As a trade, blacksmithing has undergone changes unparalleled in most fields; once integral to the smallest community, the smith was driven to near extinction by a combination of technological, economic and aesthetic forces. It was precisely at the beginning of this decline, in the 1920s, that Francis Whitaker entered the field which led to his unofficial, yet undisputed, title as Dean of American

(Cont.)

Blacksmiths. Without Francis Whitaker there would be no American renaissance in blacksmithing. The field has grown from a handful of enthusiastic novices in 1976 to over 4,000 members of its national organization, the Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America. In its early years Whitaker served officially as president, but his most important contribution has been unofficial. He is clearly teacher and mentor to 4,000 professionals and aspiring smiths. Scarcely an issue of their quarterly magazine appears without some mention of his name.

Whitaker's dedication to education has been as strong as his dedication to his work. His philosophy has informed his contribution to each. Regarding education, he has proposed a more balanced approach. "I regret very much that our educational system does not train people to work with their minds and work with their hands at the same time." He had done his best to have an effect on the American educational system. Besides teaching numerous adults and aspiring smiths in workshops and classes, Whitaker most recently took another generous step. In 1988 he founded the Francis Whitaker Blacksmithing School on the campus of the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, a high school located in Carbondale. Whitaker donated his entire collection of tools, helped the school design and build a studio and continues as master smith-in-residence, mentoring young students and school faculty. During the same year Whitaker set up the Blacksmith Educational Foundation dedicated to the education and preservation of blacksmithing.

At 90 years old (on November 28, 1996) Francis Whitaker holds a unique position as the metaphorical link in a chair which connects the European tradition to the current revival of American blacksmithing. His work has

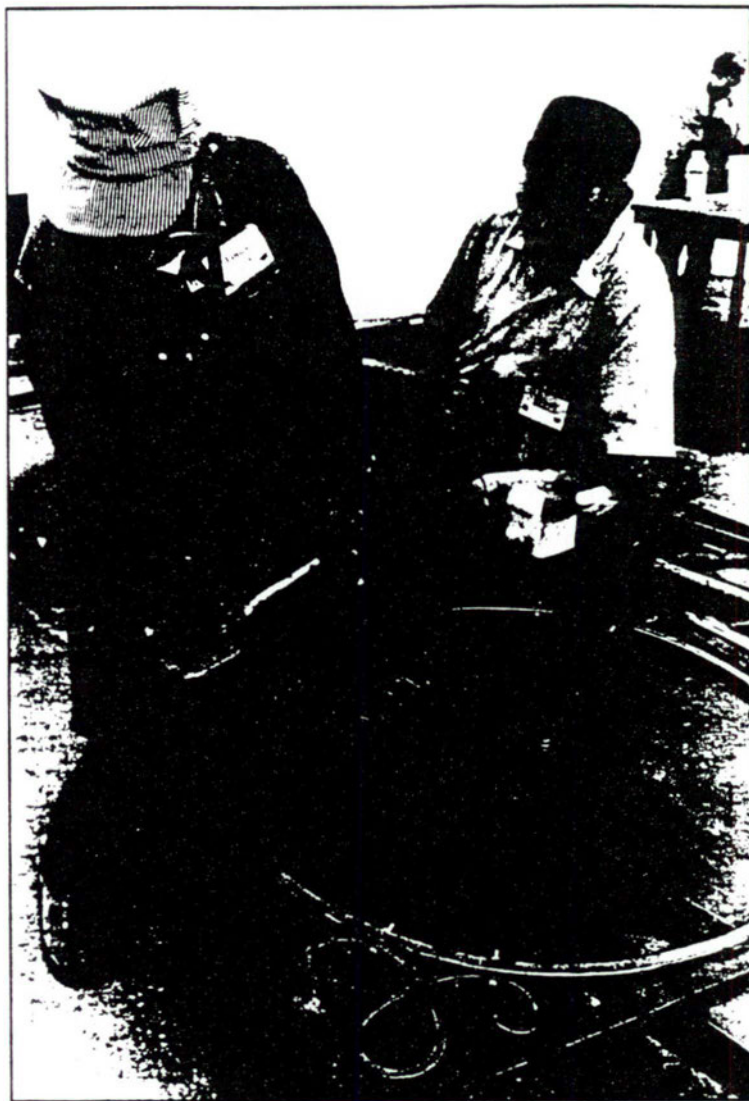
not gone completely unrecognized, but he has yet to receive national recognition outside the blacksmith community. The University of Colorado awarded him an honorary doctorate and the governor recognized his contribution with an Award for Excellence in the Arts. The American Craft Council elected him to the College of Fellows in Metal and he was included in the Lifetime Achievements exhibition at the National Ornamental Metal Museum. His founding of the Whitaker Blacksmithing School in

Carbondale was echoed by the Campbell Folk School in North Carolina which recently dedicated its smithy in his name. I encourage the National Heritage Fellowship Award in the Traditional and Folk Arts. His exemplary career and generosity truly makes him one of our country's national treasures.

A driving persistence has characterized Francis Whitaker's entire career. As a young apprentice in Berlin determined not to embarrass himself as a soft American, he worked until "they had to pry my fingers from around the sledge hammer handle at the end of the day." This philosophy which has driven his career remains throughout his entire life. It is summed up in my favorite story:

"Say you're doing a forge weld and you take it out and put it on the anvil. You hit it a couple of licks and a piece of molten steel gets between your thumb and your hammer handle. Do you drop the hammer or do you finish the forge weld?"

Anna Fariello maintains a professional commitment to the craft field via exhibitions, lectures and publications. In 1994 she curated an exhibition of Whitaker's work for Radford University Galleries, where she serves as director. She lives and works in southwestern Virginia with her blacksmith husband William S. Rogers who introduced her to The Anvil's Ring.



Francis Whitaker, right, oversees completion of the special project created by his handicapped team at the 1996 ABANA Conference. Whitaker was named the 1997 National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment of the Arts. Jim McCarty photo