

# CARTS

CULTURAL ARTS RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

A publication of City Lore and Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education

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## Becoming *Haumana*

by Cherie Okada-Carlson and Marit Dewhurst

*A'ohe pau ka 'ike i ka halau ho'okahi.*  
All knowledge is not learned in just one  
school.

Under the shade of a canopy, a group of *lauhala* weavers count their *moe's* and *ku's* (weft and warp, respectively) as their *papales* (hats) take shape. Like Hawai'iian ancestors who wove necessities such as sleeping mats, ceremonial mats, canoe sails, and baskets, these contemporary artists use the dried leaves, or *lau*, of the *hala* (pandanus) tree to weave hats, purses, bracelets, and jewelry in addition to the more traditional baskets and mats. Watching closely, one is struck by the grace with which such nimble fingers plait hundreds of long thin strands of *lau* into intricately patterned hats.

This is clearly a craft learned with great patience and attention. And yet, as one watches this group of weavers—some focused quietly and intently on their plaiting, others “talking story” or telling tear-jerking jokes—one can't help but wonder if the craft of turning a bundle of *lau* into a beautiful hat is the only thing being learned.

**Cherie:** I grew up in Hawai'i. When I was in high school or maybe college, Aunty Harriet and Aunty Shirley thought I was ready to learn *lauhala* weaving. One weekend, while on a group camping trip they sat me down and started teaching me how to weave a small basket. I didn't want to learn how to weave. I didn't see the point. But I also didn't want to be rude or disre-

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*Marit Dewhurst weaves a moi and a ku in her papale.*

Photo by Marsha MacDowell

# From the Editors

**T**his issue of CARTS features artists who teach through folk and traditional arts. It includes the work of artists who learned their art informally in family and community settings as well as artists with a formal arts education who integrate folk arts into their teaching. All of the artists featured here consider the work of educating young people essential to their lives as artists. Their stories of sharing a specialized skill or passing on knowledge of a culture or tradition offer insights into effective practices and ways of teaching and learning that are underutilized. They collectively make the case for preserving pedagogical diversity in education.

In their article, "Becoming Haumana," Cherie Okada-Carlson and Marit Dewhurst pose two important questions that many of the essays in this issue seek to address: *What does it mean for us to learn in contexts where the very ways of teaching and learning are different than those we typically experience in schools?* and *How can these experiences teach us not only how to create a work of art, but also about a culture's ways of being and of relating to each other?*

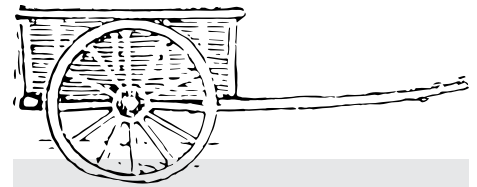
In this issue, you will learn how communities and families devote time and resources to insuring the continuity of their cultural traditions through teaching young people. **Helen White**, who founded Junior Appalachian Musicians, secured funds and enlisted local traditional musicians to teach young people, instilling an appreciation for the region's distinctive musical heritage. **Les Slater** describes how the Trinidad and Tobago community in New York City built and sustains support for programs that teach carnival arts, like steel pan, limbo, and calypso to young people. In immigrant communities throughout the country, Saturday schools provide opportunities for young people to learn the traditional arts, language, and history of the countries where their parents or grandparents were born. Programs like these help insure that some of the nation's finest folk artists can pass on their cultural knowledge and skills to young people in their communities.

For many traditional artists, their first teachers were family members.

**Malini Srinivasan** grew up in the United States but spent summers in India learning Bharatanatyam dance from her grandmother, who taught her important lessons that continue to shape her approach to dance and to life today. **Tal Bar-Zemer** describes a visit to a 6<sup>th</sup> grade class by **N'ketiah Brakohiapa**, a Ghanaian adinkra fabric artist. N'ketiah told the class how from a young age he held the ink pot for his grandfather as he printed fabric designs and how it made him yearn to make his own prints. Both artists grew up immersed in the culture and as participants in the social settings where their art form was both created and shared with others.

This issue also visits public school classrooms in Philadelphia, New York City, and Southern Louisiana where artists work as teaching artists. **Toni Shapiro-Phim** describes an artist-in-residence program at the Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School, where every December **Losang Samten**, a former Tibetan Buddhist monk, spends six days creating a sand mandala, while students watch, try their hand at painting with sand, then participate in a dismantling ceremony. Staff and artists from City Lore, in New York City, share ideas for preparing artists to work in schools, for designing community fieldtrips, for working with community guests in the classroom, and for designing collaborative residency programs with artists from different disciplines. **Paddy Bowman** describes similar collaborations between teaching artists and guest folk artists in Louisiana.

At a time in this country when teachers are often blamed for educational failures and society's ills, it is striking to hear these artists describe their deep and abiding respect for their teachers and the responsibility they feel to honor their cultures, their teachers, and their fellow students through their work as artists and as educators. They remind us that the best learning takes place in an environment where the roles of both teachers and learners are respected and valued.



## C.A.R.T.S.

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*A publication of City Lore and Local Learning:  
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City Lore is a cultural organization dedicated to advancing New York City's living cultural heritage.

Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education links folklorists, folk artists, and educators nationwide, advocating for the full inclusion of folk and traditional arts and artists in our nation's education. CARTS is published annually and provides ideas and resources for integrating folk arts and community study into teaching in school and community settings.

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*Cherie Okada-Carlson on a Pa'u ride, wearing a lauhala cup and saucer hat*

Photo courtesy Sherry Holloway

## Becoming *Haumana*

*continued from page 1*

spectful, so I sat for a couple of hours and made a basket. When they were satisfied that I “got it,” I stopped. I did not weave again for many years. I completed college and eventually became a high school teacher. Fast forward 15 years: I came across a picture of a beautiful cup-and-saucer hat (see photo) made of *lauhala* and wanted to wear one while riding Pa'u in a parade. (“Pa'u riding” is a whole other subject involving horses, flower leis, and billowing riding skirts.) I went to Auntie Shirley and Auntie Harriet to ask if they could make me a *papale*. Both asked, “Why don't you make your own?” which really means “No, I don't have the time and/or I'm not making you one.” Auntie Harriet suggested I attend the annual *lauhala* weaving conference so I could make my own. I signed up with a friend.

When I started weaving *lauhala* again *I also became a student again*. Prior to the conference Auntie Harriet prepared me by saying: you bring your own tools, don't nag your *kumu* (teacher),

and always take some sort of gift for your *kumu*. At the conference I learned that my *kumu* would be Auntie Gladys, a deeply respected weaver. I will not get into the gritty details about what self-discovering, frustrating, yet exhilarating experience the weaving of a first *papale* was, but I will say it was very, very, very humbling. Auntie Gladys was incredibly wise and twice as patient.

About halfway through I wanted to stop weaving, tear up what I had, curse a blue streak, and run off to my car screaming while waving my hands in the air. Little did I know my friend felt the same way. Later, we asked each other what had kept us from quitting. We both came up with the same responses: we didn't want to let our *kumu(s)* down. Both

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*Cherie Okada-Carlson and Marit Dewhurst celebrate finishing their papales at a community luau*

Photo by Marsha MacDowell



# Junior Appalachian Musicians, Inc

by Helen White

**Our Vision:** *All children throughout the Appalachian Mountains have access to the joy of participation in the music of their heritage.*

Junior Appalachian Musicians, Inc. (JAM, Inc) introduces children to the music of their heritage through small group instruction in instruments common to the Appalachian region (fiddle, banjo, guitar, mandolin, dulcimer, and bass). String-band classes, dance, and vocal instruction supplement the instrument classes preparing students for opportunities to play and perform. JAM advocates making the program accessible to all students by providing free or low-cost instrument loans and free or highly subsidized tuition. Fieldtrips, visiting artist performances and an introduction to the rich history of music unique to local communities round out program offerings.

## How JAM Came to Be

I walked into a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom at Sparta Elementary School in Alleghany County, N.C., to conduct my weekly Guidance class one day in January 2000. The school still had General Music at that time, and the music teacher was showing the kids pictures of the strings family of orchestral instruments. I told him that I had all those instruments at home and offered to bring them to school to let students hear, touch, and play them. The following week, I brought in a cassette tape of a folk-influenced string trio that I had written and as it played, I alternately played along on the fiddle, cello, and viola so the children could hear how the different voices of the instruments wove together. Then we invited the children to come to the front of the room and play the instrument they wanted to sample.

The crystallizing moment came when a severely learning disabled child who had been retained in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (and was taller and heavier than I) picked up my quarter-size bass, took the posture of a seasoned pro, and pulled deep clear tones from it. The room fell silent and then exploded with applause. JAM was

born. I knew we had to get music back to the kids and it needed to be mountain music—not orchestral music.

For 22 years I worked as a counselor in southwest Virginia and northwest North Carolina with at-risk children and families in the school and legal systems. I am also a fiddler/guitarist/singer who came to this music in my twenties. I am by no means an indigenous ‘bearer of tradition’ and, I was not thinking particularly about preserving the music of the Southern Appalachians when I started JAM. I was thinking about children who desperately needed to connect with positive aspects of the community and enjoy a sense of belonging and fun.

By informal assessment, backed up by research I conducted with about 150 4<sup>th</sup> graders over three years in Alleghany County, N.C., the family/community transmission of traditional music that once flourished had diminished. The great-grandparents of students had participated in the music of the region, but it declined in subsequent generations. The kids I taught were clueless about the music and didn’t really like it when it was

presented to them. How traditional music had fallen into disfavor by local residents is a topic for another day, but it’s fair to say it had in Alleghany County, N.C., in the 1990’s.

Serendipity took over. I wrote a plan to get traditional music back to the kids, mentioned the ideas to a folklorist who talked them up at a national conference that weekend, and received an invitation to apply for funding through an NEA Challenge America grant—all within a week! I then called a meeting of musicians, parents, and school personnel, including the director of a newly funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiatives after-school program. Within two hours we had a concept ready to start as part of that program using ten abandoned guitars from the local high school. Two weeks later, a retired local guitar champion was working with the after-school program bus driver (a guitarist and singer) teaching traditional music to kids.

By fall 2001 there was funding and a cache of fiddles, banjos, mandolins, and enough guitars that students didn’t have to share! Sixty students from grades 4–8



*North Carolina JAM students perform at the Alleghany Jubilee*

Photo courtesy of JAM, Inc.



*National Heritage Fellow Wayne Henderson teaches guitar to JAM students.*

Photo courtesy of JAM, Inc.

formed the inaugural “class” as part of the Mountaineer Millennium 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Initiatives After-school Program. We found local old time and bluegrass musicians with sufficient flexibility in their schedules to teach, and we began. Our spring concert was sensational and JAM became the cool thing on campus. We had ninety applicants the next year and had to resort to a lottery with a waiting list for our sixty slots.

The North Carolina Arts Council caught wind of what was up, visited, and quickly found funding to start programs in five other counties. The Blue Ridge National Heritage area decided to fund three more. Soon JAM programs were sprouting throughout western North Carolina and Virginia, and we realized we needed to establish some continuity so that the JAM name would be meaningful. At that time, people were using the name but without any true affiliation or shared core values or standards. A Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation grant and the tremendously supportive Alleghany County, N.C., Schools superintendent allowed me to cut my school counselor time in half to begin the regional organization for JAM.

The resulting core values, developed through a series of meetings with representatives of the then existing programs

using the JAM name, included (and remain):

- The fostering of local musical traditions
- Positive, accessible learning environments that provide excellence in instruction with efficient administration and encourage personal commitment, good character, and improved self-esteem
- Community involvement

A task force emerged from the meetings and developed roles for a regional organization that was incorporated in 2008. A regional office, JAM, Inc., is at the hub of the network and maintains a growing cyber resource center ([www.regionaljam.org](http://www.regionaljam.org)) housing information for program administrators, JAM instructors, public school teachers, and students. Beyond developing the resource center, JAM, Inc provides consultation to communities wanting to start a JAM program and hosts compensated “Teacher Sharing” workshops for traditional musicians who are honing their teaching skills. Through these events, they share teaching ideas with a network of peers and receive training in skills such as classroom management, teaching

multi-level groups, and planning a varied class. They have collaborated to identify a set of competencies that they think are important for students to master as well as strategies for teaching them. These are compiled into JAM’s Teacher Resource Guides.

To give a broad audience of students an introduction to the history of the music of the region, a 15-lesson “Appalachian Music Module” (linked with learning standards for 4<sup>th</sup> graders in North Carolina and Virginia) has been developed for integration into Social Studies, Language Arts, and Music classes during the school day. JAM students may also receive this history as part of the enrichment activities that supplement their after school music instruction.

At this writing, about 900 students and 75 teachers are involved in 22 JAM affiliated programs in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. North Carolina programs are supported through the North Carolina Arts Council, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, local fundraisers, small grants, and donations. In Virginia we are currently partnering with *The Crooked Road*, Virginia’s *Heritage Music Trail*, which is working under an Appalachian Regional Commission grant to develop a “Traditional Music Education Plan” for Southwest Virginia. In South Carolina, a nonprofit has formed (*POSAM—Preserving Our Southern Appalachian Music*) to lead the programs they call “YAM” (Young Appalachian Musicians).

Our vision is huge! We are passionate about getting this music to children of the region. It can be a lifeline—providing both intrinsic satisfaction in increasing musical skills and joy in belonging to a multi-generational community of people who are serious about having fun with music.

*Helen White, Founder and Director JAM, Inc, is a well traveled multi-instrumentalist, tunesmith, and teacher of old time music. She has worked as a community organizer, juvenile probation and elementary school counselor in NW North Carolina and SW Virginia for over 25 years. JAM represents a marriage of her love for traditional music with her advocacy for youth, families, and communities.*



# Kids Walk a Culture Path to Their Heritage

by Les Slater

In the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago, the practice of hanging out for whatever purpose—idle chatter, drinking, watching some not-too-serious sports event—is colloquially called *liming*. In Brooklyn, New York, where one finds one of the largest concentrations of English-speaking Caribbean transplants in North America, the *liming* urge among some Trinidadian friends morphed more than 25 years ago into organized activity for their kids to get acquainted with some of the cultural traditions their parents knew back in their island home. So was born Brooklyn's Sesame Flyers organization, which has been a kids-focused entity committed to engaging Caribbean culture patterns and quite a bit more.

Sesame lucked out in very early attracting the attention of a state legislator who was also Caribbean-born, Jamaican Nick Perry, a member of the New York State Assembly. With Perry going to bat for them and other state and local politicians joining in this children's cause in the community, the Sesame crew found themselves possessed of tools that made easier their task of expanding the kids' cultural horizons.

Given Sesame's origins, the influence of folk culture indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago was hardly unexpected. An introduction to steel band music was first. For Winston Munroe, a driving force in the creation of the organization and an avid steel pan player prior to and after migrating from Trinidad, there was no more fitting beginning for achieving cultural linkage than this well-known symbol of Trinidad and Tobago's artistic ingenuity. He got personally involved in the effort to impart the rudiments of steel pan playing to youngsters who ranged in age from under 10 to upper teens. Later, Munroe recruited Gilmore Thomas, another Trinidad steel band veteran, to do the instructing. Thomas first thought to build a repertoire geared toward the band's appearances in local schools, churches, and the like. But in due course the young musicians became caught up in the competitive spirit surrounding Panorama, the supposedly

adult steel band contest that is annually packaged with Brooklyn's Labor Day West Indian Carnival festivities. This called for substantially expanding the ranks of players to meet competition requirements and securing much additional equipment as well.

A similar blueprint had been devised by another Brooklyn young people's organization of Caribbean orientation. The Caribbean American Sports & Cultural Youth Movement (CASYM), founded in 1983, was the brainchild of William Jones, another émigré living in Brooklyn who, while previously domiciled in Trinidad, had been very involved in organizing to channel youthful energy in his community toward positive pursuits. Settled in Brooklyn, Jones' passion for such activity proved irresistible. He, too, had seen the steel band culture as the perfect anchor for CASYM's community outreach. And when he placed the kids' acquiring of steel pan playing skills in the hands of Arddin Herbert, an exceptional young player and overall musical standout fresh from Trinidad, CASYM's stock steadily rose, the band

proceeding to win the Panorama contest on more than one occasion.

With both Sesame Flyers and CASYM, the youngsters eager for a taste of their forebears' home culture have been for the most part American born, with one or both parents hailing from the Caribbean. Kids with a Trinidad and Tobago family connection tend to form the single largest subset, but parents originally from Barbados, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana and elsewhere have been in the mix. The experience of Gilmore Thomas, who now does his steel band instruction at one of the beacon schools encompassed by expanded Sesame programming, has been that there is greater enthusiasm among the younger students. "I find that as they get into the late teens, they develop other interests," Thomas says. "The pull of that other culture begins to decline as they get into more American stuff." But that may not be truly representative of the process. A number of young persons, for instance, who were introduced to the steel pan idiom via the community organization route, have obviously embraced their



*Young masqueraders in costume for West Indian Carnival on Labor Day in Brooklyn*

Photo courtesy of Gene and Rosanna Toney



*Steel band performance by young people trained in Sesame Flyers program in Brooklyn*

Photo courtesy of Gene and Rosanna Toney

cultural hybridization as a bonanza and have gone on to themselves become teachers of steel pan skills and lore.

Such further passing on of elements of the cultural legacy has been seen in other disciplines as well. Sometime after Sesame's steel band program got going, they set about paying similar attention to dance. Gene Toney, who with his wife Rosanna has been in charge of dance instruction (also including drumming) since 2004, says he had a chance, before he came on board, to observe what the youngsters were being taught. And he made changes to reflect a more Caribbean emphasis immediately upon assuming the responsibility. Toney's clear vision of the direction he thought best for his young charges resulted in their developing a style and polish that approximated professional status within a relatively short time, some stunning demonstrations of derring-do limbo and other Caribbean/African dances dramatically underscoring that magic is

possible when a seasoned pro weighs in.

Janet Cummings, a former head of the organization, while lamenting that calypso, her particular folk culture focus today, doesn't get the kind of public profiling as do steel band and dance activity, understands the dynamic. "They are sort of more glamorous," she notes. "Politicians would always go for the steel band or dance troupe. Someone who sings calypso would hardly have the same appeal."

Although kids engaged in steel band or dance invariably get an opportunity to shine publicly, it is the annual Labor Day Carnival that still provides the most coveted stage. Sesame jumped into the Carnival with both feet a few years after the organization came into being, and is now the most dominant force in the Carnival spectacle. A kids' masquerade band continues to be included in Sesame's Labor Day plans every year. In earlier years, the kids' costumes, as with the adult masquerade band, were made on

the premises. More recently, as the numbers have grown to, on occasion, better than 400 young masqueraders, it became more practical to import the costumes from contractors based in Trinidad. So in Sesame's case the youngsters no longer have the opportunity to observe or participate in costume-making. Most other groups (mas camps) involved in the Kiddies Carnival continue the tradition of in-house production of costumes, the New Generation camp of Trinidadian Kathy Ann Hernandez steeped in the practice.

Clearly, Brooklyn has proven to be an excellent hatchery for the preservation of significant Trinidadian folkloric contributions to the world. Leave it to Brooklyn to declare the legacy in good hands!

*Les Slater is Director of the Folk Arts Institute of Trinidad and Tobago, based in Brooklyn, New York City.*



# From the Steppes to Suburban Virginia

by Paddy Bowman

**A**sk public school educators in Arlington, Virginia, what languages in addition to English their students are most likely to speak at home and they'll answer, "Spanish and Mongolian." Many Central Americans have made Northern Virginia home since the 1980s because of civil wars in their home countries. Mongolians began settling in Arlington only in the past decade, drawn first by proximity to the Mongolian Embassy in Washington, DC, and now by jobs and a sense of community anchored by the Mongolian School of the National Capital Area (MSNCA).

This Saturday school for ages 2 to 16 began in January 2007 and operates in co-operation with Arlington Public Schools, which leases MSNCA classrooms in a former school building on a bustling street in this DC suburb. Families enjoy many cultural events throughout the year at the school, and during the school year students study Mongolian language, script, culture, music, dance, and history. The Children's Festival is the culminating event each May, allowing students to demonstrate all they've learned.

## Ethnic Schools in the U.S.

Ethnic schools have a long history in this country. As immigrants settle into new lives here, they want their children to know and remember the language and culture of home. An American Folklife Center study of ethnic schools in the U.S. lists dates when schools were established, the oldest being a Czech school in 1870, a Dutch school in the 1880s, and a Greek school in 1902. Traditional artists, as well as parents and community members, often emerge to provide instruction at ethnic schools, formalizing a process that would occur in family and community settings in their home coun-



Assistant dance instructor Tsolmon Uranchimeg teaches a traditional Mongolian dance at MSNCA

Photo by Harold Anderson, courtesy of Arlington Cultural Affairs Division

tries.

Although some Mongolian children in Arlington speak fluent Mongolian, many do not. First-generation Mongolians often give their children American first names and Mongolian middle names. These children speak fluent English, not Mongolian. At MSNCA, all signs are in Mongolian and everyone speaks Mongolian in the halls as well as the classrooms and over traditional meals that volunteering grandmothers prepare weekly.

## Traditional Dance Instruction

Mongolian dance traditions are as rich and diverse as the many different ethnic and tribal groups that have inhabited Mongolia for millennia. MSNCA dance teacher Delgermaa "Degi" Batchuluun, who began studying dance as a young child in Mongolia, teaches a traditional dance genre from Western Mongolia called *bielgee*. She explains that these dances imitate actions of the daily life of herders such as weaving, milking cows, riding horses, and so on. Degi attended elite dance academies in Mongolia and dances ballet as well as traditional dance.

Performed to the music of the *morin khuur* (horse head fiddle) and *yochin* (an instrument similar to the xylophone), *bielgee* dances begin with dancers slow-

ly spreading their arms, gracefully waving their hands and moving their shoulders. Then the pace suddenly changes, and lively movements imitate of the gait of a horse as dancers move more quickly.

## Students Teaching Students

During public programs, MSNCA students work at different centers to teach visitors, especially other students, about Mongolian culture. Children may try on Mongolian clothing; write their names in script; play games and wrestle; explore the

model of a *ger*, a traditional nomadic home; study maps and history; and examine instruments. MSNCA students also perform music and dance for a variety of audiences.

Khongorzuul Khosbayar is a high school student who traveled with other MSNCA dancers to perform in Middletown, Ohio, for a summer festival celebrating Mongolia. She notes with pride that the Virginia dancers were on par with Mongolian peers. Asked why she still attends MSNCA each week, she describes her passion for dance and her desire to mentor younger students. She said, "I also like being with everyone, speaking Mongolian, and helping out." She gestures to her grandmother, "Besides, I have to help her bring the food."

*Paddy Bowman directs Local Learning and is co-editor of CARTS and the new book Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum, Utah State University Press.*

Learn more about MSNCA at [www.themongolianschool.com](http://www.themongolianschool.com). (See Resources)



## Becoming *Haumana*

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Aunty Harriet and Aunty Gladys were *kumu*, or sources of knowledge for us. It would've reflected badly on them (let alone us!). We didn't want to embarrass, anger, or inconvenience Auntie Gladys. We didn't want to embarrass or let Auntie Harriet down (who set us up to learn from Auntie Gladys). I could see people asking Aunty Harriet "what kind of people did you subject master weaver Aunty Gladys to?!" We didn't want to draw negative attention to ourselves. We didn't want to disrespect those around us, our fellow *haumana* (students), with our outbursts. We didn't want to let each other down. It wasn't just about us and our egos. It was about our connections with each other, with our *kumu*, and with the community of weavers we were now a part of.

**Marit:** Like Cherie, I was introduced to *lauhala* weaving through Aunty Harriet who, despite my apprehension as a mainlander entering another culture, took my hand, sat me down, and put the *lau* in my hands with a "won't take no for an answer" direction. At the time, I was a student in the midst of my doctoral studies in education at Harvard University. (In fact, I had literally brought my education theory books with me to study in between weaving.) And yet, in handing me the *lau* for the first time, Aunty Harriet began to teach me *a whole new way to be a student*. I quietly observed the ways in which my *kumu* folded and sprayed her *lau*. I repeated the Hawai'ian words she used over and over in my head. I listened as she told us how she learned to weave, how she remembered patterns, how she determined the final shape of the hat. Desperate not to let Aunty Harriet down and deeply aware of my responsibility to her, to my *kumu*, and to the other weavers, I barely slept as I sat in bed plaiting and un-plaiting my *papale* until I had it right. Bolstered by the warm encouragement from my *kumu*, I fumbled my way through my first hat—overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude to the *kumus* who had invited me to learn with them. This was a far cry from the crisp relationships I had with academic professors bent on teaching me to be critical, to challenge others, and



*Marit Dewhurst works on her papale.*

Photo by Marsha MacDowell

to rise to the top ranking in my classes. Here, as much as I was learning to weave, I was also learning to connect with the weavers around me—to relate to them and myself in a profoundly different way.

In traditional Hawai'ian culture, teachers, or *kumu*, are specialists. They pick those who show potential to be their students. Sometimes, if a person isn't chosen but keeps showing up and respectfully follows instruction, they may be accepted as a student. The *kumu* decides when the *haumana* is ready for certain knowledge. The *haumanas'* job is to absorb the knowledge and perform their best so that they do not embarrass themselves or their *kumu*. In other words, if a student does not do well it reflects poorly on both the teacher and the student's family. If the student truly values and respects her teacher, she is extremely motivated to learn quickly and perform well. Yet at all times, humility is highly valued. In Hawai'ian culture, specialized knowledge is secret and guarded. Knowledge was not always open or free to whomever was interested. It was a source of power, rooted in history, with rich genealogy of the source(s). To become someone's *haumana* was to become a progeny of that *kumu*—to be deeply connected to each other.

As educators, we have often asked ourselves about the nature of our participation in *lauhala* weaving and our interest in education. What does it mean for us to learn in contexts where the very ways of teaching and learning are different than

those we typically experience in schools? How can these experiences teach us not only how to create a work of art, but also about a culture's ways of being and of relating to each other? In engaging in a form of art-making deeply rooted in a specific cultural *way of learning* we have also learned a specific *way of being*—one that prioritizes the interdependent connections and mutual responsibilities between teachers and learners. Such a way of being encourages us to consider not just the content of what we are learning ourselves or teaching our students, but the ways in which we are teaching them to relate to us and to each other. To learn a new trick for counting *ku* or another story behind a pattern is certainly a wonderful opportunity to become a stronger weaver. But, particularly in the current educational climate, to attend to the ways in which we also learn how to respect, honor, and relate to our *kumus* and our own *haumana* has the potential of shifting the ways in which we practice education—both as weavers and as educators.

*Cherie Okada-Carlson was born in Honolulu and grew up in Kailua-Kona on the Big Island of Hawai'i. She has a bachelor's degree in Art from Linfield College in Oregon, a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, and a Master's degree in Pacific Island History from the University of Hawai'i Manoa. She is a member of Ka Ulu Lauhala O Kona and 'Ohi Lauhala. She feels gratitude and much aloha for her friends, kumu, and na kupuna who have taught her the skills of Hawai'ian quilting, lei making, and ka ulana lauhalala: Barbara Nobriga, the late Harriet Soong, Shirley Kauhahao, Gladys Grace, Margaret Lovett, Pohaku Kaho'ohano-hano, and Marcia Omura.*

*Marit Dewhurst is the Director of Art Education and Assistant Professor of Art and Museum Education at The City College of New York. She is grateful for the welcoming aloha spirit she has felt and treasures the weaving and life lessons she has learned from her Hawai'ian kumu: Harriet Soong, Ed Kaneko, Shirley Kauhahao, Margaret Lovett, Lola Spencer, and Cherie Okada-Carlson.*

*We both dedicate this article to the loving memory of Aunty Harriet Soong.*

# Kolima's Dance Class

by Malini Srinivasan

I remember dozens of *chappals* and shoes piled up at the entryway of the flat, emitting a fragrant fog of damp leather. Bombay after the monsoons always felt moist, and smelled slightly of mold. Before you entered the flat, you could hear the crisp sound of wood striking rhythmically against wood and girls laughing and chattering in a jumble of Hindi, Tamil, English, and Marathi. Inside the main room of the flat, bare of furniture and floored with unforgiving cement covered by mosaic tiles, about twenty dance students dressed in *salwar kameez* lined up in rows at the back of the classroom. Four dancers started their dance steps, *theermanam adavus*, coming toward their teacher as they danced to the rhythmic syllables “*tei dit dit tei*.” Every so often the teacher would correct a student, “Baito! Sit! Lift your elbows.” When one line of dancers reached the front of the classroom, the next line would start.

Conducting this rigorous Bharatanatyam drill was none other than my grandmother, whom we all affectionately called Kolima, seated on the floor on a straw mat, her spine straight as a young neem tree. She wielded a wooden stick, and kept the beat against a rectangular wood block on the floor. The block had been chiseled into a smooth arc through the beats of countless dance classes. At night, the same straw mat became Kolima's bed, the wooden block her pillow, the arc in the wood revealing the sole hint of comfort. Kolima wore nine-yard silk saris, softened by years of use. I remember her in rich, saturated Kancheepuram colors: plum, blood orange, mustard, all edged in gold. She wore traditional jewelry—seven diamonds at her nose and ears, and a long, meticulously applied U (Vaishnavite caste mark) on her large forehead.

Komalavalli, my grandma, was born around 1921 to a Brahmin (priestly caste) family in Kombakonam, a small town in central Tamil Nadu. She began learning Bharatanatyam when she was seven years old from Sri Tiruvallaputhur Swaminathan Pillai who was then teaching at her school. “He taught with a ‘katai’



Kolima

Photo courtesy of Malini Srinivasan

(stick). You had to do it very correctly. They would lift and place the feet. It made holes in the ground. Then it was all mud; only afterwards they put cement and fixed the holes,” she told me laughingly. Kolima learned with Tiruvallaputhur Swaminathan Pillai until she was twelve. “Then it stopped. Why? Because in the old days they would not allow you to dance in public. We could only dance up to age twelve, that was all.” At that

time, Bharatanatyam was still strongly associated with the Devadasis, or courtesans, the traditional practitioners of the dance. Brahmins considered it immodest and immoral for a woman to “display herself” on stage, so the few who learned were only permitted to dance until they reached puberty.

At age fifteen, Kolima got married and moved to Bombay. One of the first Bharatanatyam teachers in Bombay, she



began accepting students around 1941, but with strict limitations. Although her husband permitted her to teach, she was never allowed to go on stage, or even to attend the performances. "We should only be looking after him. Someone else would take over to conduct the performance. I would not even go to the program, not even to see it."

My grandfather Krishnamani died of colon cancer in 1962. By any measure this was a terrible loss for Kolima and her four children: they were left without a stable income. Widowhood, however, gave a certain space for Kolima to focus and develop her art and the dance school. Bharatanatyam became a primary element of Kolima's life, and, by extension, her children's. Kolima established the Gitanjali Dance Academy in 1964, one of the first schools of its kind in Bombay. She taught my mother, Radha, who brought the dance with her to Maryland when she moved to the United States with her family in 1974. My mother taught dance in the basement of our suburban home and put my sister and me on stage for talent shows and Indian cultural events.

Every summer, my sister and I would happily dance in Kolima's class, despite sulkily resisting dance lessons with our mother back home. In Bombay, there were so many students of all ages, nobody seemed to feel self-conscious or shy. The class was rigorous and repetitive, but not without respite. Even when the students danced, they would carry on a playful repartee with each other, which continued after class. If Kolima singled you out in the class, it was as often as not to comment on how well you were doing something: "*Besh, besh*" she would say!

In this atmosphere, my sister and I blossomed, free from scrutiny or judgment. This was exceptional for us, especially as we grew older. As American girls in India, we often were painfully singled out, either stared at and glamorized or criticized for our "bad" behavior. Trips to India made the awkwardness of adolescence feel more acute, as we were subtly and directly instructed to



Malini and her older sister, Ranjani.

Photo courtesy Malini Srinivasan

hide any signs of developing womanhood. But Kolima had her own views on us and did not judge the changes we were going through. She loved to see our American clothes and especially liked to see us wear stylish sleeveless shirts, considered by the other adults as too risqué for Bombay. Kolima once watched me dancing and (within my earshot) said to my mother, "she looks like Parvati Devi," the Hindu Goddess. It was a phrase I turned around in my mind for years to come, a voice to counter the confusion and self-loathing of adolescence.

In Kolima's class we felt like dancing; it was the natural thing to do. It was also, in some ways, the only thing to do. During class, all the efforts of the house would focus around the dance. My aunts would be busy in the kitchen making coffee and perhaps frying some hot *vadas* for after the class. Often my uncles would watch the class or help with the tape recorder. All my cousins would be dancing, and we wanted to be where they were. Plus, there were the students, many of whom had become part of our extended dance-family. So though no one put pressure on us to learn dance, the gravitational force of Kolima's house led to the dance floor.

*Abhinaya* (mime, the use of facial expressions and hand gestures to tell a story) was Kolima's forte. Her approach to facial expression paralleled her relaxed attitude toward everything else; it emphasized natural, ever-changing expressions and lacked any kind of rigid formality. Watching Kolima demonstrate mime, her students developed an internal sense of expression rather than a set of formally learned faces and eye movements. I remember hearing her questions, "How would you call Krishna? Call him!" I would call him with my face and my hands and I could, for brief moments, feel his playful resistance.

In the still mornings, if I arose early enough, I would find Kolima in her *puja* room, chanting in a misty and fragrant semi-darkness. It was a precious and peaceful hour that slowly transformed into the bright bustle of joint-family life and the dance class. But Kolima seemed to retain that peace of dawn and bring

it with her everywhere. Her dance class was largely shaped by her personality. Her open-mindedness, her generosity, her love for both the dance and for her students shone through every aspect of the class.

Kolima died in October 2011, ending an era in our family's life, but surviving as a continual source of love and inspiration. In my daily dance practice, as I learn from my guru, and interact with my students, I continue to interpret and understand what I learned from my mother and grandmother. Much of what I express through dance comes from seeds that were planted long ago, without my knowledge or will, couched in memories of childhood play. I hope that through continuing to dance, learn, and teach, these seeds will have the chance to germinate. Every day, new memories surprise me.

*Malini Srinivasan is a dancer, teacher and choreographer based in Queens, NY. She works as a teaching artist with City Lore and Symphony Space. (See related story on p. 22)*

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# Weaving a Future for Traditions through Apprenticeships

by Anne Pryor

Her long careful fingers deftly wound one straw around another, weaving five golden strands together into an intricate spiral. Katie, a quiet teenager surrounded by a boisterous family, keeps her attention on the task and its goal—to create an even weave.

“Isn’t that beautiful?” her exacting teacher exclaims over the piece Katie is producing. “And look at this.”

Sidonka holds up a straw braid made with a flat weave. She ignores the showy wheat head that fans out luxuriously at one end, directing my attention instead to the braid.

“I started this piece by showing her how. And look! I can’t even see where I left off and she began.”

I am in the cozy kitchen of the Slovakian-American Bilicki family who live among the rural glacial moraines west of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. As staff folklorist at the Wisconsin Arts Board (WAB), the state’s arts agency, I am making a site visit to a master artist and her apprentice, part of the process of administering the agency’s Folk Apprenticeship Program.

Sidonka Wadina is a master straw weaver of international renown, dedicated to her art form and protecting its cultural significance through educating others. Sidonka and Katie’s mother descend from the same grandmother, Johanna Biksadski, an immigrant to Milwaukee from Studienka, Slovakia, who actively maintained old-world crafts in her new home and taught them to others. Sidonka learned from her grandmother but then expanded her skills by taking apart and rebuilding weavings from Slovakia, sometimes accidentally “inventing” new plaits in the process. She continued to study through books and with master straw weavers around the world until she herself became a sought-after master.

As Sidonka wrote in her application to the WAB Apprenticeship Program, “My grandmother told me, ‘Sidonka, *you* are the future. It is up to *you* to pass this



*Apprentice Katie Bilicki twists a wheat straw*

Photo by Anne Pryor

along or it will be lost forever.’ A profound love and respect for Slovakia, its people, culture, folk art, and customs has been passed on and instilled in me. My legacy, my life’s path, my ambition, is to teach and educate those who come after me. It is up to me to prevent the loss of our precious heritage so that others will know and remember.”

This is the type of passionate devotion to a lifeway and its traditions that I typically encounter in the Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. The people who apply and are accepted by a review panel into the program usually live rich cultural lives in which their art is but one expression of a valued heritage. They are members of cultural communities where they are recognized as among the finest practitioners of their art form, some one whose aesthetic skills and cultural

knowledge beautifully represent their community’s values.

As is the case with many folk arts apprenticeships across the country, Wisconsin’s is designed to strengthen and preserve the state’s traditional folk arts. In some programs, the apprentice is the applicant and receives the funding to support a year of instruction; in Wisconsin, it’s the master artist who applies and receives the \$3,000 award. This money covers their time, travel, materials, and any other expenses involved in the apprenticeship. The program requires a final public presentation by the master artist and apprentice in their community. For Sidonka and Katie, this was a demonstration at the Germantown Public Library.

Folk arts apprenticeships focus on cultural communities, for that is where



an art form has the most meaning, value, and a traditional place. The more cultural intersections an artist and apprentice have, the greater the potential for a successful apprenticeship based upon close and frequent personal contact. Sidonka and Katie live about an hour apart but they share several cultural connections that bring them into regular contact: family, ethnicity, social club, religion, and region.

When apprentices come with some skills in the specific or a related art form, they are more likely to be successful. Many award programs require that the apprentice submit work samples along with the master artist's as part of the application process. This can be a challenge for beginning artists who are not in the habit of documenting their work, a very important practice for all artists to follow.

The apprentice also needs to have more than a passing interest in the art form. Traditional arts are part of a cultural milieu and go beyond just the technical process of making (or playing or performing) something. They are a representation of values and knowledge important to a cultural community. Ideally, an apprentice will become a dedicated practitioner whose work will continue beyond the time of the apprenticeship. A goal of apprenticeship programs is that this partnership will help to preserve not only the art form but also the deep cultural complex in which it exists.

The Wisconsin review panel recognized this potential in Katie. In her application, Katie had written of being a dancer with the Tatra Slovak Dancers in Milwaukee since the age of five and how she enjoyed wearing the beautiful Slovak folk dresses while performing. She also had helped out for several years in the Slovak booth at the annual Holiday Folk Fair, a huge annual celebration of local and international cultures held in Milwaukee since 1943. (Johanna, Katie's great-grandmother and Sidonka's grandmother, participated in Milwaukee's first Holiday Folk Fair.)

This type of lifelong involvement with the local Slovak community, along with her family connections and her proven interest and skill in straw plaiting, indicated a likelihood that Katie would continue with this art as an active member



*Apprentices Germaine Bilicki (left) and Katie Bilicki (center) with master artist Sidonka Wadine (right). Katie's interest and skill in the craft encouraged her mother, Germaine, to learn too*

Photo by Anne Pryor

of the cultural community even after the formal apprenticeship had ended. As Katie wrote in her application, "By learning all I can from Sidonka about a traditional art that not many people know of or have seen before, I could give talks, demonstrate, teach classes, and share what I have learned with others. This is something I am proud of and would really enjoy doing."

As much as Katie appreciates learning from Sidonka, her teacher appreciates having such an apt student. Many artists who would like to pass on their art form cannot identify an appropriate apprentice, sometimes because of rural isolation and sometimes because of competing interests. As Sidonka explained, "It is difficult to find a young girl here in the United States who wants to learn a time-consuming, traditional art form."

Some aspects of Katie's apprenticeship with Sidonka are atypical. Most do not involve family members and most apprentices are adults, not youths. In Wisconsin, about half the applicants to the program are Native American. But Katie and Sidonka's work together represents many core elements of apprenticeship programs: regular meetings, a clear work

plan, participants committed to the art, learning that occurs in an one-on-one intensive manner, teaching that is tailored to the learner's needs and abilities, and teaching that includes the cultural context of the art as found in stories, language, community events, and culturally appropriate practices.

An unexpected outcome of Katie's interest and participation in Wisconsin's Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program is that next year she will have a fellow apprentice. Katie's mother, Germaine, was too young to learn directly from Grandma Johanna. She had always admired Sidonka's work but never thought she could do it. But with a year of instruction behind her, Katie has promised to help tutor her mother so now there will be one more eager learner of Slovakian straw weaving in the Bilicki household. The family stories will continue to fly around the kitchen already decorated with signs of their heritage as the three practitioners gather to braid, twist, and weave the golden wheat straws.

*Anne Pryor is the Folk and Traditional Arts Specialist with the Wisconsin Arts Board*

# Aye-Ti Moun Yo (Yes to the Children and People of Haiti)

by Vidho Lorville

*Forty-eight children from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and New Orleans, Louisiana, made a public art project documenting their strengths as survivors of two natural disasters and their aftermath in their respective lands.*

In the summer of 2010, Clifton Faust and I, both visual artists, selected twenty-four New Orleans children and talked with them about the powerful earthquake and its destructive aftermath in Haiti. The children wrote letters to Haitian children about the earthquake in which they shared their own survivor experiences during and after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. From this experience we started a painting using photo-transfer of the children's portraits and letters printed on two large canvases.

Afterwards, I traveled with the artwork-in-progress to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where I worked with twenty-four Haitian children using a similar process to finish the art piece. The Haitian children learned about the Hurricane Katrina devastation in the city of New Orleans through looking at the images and content of the artwork in progress. They wrote letters in response and worked with the artists to print their portraits next to those of the New Orleans children.

This project uses the arts as a tool for healing the children and people of Haiti and others who have experienced and survived large man-made or natural disasters. We are making these public art projects to preserve these children's testimonies as survivors, in their own words, reflecting their time and place in history.

We are creating, at the same time, a network that connects children and artists of different communities and



*Artist Vidho Lorville works with New Orleans children at William J. Fisher School as they start the painting and photo-transfer of their portraits and letters onto canvas*

Photo courtesy of Aye-Ti Moun Yo

populations to communicate about environmental and social challenges we face around the globe.

We are also a year-round healing-through-the-arts program that encourages children to develop compassion for others. We use the arts to help children recognize their strength, resilience and capacity to impact their communities and the larger society. We magnify the potential of the arts as an agent of change, for shaping new identities, personal transformation, and international exchange.

*Vidho Lorville is Founder and Art Director of Aye-Ti Moun Yo, an arts relief program for Haitian children who experienced the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010. To learn more about the project, go to [aye-timounyo.blogspot.com](http://aye-timounyo.blogspot.com)*

*This project was sponsored by Young Audiences 21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts for Learning of Louisiana at William J. Fisher and Lavadais Elementary School, New Orleans, Louisiana, and the Hope for the Haitian Children Foundation, Inc. at Foyer Espoir Pour Les Enfants Children's Shelter, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.*



*Haitian children look at their work-in-progress with artist Vidho Lorville*

Photo courtesy of Aye-Ti Moun Yo



# Spending Time with Molly Neptune Parker

by Kathleen Mundell



*George Neptune with Molly Neptune Parker, a 2012 National Heritage Fellow*

Photo by Peter Dembski

“Basket making is an art that I believe I was born to do, much as my ancestors have for thousands of years,” explains Molly Neptune Parker, a master basket maker from Princeton, Maine. One of the most gifted traditional artists of the Passamaquoddy tribe, she has devoted her life to the brown ash and sweetgrass tradition. As a child, Parker learned basket making from her mother and grandparents in Indian Township, Maine. Part of the Wabanaki (People of the Dawn), which also includes the Penobscot, Micmac, and Maliseet tribes, the Passamaquoddy have called this remote part of Maine; their home for generations.

Ash and sweetgrass baskets are central to Wabanaki culture. As an elder, Molly Neptune Parker plays a vital role in teaching her tribe and family not just basket making but cultural and language traditions as well. As she explains, “The art of Passamaquoddy basket making has been woven throughout all aspects of my life. I have used it to teach myself, my children, my grandchildren, and

others about Passamaquoddy traditions, history, and values. I have used basket making to teach discipline and patience. I realized from a very young age that I wanted to be a basket maker. I not only wanted to learn but I wanted to be able to pass on this beautiful art to my children, my grandchildren, and any others who wanted to learn.”

One grandson in particular, George Neptune, has been working with his grandmother since he was four years old: “Every Tuesday night, we would have dinner and then my grandmother would sit down and make her baskets as she watched TV. So, it just seemed natural to me to try and do it with her. I was able to make my own basket and start at the bottom without her help by the time I was seven.” Now 21 years old and an accomplished basket maker in his own right, George Neptune recently graduated from Dartmouth College and decided to return to Indian Township to work with his grandmother again: “I still go over and weave for hours. We have that time for us. We talk about

many different things. One of my favorite things now is to ask, ‘How would you say this in Passamaquoddy?’ I don’t speak fluently, but I know a few songs and prayers. I’ll ask her about our traditions or what she remembers about her grandparents, or I’ll ask her about the dishes she likes to prepare, or we talk about the things that are happening in the town.”

By carrying on the tradition, new generations of basket makers like George Neptune help strengthen the entire community. In the process, they often become cultural advocates as well. As George Neptune explains, “Basket making and our language are the two most prominent things that are left from our traditional culture. ....We need to keep this traditional craft alive and pass it on because it is one of way to demonstrate what it means to be Passamaquoddy.”

Created within a circle of history, transforming old forms to reflect a living, contemporary community is part of the tradition. As Molly Neptune Parker relays, “Basket making for me is about innovation and creativity within the context of a traditional art form. The functionality, the materials, and the shapes have been a legacy to each generation. I honor that legacy and believe I have a responsibility to continue it.”

Such a commitment requires mutual effort. George Neptune explains, “I know when I’m older and my grandmother is no longer around to make baskets, I’ll be making my style of baskets but I will also be making the more traditional baskets. I’ll be making baskets with her in mind.”

For over two decades, basket making apprenticeships among Maine’s four tribes have made a significant impact on conserving the tradition. In fact, apprenticeships have lowered the average age of Wabanaki traditional basket makers from sixty-three to forty-three. With support from the National Endowment for the Arts, organizations like the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance and the Maine Arts Commission have sponsored over one hundred apprenticeships. According

*Please turn to page 33*

# The Witnessing of Patience: Losang Samten

by Toni Shapiro-Phim

Losang Samten is a Tibetan sand mandala artist. As a teacher of meditation and as Spiritual Director of the Tibetan Buddhist Center of Philadelphia, he lives and practices his art as part of a community of Buddhists, both Tibetan and others. Born in 1953 in Chungpa near Lhasa in Central Tibet, Losang escaped in 1959 to Nepal, along with his father, mother, and sister. He later settled in Dharamsala, India, where he studied at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, and, later, at Namgyal Monastery. At the monastery, he earned a Master's Degree in Philosophy and Debate and became a scholar of Sutra and Tantra.

He first studied sand mandala making while a monk at the monastery in 1975. A mandala (literally, "circle") is an intricate diagram of the universe or cosmos in sacred terms. In Buddhist Tibet, mandalas have been painted on walls or scrolls since around the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Each Tibetan mandala design has its own complex iconography and its own purpose—to heal, to represent and teach compassion, to explore the roots of suffering, and so on.



*Losang Samten is in residence at the Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School in Philadelphia's Chinatown neighborhood for six school days every December. While on site, Losang creates a mandala that has thematic relevance for current concerns of the school community. Each class visits Losang, to witness the patience, attention to detail, and aesthetic excellence that he exhibits as he uses colorful sand and ancient wisdom to create a microcosm of the universe.*

Photo by Toni Shapiro-Phim

Losang Samten has been painting mandalas with sand for more than three decades. Born in Tibet, and a resident of Philadelphia for the past 18 years, Losang

made his first sand mandala in the U.S. in 1988 after the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's highest-ranking spiritual authority, invited him to work on a piece at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

Whether the site is a museum, a Buddhist temple, a library, or a school, artists of sand mandalas both share their understanding of the cosmos and create a temporary sacred space through their "paintings." Artists may work on a single intricate design for weeks, painstakingly layering grains of colored sand. Yet, in keeping with the Buddhist principle of impermanence, ultimately the picture is wiped away, the sand ceremoniously poured into a lake or river or some other body of water, where it becomes, again, one with the environment.

When Losang is working, small bowls of richly colored sand rest on a nearby surface. The color symbolism is complex, but in general, it is related to the five elements, with white representing water, yellow for earth, red for fire, green for air, and blue for space. In order to create a detail, he begins by concentrating on the overall meaning of the mandala and on the specific image he is about to craft. Back in



*Students not only observe Losang at work, but also try their hand at manipulating the chakpo (hand-made metal tools) to paint with sand and hear stories represented symbolically and otherwise in the mandala. Some classes meditate while in the presence of the mandala; others dance, following Losang's lead. Students come prepared to ask questions about Tibet, the practice of sand mandala making, and Losang's life story.*

Photo by Toni Shapiro-Phim



## ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

the 1970s, when Losang was studying at a monastery in a Tibetan exile community in India, his teacher explained that concentration, along with memorization of iconography, helps the artist produce a precise expression of the intended design. Traditionally, sand mandalas were the focus of meditation, and precise imagery is critical when a mandala is to be used for such a purpose. It is still important, says Losang, when the mandala has an aesthetic or educational role.

“First and foremost,” according to Losang, “these mandalas are a form of communication through art. They tell stories that have meaning for Tibetans and other Buddhists, and for humanity in general. The witnessing of patience in the creative process helps observers find patience and perseverance within themselves. They also see how each tiny piece matters in the interconnectedness of life,” as grains of sand and individual images combine to create meaning. “These are important lessons for the next generation, whether Tibetan or not. Whenever I dismantle a mandala, I ask some young people to help as a way of physically and spiritually passing on this tradition.”

In 1995, Losang gave back his monas-

tic vows and entered a lay practitioner’s life. Dedicated to the dharma, he continues to travel extensively, sharing his vast knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and meditation, and his skill in the Tibetan ritual arts. He received an NEA Heritage Fellowship in 2002.

*Toni Shapiro-Phim is Program Specialist at the Philadelphia Folklore Project, a non-profit organization based in Philadelphia. A cultural anthropologist with a specialization in the performing arts of Southeast Asia, her books and other publications focus on the history and cultural context of dance around the world, particularly in relation to violence and gender concerns. She is co-editor of Dance, Human Rights and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion.*

\*Adapted with permission from a longer article published in the Philadelphia Folklore Project’s magazine, *Works in Progress* 19:2/3 (2006-7), which can be accessed at [www.folkloreproject.org/folkarts/resources/pubs/wip.php](http://www.folkloreproject.org/folkarts/resources/pubs/wip.php)

Additional information about Losang Samten is available on the Philadelphia Folklore Project site above and on Losang’s website [www.losangsamten.com](http://www.losangsamten.com)



*The Philadelphia Folklore Project hosts Losang Samten every spring in its gallery. While he is in residence, the public is invited to observe his creative process and to engage with him in discussions of mandala-making and aspects of Tibetan Buddhism.*

Photo by Selina Morales



*Losang Samten completed a Mandala of Compassion over the course of a week at the Philadelphia Folklore Project office in March, 2012. The mandala is lit from the side to show the dimensionality of the sand painting.*

Photo by Tony Boris



*A representative from every classroom participates in the dismantling ceremony. Losang leads a discussion about the concept of impermanence, and the importance of returning beauty to the earth and water. Then, each student present pushes some of the sand to the middle of the table, swooshing Losang’s meticulous work of at least 30 hours into a rainbow-hued pile. Losang scoops the sand up into a glass vessel. He explains that he will pour the sand into the river as an offering. Students are responsible for describing the dismantling process and its meaning to their classmates upon returning to their homerooms.*

Photo by Toni Shapiro-Phim



*Following a dismantling ceremony at the Folklore Project office, Losang Samten proceeds to the Delaware River. He shares pinches of the sand with each participant in this part of the rite, before pouring it into the water.*

Photo by Debora Kodish

# Finding the Connection

Juan Gutiérrez-Rodriguez and Julia Gutiérrez-Rivera

*Los Pleneros de la 21 (LP21), formed in the South Bronx, New York City, in 1983 by National Heritage Fellow, Juan Gutiérrez-Rodriguez, is a group which has spanned three generations of Puerto Rican musicians, dancers, and artisans dedicated to performance and transmission of bomba and plena, two genres of Puerto Rican music which spring from deeply-rooted African traditions. This intergenerational ensemble provides numerous programs, cultural events and arts education workshops and performances to thousands citywide every year. Amanda Dargan interviewed Juan and Julia in LP21's offices in East Harlem.*



Julia Gutiérrez-Rivera teaches her students bomba dance steps at Public School 11 in Queens

Photo by Amanda Dargan

**J**ulia: *Bomba* and *plena* are two different musical and dance traditions from Afro-Puerto Rican culture. They are both manifestations of former enslaved communities in Puerto Rico and their descendants. They include singing, dancing, and percussion. They're very much a part of the urban community, *el legado del pueblo* (small town legacy). *Bomba*, which is more ancient, has been around for about 300 years in Puerto Rico. And *plena* developed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Puerto Rico, with urbanization.

**Juan:** *Bomba* and *plena* also have a strong connection with the individual who practices the tradition. It's part of his or her way of life, and the community's way of life. The way the person

expresses his or her traditions is shaped by their views and experiences, as well as those of the community and the family.

**Julia:** In the same way that hip-hop is a lifestyle, not just a genre, *bomba* and *plena* are musical genres that also capture the life experience of a community, the emotions of the individual, the beliefs of the people who convey and teach them.

They stem from the African slave experience, so the song structure for both is call and response and they both use drums. *Plena* is more contemporary and came with the urbanization of Puerto Rico, so it has more contemporary musical instrumentation, like piano, bass, winds. Their dancing dynamics are also different. In *bomba*, there is a more direct dialogue between the dancer and the drummer, whereas in *plena*, even though

the dancer connects with the drum, it is not a direct conversation.

**Amanda:** How did you both learn these traditions? Who were your teachers?

**Juan:** I consider myself a student of these traditions. I hope that I never stop seeking that knowledge of the music. Coming to New York, my goal was to excel in music. Then I realized that I couldn't go any further if I don't know the music traditions of my own people. It was a constant search for me. I found a lot: I met the elders, masters in this tradition. In Puerto Rico, I really was not in contact with this music. I was closer there, but it didn't click. Here, I said, "I need to do this."

**Julia:** There is a word in Spanish, *af-inque*. It's a type of grounding that this music gives you, your self-expression and your discovery. I was born into this. I am Juango's youngest daughter. He was a musician before I was born and had already started sharing with elders here in New York. I was always surrounded by musicians coming to the house. We would spend countless hours at Rincon Criollo and at the Young Devil's Basement. It was an impactful experience. It was a musty dark basement that you got to by going down these really steep stairs, and I thought, "Oh my god, it's dark and there's a huge hole in the floor. What's going on?" But I was always surrounded by elders like Eugenia Ramos, Paquito, all these other cats, in the *bomba* and *plena* workshops in 1989, when they started. Me, my brother and sister and a couple of other kids were the first kids to join.

But growing up and going through teenage rebellion, I wanted to push back from that, even though it was part of my upbringing. I moved to Puerto Rico to do my undergrad, but even though I was physically closer to what people think of as the hub of *bomba* and *plena*, that was when I least participated in it. That



## FEATURED ARTISTS

feeling of *afinque* that I talked about before, I didn't have. I remember going to Camaradas in East Harlem after I came back and that passion and feeling I felt as a kid just woke up again. So it's similar to Juango's experience, being in Puerto Rico and not feeling so much connection, then coming back here.

My first teacher was Eugenia Ramos, the mother of Kako Bastar, a prolific musician of Puerto Rican popular music. She was a powerhouse. Wow. She taught how a lot of the elders taught: You observe, and then she welcomes you in. She looked like an intimidating woman: very elegant, tall, skinny, dark. She was always dressed to the nines. She had a stern face, very serious, and she danced very regal. But she was also a jokester. As a young child, I thought, okay, she's not like the grandmother that gives you warm cookies out of the oven. But when she would come out and dance—my sib-

lings and I would play around on the side of the stage—she would beckon us to come over. In the workshops my teachers were Roberto Cepeda, Tito Cepeda, Jose Rivera and my father, of course. But my contemporaries are also my teachers.

*Juan:* You asked about my teachers—Marcial Reyes was the man, he was the *plenero* par excellence. He thought like a *plenero* all the time, 24/7. And he made me think like that. Through his stories, I was transported to another era. He was an excellent storyteller, and I just pictured in my mind all that he was saying. He took me to places here and in Puerto Rico, where *plena* was really vibrant and the *pleneros* were the real deal. I thought, "Oh, I've never experienced this in my whole life. I've been studying music, but this is the real deal." It clicked for me. Seeing him play, his approach; it was so logical, so natural, so organic. I really wanted to learn that. I was very fortu-

nate to know a lot of the elders and to learn from them just by watching, not asking questions, just watching. That was incredible.

*Amanda:* The children you teach in New York City's public schools, come from many cultural backgrounds, may have little or no music or dance experience, and you have only 10 to 14 sessions to work with them. What do you want them to take away from the experience? What is non-negotiable for you in teaching these traditions?

*Juan:* Sometimes it's not *bomba* and *plena* that we aim to teach them at all. It's the opportunity to connect with them, to give them an opportunity to express themselves.

*Julia:* When I'm teaching dance, *bomba* dance in particular, the non-negotiable for me is saluting in and saluting out.

*Please turn to page 33*



*Los Pleneros de la 21*

Photo by Tom Ehrlich

# Artists' Letters to Students

by Amanda Dargan

I grew up in a small village in the state of Espirito Santo, Brazil, where there was not much to do as a small child but go to our one room school, tend to our crops and animals, and create adventures (some imagined and some real) while dreaming of far away places.

So begins *capoeira* artist Bom Jesus's letter to the students he will teach for the next fourteen weeks. He goes on to describe how he began learning *capoeira* at age ten and what attracted him to it. *I realized I could entertain people by walking long distances on my hands as fast as the other boys walk on their feet. I loved to fly through the air and to do back flips and somersaults.* He describes years spent perfecting the skills and learning the philosophy and important life lessons that *capoeira* teaches. He closes by telling students what he expects them to learn: *We will explore the basics of capoeira while developing our physical fitness, creativity, self-expression, and performance skills.*

At City Lore, the non-profit organization in New York City where I work, we bring artists into public schools to work with students in long term (10 to 14 sessions) artist residencies. The artist's letter is a valuable tool we use to introduce teaching artists to students and to help artists identify what they want their students to know and learn. Writing the letter encourages artists to think deeply about their practice as artists, and as educators, as well as their responsibilities to their culture and their students.

Although City Lore works with both folk and traditional artists and artists with a fine arts background, we find that a key challenge for folk artists is how to teach their art in a way that respects the tradition and the cultural values it embodies. They struggle with how to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds, whom they will see for only a short time. Before writing the letter, artists identify what they consider essential that their students know about their cultural tradition, their "non-negotiables". For Guillermo Guerrero, a traditional musician from the Andes Moun-



Teaching artist Kwok Kay Choey performs tai chi to Juan Gutierrez's bomba beat in a workshop that explored ways to integrate students' own traditions and creativity into a folk arts residency

Photo by Amanda Dargan

tain region of South America, it is essential that the students make their *antara* (a panpipe) with reeds he brings back from the region, because "the sound of the Andes is in those reeds." For Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena* dancer Julia Gutierrez-Rivera, it is the gesture of respect, the "salute," that the dancer gives the lead drummer in the *bomba* ensemble as she begins and ends their "conversation." She teaches her female dancers the traditional way to salute the drummer by lifting the edge of her skirt to her forehead as she bows, but she allows them to use their own nonverbal ("dancers communicate with their bodies, not words") greetings. West African dancer Yahaya Kamate insists that each class end with a *doable*, a gesture of respect. As he accompanies students on the djembe drum, they place their hands over their hearts, reach for the sky, touch the floor, and turn around while saying, "Thank you heart. Thank you sky. Thank you heart. Thank you

earth. Thank you everyone." Yahaya says that his students may forget the dance steps but they'll never forget the *doable*.

We also identify elements that artists are willing to sacrifice or adapt to the age and skills of their students and the constraints of time, setting, and duration of the residency. A key question is, "How can we convey the complexity of a cultural tradition and make it accessible for even very young students?" Malini Srinivasan, an Indian Bharatanatyam dancer, realized very early that in school settings she must sacrifice an emphasis on technique. She described her non-negotiables as the opening and closing prayer to Mother Earth, which became a "greeting" to Mother Earth, "so as not to offend," and dancing with bare feet. "I feel that this art form is about contacting the ground with your body. It does not work with shoes. So much of our tradition is that weight and attachment to earth, that grounded, rhythmic move-





*Germaine Ingram, Isunuevho Igetei, and Jenna Bonistalli look closely at Haitian Vodou vèvè designs drawn by Kesler Pierre in a workshop that explored ephemeral and sacred art traditions in different cultures*

Photo by Amanda Dargan

ment...It's also attached to this Mother Earth idea. We are planted here."

We encourage artists to discuss the people and experiences that influenced their decision to become artists in their letters; the contexts where they learned and presented their art; and the cultural values their art embodies. Artists identify the skills, work habits, and values that their art teaches and how these have informed other areas of their lives. Then they incorporate this information into a letter to their students.

The letters become a tool artists use to design instruction that supports the prac-

tices and values they identify as essential. Nego Gato, a Brazilian capoeira artist whose artist statement inspired our artist's letters, writes, *Capoeira teaches sensitivity, flexibility, coordination, stamina, and how to read people.* We circle these words and phrases and discuss how to design instruction that supports these core values and skills. We may ask, "What do you mean by flexibility? Is it just flexible bodies or do you also mean flexible minds?" We can stretch and warm up muscles to build flexible bodies but how do we develop flexible minds? Many traditional arts, including Puerto Rican *bomba* and *plena*, require the skill of reading and anticipating a partner's movements, so we gather ideas from other artists in the room about activities and strategies for teaching this skill.

In their letters, several artists wrote that their art form teaches "patience." How can we teach patience? The artists'

responses reflect their experiences both as learners and teachers: we can model patience in our teaching, design activities that require patience, refrain from rescuing students when they lose their patience and offer strategies to help them push through frustration. Other artists describe the importance of learning from mistakes. We encourage them to use teachable moments to share examples of their own mistakes, what they learned from them, and artwork that grew from work they considered imperfect.

Our goal is to encourage artists to gather their memories and experiences and to identify their values and skills, then incorporate these into their letters and their teaching practice. This process helps artists design instruction that honors their tradition, reflects their core values, and provides rich learning experiences that students can connect to their own experiences and cultural traditions.



*City Lore celebration with mentor artists and artists in training*

Photo by waiter at Little Frankie's

## MEET YOUR CITY LORE ARTIST, FOLY KOLADE

Hi, my name is Michael Kolade, but everyone calls me Foly. I am a visual artist and a musician. I express myself with textiles, paper, and drums. I grew up in southeastern Nigeria in a small town called Osogbo. Many people there are artists. Honestly, there isn't one family in Osogbo that doesn't have an artist. Once I knew I wanted to be an artist, my aunt, who was an artist, sustained my inspiration. She had an art gallery and international art school. I met artists from all over the world through her.

My art comes from my experience, my environment, and what I see. My paintings and my music reflect the life I had growing up—the hardship, the fun, the spirituality. There were many tragedies

in my life, but also many fun times. You know what else motivates me— a sense of responsibility to my culture. I want to keep my traditions alive. Many parts of my traditional culture are dying and I feel it is my responsibility as an artist to maintain them. If I don't, what will happen to them? They're too wonderful to neglect and let wither away.

Being an artist requires discipline. I'm totally dedicated to my work. I respect it all. I learned this from a woman who took care of the river gods, the Osuns. She told a story about a man who threw his artwork in the garbage because he thought it wasn't good enough. She said, "Never throw your art away. All your work is valuable. It's not perfect;

it's not supposed to be. We always have room to grow and our work reminds us of our imperfection and encourages us to grow." I try to have that philosophy about my life and my art.

I love working with young people because they're so curious. They make me feel like I'm sharing something, like there's an exchange. I teach to help people understand my culture and its people. I want people to see and understand the beauty of African cultures. There's so much beauty in Africa. Art and music are powerful ways to communicate that beauty. I grab any opportunity to teach and I'm so happy to share what I know with you.

# Artful Stories: Artist Collaborations Across Disciplines

by Jenna Bonistalli and Malini Srinivasan

*City Lore teaching artists, Malini Srinivasan, an Indian Bharatanatyam dancer, and Jenna Bonistalli, a visual artist, have collaborated on two school residency programs and a professional performance. Amanda Dargan talked with both artists about what they and their students learned from these collaborations.*

**A**manda: You've worked together on a few projects. Can you describe an example of how you collaborate?

**Malini:** We co-taught two third grade classes in our most recent residency. Each class picked a Jakata tale from the Buddhist tradition, a sort of fable, and they told that story through visual art and dance. We did a couple of sessions together in which we tried to make the connections apparent. We introduced the idea of gesture and the character traits, and the idea of telling a story through two different media. We also took a trip to the zoo. Each student had an animal character to portray, so they drew from their animal observations there to come up with material for their character. The residency culminated in a performance in which the paintings served as a between-scene narrative. The paintings were projected sequentially so that you could see different scenes from the story while you watched the dance.

**Amanda:** So the students created movements inspired by their visit to the zoo and you also taught them traditional dance movements. How did you meld the two?

**Malini:** I started with a formal gesture—as a warm-up, we read the story of the “Weird Bird,” (a poem by Shel Silverstein). I showed them bird gestures from Bharatanatyam and they showed me their bird gestures. They would say, “Oh, a bird can also fly like this.” So there was immediately the classical and the improvisational, which could both, stylized, fit into that dance language.

In the first few sessions, I established the outlines of a movement vocabulary—what parts of the body we use, for example. Bharatanatyam dancers focus on the hands and the face. So when they got to the zoo, which was mid-residency, they had a sense of the broad outlines of this art. When they saw their animal



*Teaching artist Jenna Bonistalli leads a class discussion with guest artist Malini Srinivasan*

Photo by Anika Selhorst

and developed their gesture, it wasn't necessarily like classical movement, but they did have this idea of how we use of our bodies. Then they incorporated of very natural movements that they saw a monkey do, or a lion do. Actually, that's exactly what I do, it's just a much longer stewing period for a classical artist where you spend years learning the vocabulary, but to advance as a real artist. You have to take your personal observations and bring them into your gesture, because otherwise they're not real. When you add your experience, your observations of what a bird is like, then those gestures come to life, for everybody. So this was an abbreviated version of what I do. They combined ideas and movements instilled through my teaching but also things that were their own.

**Amanda:** What did you learn from this experience?

**Malini:** With visual arts you give them an assignment and they have time, individually, to work. I've drawn from that. Because the problem with teaching a dance skill or technique is that it can be so strict that there's no feeling of creativity or individual input. Part of what I was trying to do with the zoo trip was to give them an individual project that they could bring to the ensemble piece. That's the nice thing about having your own drawing. You can sign your name to it and say, “This is mine.” I think every artist, young or old, wants to be recognized for their own contributions.

**Jenna:** Having that performance at the end was really powerful for me. When you have an art show, the art is often on display and people walk by, but you don't necessarily have a large audience that is attentively focused on the work. The artwork in this performance helped the audience to both see a story performed in





*Teaching artist Malini Srinivasan leads her class in Bharatanatyam dance movements and gestures*

Photo by Catherine Fletcher

movement and gesture and in visual art. To see an audience engage with the performance on both of those levels, watching the movement as well as hearing the narration and seeing the artwork, there was a synthesis that you rarely feel at the end of a visual arts project.

I think it's particularly relevant to folk art traditions, because there is a performative element in many painting traditions in India, especially the Patachitra tradition. The paintings are sung. They are performed. In the Mithila tradition, which was the drawing and painting tradition we looked at here, you might have a wall painting for a specific celebration such as a wedding or a child's birth. The display is imbedded in the social context of art. It doesn't just stand on its own in a hallway that people may or may not walk by and see.

Also this idea of kids embodying arts language through dance. In visual art you use the words "gesture," "line," "movement," "shape," "expression" all the time when teaching. But the day before with Malini they've been trying expressions with their faces. Malini was using the word "shape." So it's re-

ally concrete—if you're eight years old, concrete is a good reference point. You're not asking them to imagine a theoretical scenario. They've done it the day before.

*Amanda:* What did you draw on in your collaboration?

*Malini:* One reason we picked Jakata tales was because both of us have visited the region where Jakata tales are told, the whole border of north India and Nepal and Sikkim. Going up to Tibet where the borders between countries are pretty porous, there are so many languages and also religions are very fluid. I've been interested in Buddhism for a long time, although my family is Hindu. I love that whole region and the way that stories are told. So this was a way for me to enter a story, which may have

been told in a Buddhist family to young children the way Hindu stories were told to me. I feel that I share something with these communities and with that place. And since Jenna had visited Sikkim, we had that in common.

*Jenna:* I lived and taught in Kalimpong in West Bengal, India, about six years ago. So that was a region and a culture that I was also familiar with. When Malini and I first looked at these stories, we talked about connections between our own personal work and the stories, as well as connections between dance and the visual arts, and a huge part of it was looking at the natural world. These Jakata tales attach a deep importance to nature, to the elements of water and fire, to plants (bamboo in this case), to animals. Animals are personified characters that take great action in the world. Similarly, looking closely at the natural world and reinterpreting it inspires many artists, including myself. In the painting workshops, it became a core part of our discussion, because we used paint made from pokeberry, from turmeric and from purple cabbage. We talked about

natural materials as part of the storytelling tradition.

One day I thought about the idea of "traditional materials." Even though I'm not trained in Mithila painting from India, I think all of us have connections to some of the materials from other traditions. Material traditions have been passed down over many generations, shared between artists from all over the world, as people migrate and travel. Using that language for students—this idea of traditional materials and art forms—was a powerful connection. Also, the idea that wherever you are in the world, you can look around for the resources that are available and make something from them, became a core part of the conversation. The pokeberry was harvested in New York; the turmeric was not. It helped to instill a kind of ecological awareness—both on a material and a thematic level, because these stories are about the environment. They're moral tales about how people should approach the earth and our place on it together, whether we're from India or New York or wherever we're from.

*Amanda:* You collaborated recently on a professional performance. Tell me about that.

*Malini:* I was commissioned by Dr. Sunita Mulchi and the Charles B. Wang Center at Stony Brook University to create a dance piece. They hosted an art exhibit for the Indo-American Art Center called "Erasing Borders," which featured visual artists of South Asian descent. The performance was to be at the opening of the exhibit, so it had to be a piece that worked in a gallery setting. That was a big challenge and I was completely stumped as to what to do.

So I looked at the work that was going to be there, and I noticed a painting by Reet Das called "Stealing the Queen's Royal Jelly." It's a very big piece that has a skeleton and different animals in it, birds and bees, and it looks like they're stealing from the skeleton. It's a very beautiful work with very rich colors, very Indian colors—oranges and reds and blues. There's a red string that runs through that painting. On my first visit to his studio, I saw this red string and it went through every one of his paintings. This was very intriguing to me. So what is this string? He's very articulate about his



*Malini and Dancers perform at the Charles B. Wang Center*

Photo by Ezra Margono

work, and his explanation is that this string is the narrative, the storyline that keeps going. I loved this idea and also the idea that each of his distinct paintings is part of a larger narrative that is represented by something as clear as string. There's so much movement in the painting from the birds and the bees and the string, so I thought, what if we were to take off where these bees start in the painting, which is they're getting the string, so what do they do with it next? It has to do with death and what you take from the dead and what you create next. In a bee's life cycle, if they pick up something they then create their hive or they collect pollen and make honey. They use everything they collect and make something out of it. So that's where I got the idea of trying to make a hive out of string in the piece. Reet's idea was to make the hive site-specific so it would fit into its surroundings just like bees make their hive in the nook of a tree or in the corner of a building.



*Malini Srinivasan and Dancers interpret a painting by Reet Das, "Stealing the Queen's Royal Jelly." Jenna Bonistalli (far left) builds a "hive."*

Photo by Ezra Margono



That's when I knew I was in trouble. I was like "How in the world am I going to do that?" I have no idea what to do with string. I'm a traditional artist who performs usually in a black box stage and this is an interactive, largely improvised, piece. And we're going to make something? That's when I called Jenna.

*Jenna:* Her goal was to make it look like a hive, so because I have experience using fibers in different ways, I said maybe you should get some felted wool, because you can pull it apart and fluff it out, have some transparency, add light. It will move more softly. It's a different material from string or yarn. It has soft features to it, so you won't have these hard spider web lines. We walked to the store and were experimenting with types of fibers, talking about possibilities, and she looks at me and says, "Well, would you be in the piece?"

*Malini:* I think she thought I wasn't serious, but eventually she was convinced. Jenna was responsible creating something out of the material we brought to her. I think her involvement changed the focus of the piece quite a lot. I'm a dancer, so I was thinking about how to make the string part of a dance movement. But interestingly, a lot of the movement started becoming about the material. We tried to make the whole gathering process one of discovering the materials we were working with. Every time someone picked something up it was like this new thing. I think the materials really changed the piece, because we had to play with it and get to know it. This is something Indian dancers don't really do. And we had—I can't tell you—so much fun. It was like being a kid and you have this art project and you just get to play with stuff. It really took the focus off the performative element and on the actual process of finding our materials and building our hive. That had a lot to do with Jenna's involvement, because your perspective on



*Jenna helps a student with his brush stroke technique*

Photo by Anika Selhorst



*Malini demonstrates dance gestures for Jenna's visual art students*

Photo by Anika Selhorst

the material and your love for the material brought us into that world.

*Amanda:* Jenna, what was it like making visual art as a performance?

*Jenna:* Wow. It was so interesting—to watch this work of art constructed in eight minutes from nothing. The combination of play and purpose at the same time was an important balance. There was a lot of play, in the sense that each dancer when they picked up their material would sort of fall in love with it. Sort of, "What's this? What can I do with it?" And they would play with it, in that love sense. But they were also adding it to this structure over time. We did set some constraints. We did say each dancer takes one red thread, then a maroon colored thread. First we build

this structure. Next we take the felt and we start wrapping it. So, there were some rules associated with what you were supposed to do with the matter, but in the middle of that there was a lot of room for interpretation.

It was an interesting way to think. As a visual artist you often don't have to think about your audience in terms of time and rhythm in the actual making process. There was a pacing that had to happen as we were working. It's really hard to tie a knot when you're nervous. You're trying to stay fluid, but it's a little nerve-wracking. You're tying the knots and something goes wrong. You're trying gracefully to make it work. It was improvisational, definitely.

*Malini:* Absolutely, a lot of the movement was a sort of structured improvisation. We chose more basic, simple movements. The rhythm was a 4-beat cycle, so it was not too complicated. Then the dancers could pretty much do what they wanted, but we set little duets, so that there was interaction between dancers. And then we had choreographed movement at the end when all the bees start going up the staircase and fly away.

*Amanda:* Did you fly away, too, Jenna?

*Jenna:* Yes I did.

*Malini:* Yes she did. And may I add that Jenna was wearing a full Bharatanatyam costume and jewelry and she looked to die for. I could have married her off to an Indian boy in a second.

*Jenna Bonistalli, former Education Associate and teaching artist for City Lore, now lives in New Orleans, where she works as an independent artist and as a teaching artist for Kid smART.*

*Malini Srinivasan is a dancer, teacher and choreographer based in Queens, NY. She works as a teaching artist for City Lore and Symphony Space.*

[www.malinisrinivasan.com](http://www.malinisrinivasan.com)

# Be My Guest: Folk Artists and Community Guests in Classrooms

by Tal Bar-Zemer

*Providing opportunities for students, teachers, and artists to work with guest artists is a cornerstone of City Lore's Arts Education Program. We believe that knowledge of historical, cultural, and social events resides in the daily practices, memories and lived experiences of people.*

At the Academy of New Americans, a Queens middle school which helps newly arrived immigrant students transition to life in New York City, students are learning about Ghanaian *adinkra* art with City Lore teaching artist Judy Hoffman. N'ketiah Brakohiapa, a teacher at the Fashion Institute of Technology and an immigrant from Ghana, West Africa, has been invited to share his expertise as a professional *adinkra* artist.

N'ketiah begins by describing his family's tradition of *adinkra* printing. He describes the processes of carving *adinkra* stamps from the dried thick skin of a calabash gourd, making dye from the bark of a tree, and preparing the fabric for printing. Then he points to symbol on his shirt, *I chose this symbol because it is very manly, very warrior. I am a commoner. That means I can wear only one symbol at a time. It is only the chief who can wear a combination of several symbols. That's why I wear only one, but I can use it in different sizes to make it*

*more interesting. If you are a student in my village, you can wear only one symbol, but your teacher can wear a combination of two or three. That will tell everyone who sees you on the street, "Oh, she's the teacher and you are the student."*

*If I'm making a print for families in a certain community, I use specific symbols for them. I wouldn't use their symbol on my shirt. We use the symbols in different ways today. But if you're in Ghana, you must be mindful of what these symbols mean. In Ghana, different occasions require different symbols. And there are different symbols for men and women in Ghanaian society. A funeral cloth has all the symbols, very small. They're worn by the men of the home. The women wear black-shaded cloth for funerals.*

Judy asks N'ketiah to describe a typical day when he was the age of these students. *At age 12, I was a pro at making adinkra, he says. When you see me, my hands and knees are covered with dye. I would wake up early, 6:30—in Ghana the sun is already high—and make sure we have*

*water. I would go to the riverside to fetch water and bring it to where we are doing the printing. We had 4 to 6 drums, and me and my sisters were in charge of filling them. Then I would sweep the whole space and put in the pegs for pinning the fabric. I had to prepare the space for the day's work. I had to make sure we had the dye for printing. I had to put buckets at points along the fabric. I had to make sure that the blocks were dry and not loose. After that I put the ink in pots. My grandfather did the main designs but he left small parts of the fabric for me to print. I would have loved to make my own designs, but the adults knew the sequence of how the design flows. I'm going in my head, "I would like to do that myself." But it wasn't my time. I had to learn. At 8 o'clock things were done and we had dinner.*

N'ketiah holds up a large cloth that combines a traditional symbol with a contemporary image of a rose. He asks: *Why did I do this? It is a statement, a combination of influences. Because adinkra is in my blood, I wanted to share that tradition, but I also wanted to create something new, so I introduced blocks of flowers.*

A student asks him, *What do you think is essential to become an adinkra artist?*

*First, you have to have knowledge of the symbols, N'ketiah says. You have to know the connections, male and female, old and young. It is essential that you understand what the symbol means and its relationship to society. The other is you have to be from an Adinkra place. But today the world has become a global village and we exchange cultural traditions. We share our arts. When I use the symbols, it's my way of talking through the fabric. You have been taught the processes and now you can use and identify these symbols. That gives you a place in the tradition too.*

A boy asks, *What are your favorite*



Guest artist N'ketiah Brakohiapa talks with students about *adinkra* art of Ghana

Photo by Amanda Dargan





*N'ketiah Brakohiapa, teaching artist Judy Hoffman, classroom teacher Evelyn Gomez, and students at the Academy of New Americans*

Photo by Amanda Dargan

symbols?

N'ketiah points to a symbol printed on a large cloth and explains, *This symbol, sankofa, means a lot to me. If you travel away from your home, this symbol is especially important. It tells you that you shouldn't forget the art that you left back home. I came to this country with my whole adinkra understanding. I couldn't leave it behind. I wanted to share my art, so I went to school to study art. I wanted to be able to connect to everyone else, regardless of where we're coming from. We all have to share.*

### Community Guests in the Classroom

N'ketiah's presentation offered a fuller portrait of the *adinkra* tradition and the ways that one artist learned, practiced, and adapted the tradition. It also offered a wealth of potential topics for classroom discussions that follow the visit: the role of gender, social status, age, and occupation in *adinkra* art; the process of making the dyes and tools used to print the fabric from local natural materials and of preparing the space and fabric for printing; the function and uses of *adinkra* cloth in community settings and rituals, such as funerals; the different roles played by children, men, and women in the printing process; the meanings of *adinkra* symbols and what they convey about the wearer; ways of teaching and mentoring younger family members in the tradition; and the way that artists like N'ketiah combine both traditional designs with his original designs. Students learned that *adinkra* symbols and art, like most

traditional arts, are embedded in the rituals and daily lives of the people who make and use them. They express a culture's sense of beauty, but so much more. They communicate personal information about the wearer but also the values of the culture and the community.

Guests offer points of view and a ways of learning that are different from what students might get from a textbook or the internet. In addition to their artistic and cultural expertise, guests connect stories of their lived experience to their practice. Students hear personal stories of events they otherwise might consider to be distant history and gain an understanding of how these events impacted the lives of ordinary people. They learn to see the people in their communities as potential resources for learning about the world. Students also make personal connections to other cultures and moments in history that previously may have seemed remote and disconnected from their own lives. Often awed to be in a room with someone who grew up in these cultures and experienced historical events first hand, they begin to see the people around them as potential founts of knowledge.

*Tal Bar-Zemer is Manager of Out-of-School-Time Programs at City Lore in New York City. She has a MS.Ed from Bank Street College of Education.*

### DEAR MR. N'KETIAH BRAKOHIAPIA,

Hello, my name is Asa Shin. I first time met you in the social studies class with adinkra art. I am from Japan and had lived here for almost one year. I never knew about adinkra symbol or clothes until this art project begin. I even didn't know any of African art. When I first time saw the pictures of adinkra clothes, I was amazed by it, because I've never seen clothes designed by stamps. In Japan, there is cloth made using dyeing process, but not with stamps. So I couldn't imagine how to stamp on the fabric. Then Ms. Judy, the artist and teacher of our art project, showed us the videos about how to stamp or make the adinkra symbol.

Also, I learned there is a process... and when or how to wear it. When I heard that, I felt that I want to see people who actually do that. So when you came to our class, that wish came true. By your talking, I could learn more about what native Ghana's adinkra makers do every day. I was surprised when I heard that children also help their family from early morning to night. I didn't have that experience when I was in Japan. I helped my mother sometimes, but not everyday, all the time. So I thought maybe it is tough, but I wanted to experience that, too.

One more thing, I felt surprise that there is rank between people. For example, you said that only the village chief can wear a lot of symbols and others wear only one symbol... Actually, there was like this rank in ancient Japan, too. When people started making rice, there were people who manage that, who make that rice, who make the tool to make rice, and who cook. In that time, people who manage the rice was most admired by people... I learned many things from what you spoke and taught us. Also, it make my ability of understanding more and I learned many knowledge that I can't know from pictures or videos. I'd like to be thankful for that. From this experience, I want to learn more about adinkra symbol and tell people how beautiful and amazing it is. Again, thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Asa Shin

# Integrating Folk Arts and Sparking Creativity in Classroom Residencies

by Paddy Bowman

“**T**his project has revolutionized my teaching,” observed Jeff Foley, a language arts teacher at L.J. Alleman Middle School and Arts Academy in Lafayette, Louisiana. He is among eight teachers paired with guest folk artists and teaching artists for the third year of Local Learning in Lafayette (LLL). This model project, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts Folk and Traditional Arts Program, supports classroom residencies that infuse folk arts and the interview process into arts-integrated units of study. Jeff expanded his critique by describing how students’ family interviews and interaction with their guest folk artist, third-generation cowboy Johnny Richard, reminded him to savor teaching and taught him to embrace open-endedness. “This approach gave me the confidence to slow down,” he said. “And it gave me proof that teaching is an art. The documentation component taught me the value not only of documentation but also of embedding photos, images, and artifacts in language arts assignments.”

Famous for its Cajun and Creole cultural heritage, Lafayette Parish is home to hundreds of traditional musicians and craftspeople, yet students here, like students in many communities, rarely have opportunities to learn with folk artists in school settings. To address this, Local Learning partnered with the Acadiana Center for the Arts (AcA) and the Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS) to adapt the City Lore model that teaches students to interview and document family and community culture and uses guest folk artist classroom visits as springboards for teaching artists and teachers to develop arts-integrated lessons. Renée Roberts of the AcA education department and Local Learning director Paddy Bowman identified folk artists who represent the diversity of the parish, including a Cajun fiddler, Creole accordionist, Anglo American and



*World history teacher Brian Tarrant plays along on a song or two with fiddler Mitch Reed during his classroom residency focused on migration*

Photo by Renée Roberts

African American basket makers and weavers, and a Louisiana cowboy. Other genres include natural egg dyeing, goat farming, fly fishing, and healing. Renée selected AcA teaching artists, all visual artists who are deeply experienced in planning arts-integrated lessons with teachers. Project teachers at Alleman Middle and Lafayette High School teach language arts, world history, Louisiana history, gifted enrichment, and French.

## Inspiring Teachers and Students

Powerful family and community connections inspire teachers as well as students. During an evaluation interview, all eight teachers agreed with their peer who said, “This is the most important thing that my students will do all year.” Maureen Bonvillain said, “This year I had to include all six of my 8th-grade Louisiana history classes, not just my target class, because students were so interested in the project. I assigned students to interview someone of a different generation in their family. Most chose grandparents.” Photos of students and elders, many bearing a strong family resemblance, grace the covers of reports that situate students and their families in living Louisiana history.

French teacher Andrée Elder and teaching artist Lauren Hensgens built on 6<sup>th</sup> graders’ residency with natural egg dyeing folk artist Connie Boustany last year. They asked students to choose quotes from family interviews to translate into French and then layer them in tissue paper with pressed flowers and leaves used as dyes to make large, delicate luminaries lit by battery-powered votives. Brian Tarrant’s world history 6<sup>th</sup> graders incorporated family migrations into their studies. Fiddler Mitch Reed taught them about the migration of Cajun, Irish, and African American music to southwest Louisiana. Teaching artist Marla Kristicevich then led students to weave symbols of family stories into rhythmic patterns to create fabric wall hangings. After hearing from the folk artist Johnny Richard about his cowboy code of honor, Jeff Foley’s 7<sup>th</sup> graders chose important character traits of family members they interviewed to embellish painted portraits. Along with symbols they devised to represent their subjects’ values and strengths, students summarized stories through quotes that edged the portraits. “My mother is the cover girl for perseverance,” wrote one student on her mother’s portrait.



A gifted enrichment teacher, Adrienne Smith seeks to impart critical and creative thinking skills and social development. Her middle-school students auditioned for documentation roles when folk artist Keith Richard came to their class last year. A world-class fly fisherman, he shared his lifelong knowledge of Louisiana waterways, fish, and insects as well as of fly tying and casting. Adrienne summarized some of what students learned: abstract math concepts, science (the seasonal round, insect life cycles, the food chain), cooperation, interviewing, note taking, photography, poetry, and visual art. With teaching artist Jill Broussard, students studied many artists' depictions of fish, sketched realistic fish, then chose a section of their sketches to paint in large abstracts.

In her 8<sup>th</sup>-grade language arts class, Colleen Tharpe assigned students to apply poetic devices, including musical devices, figurative language, and imagery to create mood and feeling in poems that reflect family traditions and keepsakes. One student wrote:

## My Piano

Passed down  
From many generation  
Old elephant tusk keys  
The black ones shiny  
I'm the last one playing  
For now

## French Language Component

This year LLL added French language teams. At the middle school, students studying *passé composé* will summarize fly fisherman Keith Richard's interview in the past tense and then extract French words and phrases for a poetry exercise, which will be incorporated into altered books with teaching artist Sasha Nick. A French-speaking teaching artist, Alyce LaBry, is working with two Lafayette High classes. Advanced French students, enthralled by Creole zydeco musicians' residency, are seeking fluent French speakers in the community to interview about musical traditions. Meanwhile, beginning French students are learning the Louisiana French names for local plants and collecting family remedies in conjunction with Creole healer Rebecca Henry's classroom visits.



*Colleen Tharpe's students negotiate quilt square placement for their family poetry quilt*

Photo by Paddy Bowman



*Healer Rebecca Henry conducts her folk arts workshop in French at Lafayette High School. Teaching artist Alyce LaBry and French teacher Cindy Barry designed an arts-integrated lesson to create medicine chests filled with students' home remedies labeled in French*

Photo by Cindy Barry

Asked what skills their students are learning through LLL, teachers quickly listed observation, close listening, polished questioning, note taking, analyzing data, re-presenting findings, interpersonal relationships, patterns, abstraction, metaphor, symbol, tolerance, self-identity, confidence, manners, and art as a language. Witnessing demonstrations and interviewing traditional artists inspires students to reflect on community and family. Folk artists often look and sound like students and prompt them to recognize their own traditions that they may have overlooked. Highlighting local

learning honors families and communities. In coming months, Local Learning offers a Folk Arts Integration Handbook for developing these types of residencies on our web site

[www.LocalLearningNetwork.org](http://www.LocalLearningNetwork.org).

Stay tuned!

*Paddy Bowman directs Local Learning and is co-editor of CARTS and the new book Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum, Utah State University Press. (See Resources, p. 32)*

# Studio Visit: Capoeira en Roda

by Jenna Bonistalli

Climbing up an old winding wooden stairway in a warehouse building on 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, 57 students enter a wide-open room. Sunlight streams into the space, washing over the succulents and vines that line the windowsills. A parrot chirps “hello.” The smell of freshly brewed coffee wafts through the air. Black and white photographs of Brazil and Africa adorn the walls. Sculptures, textiles, and mementos grace tables. A small colorful shrine is lit with candles. Joined by many musicians and capoeiristas, Mestre Bom Jesus and Mestre Carioca welcome their youngest protégés. *Olá. Good day. Bom dia.*

## Capoeira Angola

*Capoeira*, a art with roots in Africa, is one of the many cultural art forms that were used to break the chains of enslavement in Brazil. Played close to the ground, *capoeira* combines fluid, dance-like movements with kicks, tripping sweeps, hand stands, and the appearance of playfulness or vulnerability. Music is played on traditional instruments, such as the one-stringed *berimbau* and drums, to accompany the players, to teach the rhythmic heart of the art, and also to

mask its power. For almost 400 years *capoeira* was taught and practiced in secret, and only in the 1930s did this African martial art become legal to teach and practice. Hailing from Salvador, Bahia, in Northeast Brazil, Mestre João Grande is a Grand Master of *Capoeira* Angola, with more than 50 years of experience performing all over the world. Since 1990, his New York City Capoeira Angola Center has been a hub for the Brazilian dance and martial arts community.

## Studio Fieldtrip

In April 2010, students in Lydia Cruz’s 5<sup>th</sup> grade and Sindy Soleymanzadeh’s 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes visited the Capoeira Angola Center. Students had been studying *capoeira* and *maculelê* for four months as part of City Lore’s *Nations in Neighborhoods* program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. City Lore, in collaboration with New York City’s Community School Districts 28, 29, and 30, is implementing this program, now in its fourth year, in six schools in the borough of Queens. The program places working artists with classroom teachers to design arts-integrated units of study focusing on social studies, literacy, and community resources. It seeks to create

a replicable model for strengthening standards-based arts instruction in grades 3 to 8 and improving students’ academic performance, including their skills in creating, performing, and responding to the arts. Goals include building teachers’ capacity to use community resources and culturally responsive instruction in their classrooms and helping teachers address the challenges and promises of a highly diverse and shifting immigrant student population through cultural arts integration.

City Lore embraces art as situated in communities and homes, thus a focus of our work in the schools is to explore art outside the classroom. Fieldtrips are integral to the programs we design in collaboration with artists and classroom teachers. We try to imagine all the possibilities for designing trips that stretch beyond New York City staples and have the potential to enhance students’ understanding of the community contexts in which artists learn and practice their art.

## Inquiry and Interviews

To prepare students for their visit, we read João Grande’s biography and looked at photographs and paintings of *capoeira* as practiced in Brazil. Students wrote questions they developed on index cards. Upon arriving at the studio, they investigated: “Walk around and find something that interests you. Draw it or write about it in the space below.” They practiced inquiry skills, dividing their thoughts into three categories:—*know* (describe what you see)—*think* (thoughts/feelings about what you see)—*wonder* (questions about what you see). Afterwards, students sat and asked questions of the *mestres*. Then, the sounds of the *berimbau* began as the *capoeiristas* sang and began to practice *en roda*, a circle formed by the *capoeiristas* and musicians. Students watched and were invited to join.

When artists visit schools, they enter the workspace of students and their teachers. When students visit studios, they enter the workspace of artists. Artists work in all kinds of spaces—outdoors, in their homes, in places of worship, in their studios, and in community



Students interview mestres at the Capoeira Angola Center

Photo by Catherine Fletcher



centers. Entering a studio space is a full sensory experience, where students can feel and see artists situated in the world. It provides a window onto the materials, practices, and contexts for creating. *What does it mean to be a working artist? How do you practice your craft? Who are your teachers? Where do communities of artists gather to learn from each other?*

To hear the *berimbau* echo throughout the room; To see and join a group of *capoeira* artists *en roda*; To ask questions of a *mestre* and listen to his responses in Portuguese, students enter a dialogue about an art form, in rhythm with *capoeira* masters. When Kareem asks, “Where was *capoeira* started?” João Grande gracefully replies, *A capoeira é como o oceano*. “*Capoeira* is like the ocean.” He describes how art flows where people practice it, without boundaries, no

beginning and no end. “Art worlds” surround young people. Discovering a painting on a neighborhood wall, watching a grandmother as she stitches a pattern on cloth, or climbing this steep stairwell on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, students become participants in these worlds.

To learn more, visit: Capoeira Angola Center of Mestre João Grande:

<http://www.joaogrande.org>

Nations in Neighborhoods Blog:

<http://nationsproject.wordpress.com/2010/10/11/capoeira-en-roda>

*Jenna Bonstalli, former Education Associate and teaching artist for City Lore, now lives in New Orleans, where she works as an independent artist and as a teaching artist with KID smART.*



*Students pose with Mestre João Grande at the Capoeira Angola Center*

Photo by Jenna Bonstalli

**At the Capoeira Angola Center, students and teachers interviewed capoeira artists Bom Jesus and Carioca, Mestre João Grande, and Mestre Jelon Vieira, who was visiting the Center. This is a selection from the interview.**

**Q: HOW LONG HAS CAPOEIRA BEEN IN THIS COUNTRY?**

**Vieira:** This year we are celebrating the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *capoeira* in this country. Mestre Vladimir and myself were the first capoeiristas to come to the United States, in 1975. In 1979 there was Mestre Acordeon in San Francisco, California. There was a big gap between west and east. Nowadays this gap has been filled. You can find *capoeira* everywhere in the United States, every single state you can find *capoeira*, which is great because everyone has access to it. ... It's great to see kids like you coming here and doing research and meeting Mestre Grande. I'm very impressed and very happy and proud to see that. ... I brought Mestre Grande here the first time in 1989. It was Mestre Bobô, Mestre Pequeno, and Mestre Grande. They came here for the first time, and it was a big success. And Mestre João coming here, it start changing *capoeira*. It was one of the best things that happened to *capoeira*. It planted the seed of Capoeira Angola. I plant the seed of Capoeira Regional and he plant the seed of Capoeira Angola. Capoeira Angola is the mother of all *capoeira*.

**Q: ARE AMERICAN CAPOEIRA STUDENTS DIFFERENT FROM BRAZILIAN CAPOEIRA STUDENTS?**

**Bom Jesus:** “From my personal point of view, there's nothing different. It's person to person, how much they work, how much they dedicate themselves to learn the Brazilian culture. How much they learn Portuguese and how they sing the songs. Then you cannot tell if they are Brazilian or they are Americans.”

**Vieira:** “I would like to add one thing—it is rooted in Brazilian culture, but it is a human being thing. Anyone can

do *capoeira*, Like he said, it depends on how much time you devote to it, but it's an individual thing.... But when learning *capoeira*, you must learn all—the language, the culture. You have to be part of the culture to truly be called *capoeirista*. But anyone can become *capoeirista*. *Capoeira* is for everyone.

**Q: WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR CAPOEIRA FOR THE FUTURE?**

**Vieira:** Mestre Grande says, it depends who teach the generations. It's like a tree. If you treat the tree right from the very beginning, definitely that tree will give good fruits. I say we're all *capoeiristas*. We have a moral obligation with our ancestors to continue this art and pass it on to the next generation, so the next generation keep passing it on and on and keep it pure, like they just said. You have to keep pure. My dream is one day to see the whole world *ginga* (rock back and forth, a basic movement of *capoeira*), but *ginga* the right way. Because nothing promotes Portuguese more than *capoeira* does. I'd say 90% of *capoeiristas* in the world speak Portuguese. Here to Mestre Grande's class, they all speak Portuguese. You learn Portuguese. You learn the music. You're hooked to *capoeira*... I was surprised when I came here. I came here to see Mestre Grande, and I run into Mestre Carioca and Bom Jesus. I hadn't seen them for awhile. I've been kidding them saying they're like the equator. You know the equator line is there, but you don't see it. To see them was great. And seeing the kids was really a great feeling, seeing that *capoeira* is catching on with this new generation. Seeing them getting to them know Mestre Grande, getting his blessing, it really made my day.

## Be My Guest: Folk Artists and Community Guests in Classrooms

*continued from page 27*

### WHERE TO FIND COMMUNITY GUESTS

Part of the work of City Lore's artist residency planning process is to identify resources to support students' learning and to inspire their art making. We work with teachers and teaching artists to plan fieldtrips to city institutions and community sites as well as to identify potential guests to bring into the classroom or to host a visit with students at their home or workplace. Here are some suggestions for selecting and finding potential guests:

#### START WITH WHOM YOU KNOW

We begin with our personal contacts. Often our artists visit each other's residency programs as guests. For a residency to create Chinese lanterns decorated with paintings of family stories, teaching artist George Zavala invited Lu Yu, who teaches dance-theater, to show examples of traditional lanterns and to talk about the Chinese lantern festival.

#### SURVEY STUDENTS, PARENTS AND SCHOOL STAFF

Describe the residency program and ask if they or someone they know would be interested in sharing their skills, knowledge, or experiences with students. For a residency on regional Mexican dance, for example, we invited a Mexican chef, a parent of a child in the class, to demonstrate how to prepare regional dishes and to discuss cultural influences.

#### EXPLORE YOUR COMMUNITY

Contact organizations and businesses that serve artists and ethnic communities in your community, such as religious and social service organizations, arts councils, galleries and museums, restaurants, libraries, historical societies, music and video stores, book stores and local libraries, community festivals, and arts and crafts markets. Many of these organizations have community bulletin boards and newsletters, where you can post an inquiry as well as find potential contacts. Use social media to post an inquiry about the kind of guest you're looking for.



*Students' printed adinkra symbols on fabric*

Photo by Amanda Dargan

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR A GUEST'S VISIT

Preparing the guest and the students for the visit helps to insure a successful experience.

#### PREPARE THE GUEST

Before the visit, talk with guests about what students are learning and what they will create for a final product. Explain why you chose the guest and ask what he or she would like to share about their art or their personal experiences. Ask if the guest prefers to lead the class alone or have someone to help facilitate. You may want to work with the guest to develop an activity that gives students a chance to practice a technique or skill associated with the guest's art form. In one City Lore project, Indian Tanjore-style painter, Pria Ramanjan, showed examples of her portraits of Hindu deities and demonstrated how she applied ornamentation using gold leaf and semi-precious jewels. In the weeks that followed, students painted portraits of a relative with their teaching artist George Zavala and with Pria's assistance on her second visit, applied gold paint and embedded plastic "jewels" inspired by Tanjore-style painting.

#### PREPARE STUDENTS

Talk with students about the guest's background and area of expertise. Remind students that the guest will speak about his or her own experience and that one person does not represent an entire community, culture, or experience. Guide students to frame questions for the guest. For N'ketiah's visit to Academy for New Americans, students brainstormed questions based on what they had read and their experiences working with adinkra symbols. Students were keeping a blog as a way to develop writing and inquiry skills, so we asked students to look through their journals and to write a few questions that interested them. With the help of their teachers, students posted their favorite questions on a project blog for the artist to see before his visit. You can read their questions on the blog at <http://nationsproject.wordpress.com/2012/01/11/adinkra-stamps-of-ghana-ask-the-artist/>

#### FOLLOW-UP

Send the guest thank you letters from students and invite the guest to visit students' culminating performance or exhibit.



## Finding the Connection

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Saluting in and out in *bomba* dance is basically an action of acknowledgement, because *bomba* when it's danced is really a conversation, a dialogue between drummer and dancer. Before you engage in a dialogue, you want to recognize that you're going to initiate that conversation. When you're done, you want to acknowledge and give thanks. If a *bomba* dancer that knows his or her stuff does not do that, that's a big no-no.

Beyond that, the question of authenticity, especially when teaching in schools, is a hot debate. It's very difficult, because there's not one correct way of practicing this. You validate the experiences and the traditions as you perceive and interpret them. The overarching thing for me is that students get some kind of connection to the music, not necessarily that they understand that *bomba* was developed in this era or the names of the drums and the names of the steps. That comes with time. What you can't teach is passion, and passion starts with a connection. When I go into a classroom, whether it's a classroom with twenty different ethnicities or a classroom of Caribbean students that have closer connections culturally, the most important thing is finding that connection with them as an individual—from teacher to student—and then culture to culture.

**Juan:** When you teach in public schools, students are not there to become *bomberos* or *pleneros*. So everything is negotiable with them, except your attitude toward this tradition. It has to show, and it will show, of course. The kids have to use what they brought with them, their own expressions, their own tools, and their own resources. Teaching was like a crash course for us. We were writing the book as we were doing it. And everybody has a different book, in a sense. How do you teach playing a pandereta? How do you break it down and keep a little essence of what it is—the tradition? It's a constant search for that.

When kids come up to you and say, "I like you," or, "The music is great," no one tells them

to say that. I have met people in the street that I don't recognize and they come up to me and say, "I loved what you did and I learned so much from you." Once when I was driving down the highway in heavy traffic, an officer in a police van full of cops approached me and honked me. Then he shouted, "Hey, Mr. Gutiérrez, you were my teacher and I loved you!" Oh my God, that was something!

**Julia:** That experience goes back to the importance of just being able to get that connection. That's what they are going to carry with them for many years: the colors, the impressions, the sounds, and the smells, even if they're not able to pinpoint it directly. Memory is a trigger. Who knows, many years from now, they may see something that reignites that. So it's a very powerful tool.

*Juan Gutiérrez is the Founding Director of Los Pleneros de la 21. In addition to a career as a Broadway percussionist and arranger and his work leading the nonprofit organization and performing ensemble LP21, he has taught as a music teacher, then as a teaching artist in NYC public schools for over 30 years. He has a Masters in Music Education from the Manhattan School of Music.*

*Julia Gutiérrez-Rivera, who was a student in LP21's Children's Workshops pioneer class in 1989, is a member of the new generation of LP21's staff and performing and teaching ensembles. She has Masters in Nonprofit Management from The Milano School for Management and Urban Policy at the New School.*



*Juan Gutierrez teaches a plena song to students at Public School 11*

Photo by Amanda Dargan

## Spending Time with Molly Neptune Parker

continued from page 15



*Basket by Molly Neptune Parker*

to Theresa Secord, a Penobscot Basket maker and Director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance,

"The Apprenticeship Program has been a catalyst for many of us becoming basket makers and continuing the work. I'm proud how some of our elder basket makers, in particular, have made themselves available. It takes a lot of patience and maybe they don't even want to share some of their skills and knowledge, but they have forced themselves because they understand it must be that way. They must pass on their knowledge and their skills, even if it is to someone outside the family, because they understand how critical it is to make sure that a part of the culture is passed on to future generations."

*Kathleen Mundell is a folklorist and director of Cultural Resources, a nonprofit Organization in Rockport, Maine, that collaborates with diverse communities on developing strategies, alliances, and programs that help sustain their cultural traditions.*



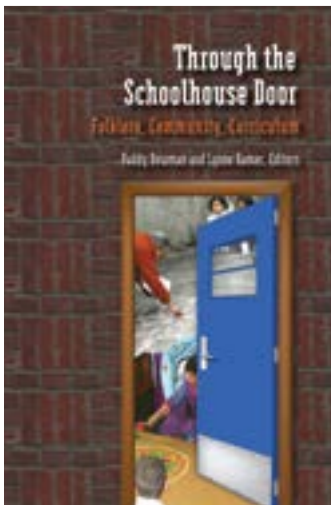
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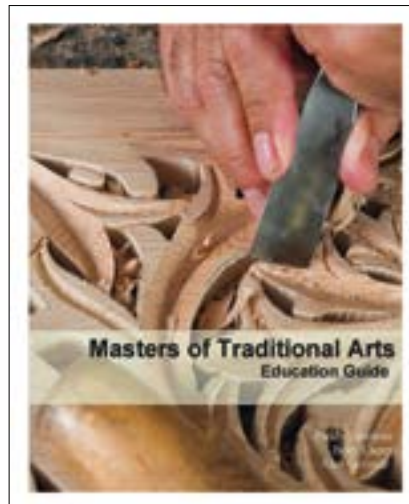
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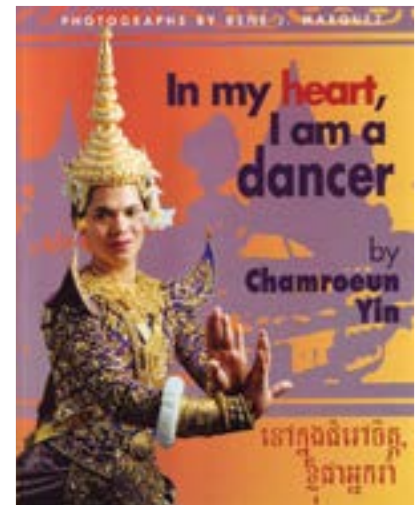
*Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum*, Paddy Bowman and Lynne Hamer, eds. Utah State Univ. Press, 2011, 264 pages, \$24.95. Digital edition, \$20.00. Order from [www.usu.edu/usupress/books/index.cfm?isbn=8596](http://www.usu.edu/usupress/books/index.cfm?isbn=8596).

This anthology features exemplary school programs and the analysis of an expert group of folklorists and educators who are dedicated to getting students out the door and into their communities to learn about the folk culture all around them but also to honor the culture that teachers and students bring into the classroom. Includes essays by CARTS authors P. Bowman, A. Dargan and A. Pryor.



*Masters of Traditional Arts Education Guide*, by Paddy Bowman, Betty Carter, and Alan Govenar, Documentary Arts, Inc., 2011, 80 pages. An online version of the guide links to artist profiles and multimedia at [www.mastersoftaditionalarts.org](http://www.mastersoftaditionalarts.org). To order the free book and DVD, go to [www.nea.gov/honors/heritage](http://www.nea.gov/honors/heritage) and click publications.

This education guide accompanies the 30th anniversary publication and DVD *NEA National Heritage Fellowships 1982-2011*. It offers authentic content that will encourage students to explore their own and other cultures through traditional arts.



*In My Heart, I Am a Dancer*, by Chamroeun Yin, Deborah Wei and Debora Kodish, eds. Photos by René Marquez. Philadelphia Folklore Project, 1996. 32 pp, \$12.95. (Grades K-4). Teachers' guide also available in hard copy, \$6.00. Order from [www.folklore-project.org](http://www.folklore-project.org)

*In My Heart, I Am a Dancer* is a children's book about a Khmer classical dancer, mask-maker, gardener, friend and neighbor that shows many sides of this Cambodian man, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime, who has followed his heart and his dream. The book, in a simple and straightforward way, punctures stereotypes.