OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE


Patricia Reynolds

AN AMERICAN FESTIVAL WEAVES A VISION OF A VITAL NEW WORLD

▶ BY GAYLE STAMLER

"THE BLOOD WAS EVERYWHERE. Grandfather took a deep breath. He got one more Indian. Now he was alone with his thoughts and a smoking gun. To be on guard like this is a great opportunity for a colored man."

Robbie McCauley snapped to attention behind her microphone, a black stick of wood — grandfather's gun? — cradled in the crook of her arm. Her band tootled a melancholy jazz riff, while the audience in Cornell University's black box theater sat silently in the dark, waiting to see what might come next. Suddenly, McCauley shouted to them — at them — in her grandfather's voice, spitting out the words like poisoned pellets:

"IT WAS MY *JOB* TO KILL THE INDIANS. IT WAS MY *JOB*.

"IT WAS MY JOB."

For more than an hour, McCauley roamed the stage as she roamed through her family's history, first sharing apples and cookies with the audience; later teasing them into laughter with an account of how the family genealogists measure each generation's share of the "Indian blood" inherited from Grandmother Pease, who was half-Indian; and then riveting them with the poignant story of a small girl's journey into "white people's territory" in search of strawberry bubble gum.

McCauley's *Indian Blood* was the first staged performance in An American Festival, an eleven-day event at Cornell University last September to mark the opening of Cornell's new Center for Theatre Arts. During those eleven days, audiences were stirred by many powerful works like McCauley's. Kentucky's Roadside Theater gripped theatergoers with its portrayal of a family facing the loss of its homeplace; Liz Lerman taught people, young and old, to see aging bodies with new eyes; and Francisco González y su Conjunto opened the ears and hearts of Ithaca residents to the music of Mexican-Americans. Each of these artists, and the seven others who participated in the festival, contributed something unique to the cultural dialogue that the festival's organizers considered an integral part of the event. (For a full list of artists, see page 39.)

It's a running dialogue, of which the festival at Cornell is only one voice, albeit a collective one. All these artists are participants in the American Festival Project, an ongoing attempt to build a new understanding of American pluralism by presenting high-quality work that combines traditional sources with artistic innovation. The Festival Project encompasses

▲ Michael Keck and John O'Neal in performance

a national consortium of presenters; a pool of visiting artists who suggest the diversity of cultures in the United States; and a network of community co-sponsors and local artists.

Like *Indian Blood*, each festival work in its own way bumps hard against traditional Eurocentric assumptions about the way the world is organized, and who is supposed to be on top. These artists are subversive without necessarily being confrontational; they simply insist on the value of their experiences and traditions, even when those traditions lie outside society's prevailing idea of "culture."

The works can be unsettling, just as it is unsettling to open a new performing arts center with an event that implicitly challenges the cultural status quo. There were no black ties at An American Festival, no massed violins, no champagne receptions. There was only the vision, and the people who share it.

This is John O'Neal's vision: "The future is not a simple given. There is no guarantee of power for the powerful or weakness for the weak. The future will become as we create it through the ways we interact with all living things as well as with each other. As artists we are not exempt from the problems that threaten the communities in which we live and on which we depend."

O'Neal is a founder of the American Festival Project and, as director and principal performer for the Junebug Theater Project, one of its artists. He is also in the middle of a three-year stint as playwright-in-residence at Cornell, and when Bruce Levitt, the director of the university's Theatre Arts Department, asked him if he had any particular projects he would like to pursue during his residency, he didn't have to think long. Why not bring An American Festival to the Ithaca community? he asked.

Once the decision to host the festival was made, Cornell's administration entered into delicate negotiations with the festival's directors and community leaders to ensure that each party's interests were satisfied. Each community or organization that hosts An American Festival (the festival at Cornell is the sixth to date, and the largest) is expected to define its own long-range goals in collaboration with the festival's multicultural mission, and to become a partner in creating an event that will take on the character of the community while retaining the festival's identity.

The relationship between Cornell and the festival was a true partnership — from the big decisions about the festival's scope, down to the negotiations of artists' fees and travel arrangements. Along the way, the university and festival organizers gained a mutual sense of trust from sharing responsibilities.

Patricia Reynolds

▲ **Amy Dowling of Liz Lerman/Dance Exchange works with a class of mentally challenged students**

"Rather than simply being a presenter who hired a bunch of artists to come and do this festival, we were a partner, integral to designing this project and making it work," says John Suter, who was hired as festival coordinator a scant seven months before the event was to take place.

"There were a number of differences and challenges and problems that we had to work out among ourselves, so it was important that we establish that sense of trust."

Because the festival involved so many players, each of whom had definite objectives, its planners had to find a way to mesh a number of diverse goals. Cornell wanted to mark the opening of its new performing arts center; the American Festival coalition wanted to further its dialogue about culture, heritage and equity in the United States; and numerous individuals and community groups all had their own agendas.

Fortunately, there was a meeting of the minds about the central goals: to deal with multicultural issues, to involve the community, and to make sure that the artists reached the kind of audience they wanted to reach. This audience, says McCauley, includes people with "a broad range of ideas about the worth and dignity and possibilities of people in this country, ideas that often are not addressed in mainstream work."

Suter discovered that finding the right message to attract audiences was one of the most challenging aspects of the festival for the Cornell staff. "The mission of the festival, stated in its most pungent form, would tend not to be attractive to a general arts audience. It's pretty strong stuff," he says.

"It's always a question of thinking carefully about who you're trying to reach and why, rather than 'How can we seduce people to come to this thing?,' or 'We've got to tell people up front what this is about — social change and overthrowing the establishment.' How do you avoid both extremes without ending up with something that's just vapid?

"These works are positive and celebratory; people have a good time at these events," he says. "The art is good, and it appeals to the best in human thought and emotion. It challenges us about where we're stuck, but doesn't tell us that where we're stuck is who we are. I think that's what makes it work."

Still, the American arts community has only recently begun to realize the importance of presenting multicultural arts. American Festival Project Director Caron Atlas is surprised by the perception that this work is something new.

"In all this ferment of multi-culturalism these days, a lot of the 'discovery' talk is among white groups who are doing outreach," she says. "In fact, there are a lot of groups that have been supporting this work for years but, because they're community-based, they have gotten little national recognition."

The term "community-based" — which is integral to the American Festival Project's concept of how its programs should be seen and presented — defines not only sponsoring organizations but the festival artists as well.

The work of community-based artists grows out of the artist's background or affinity with a particular group of people. The group identity may be geographic, like the

THE ARTISTS

Ten companies were part of An American Festival at Cornell. Each participated in a range of activities, including workshops, lecture/demonstrations and discussions. In addition, each group gave two staged performances in the Center for Theatre Arts at Cornell.

• Francisco Gonzales y Su Conjunto is a group of three musicians who perform a variety of Mexican and Chicano music on traditional Mexican instruments. Their performances at Cornell included music of the Veracruzano, jalisco and jarocho styles.

• Jessica Hagedorn and Company includes Hagedorn, a writer, director and performance artist born and raised in the Philippines, and five Asian actors. The company performed *Holy Food*, an almost absurdist look at a a Filipino family living in New York in the last days of the Marcos regime.

• Junebug Theater Project, directed by John O'Neal, is a community-based arts program headquartered in New Orleans. O'Neal and Michael Keck performed *Ain't No Use in Going' Home; Jodie's Got Your Gal and Gone*, which explores black involvement in World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

• Liz Lerman and the Dance Exchange is a community-oriented modern dance company that includes senior citizens in many of its compositions. With the Dancers of the Third Age, a company of senior dancers aged 54 to 90, the Dance Exchange presented five pieces: *Sketches from Memory; Atomic Priests; Coming Attractions; Still Crossing;* and *Reenactments*.

• Robbie McCauley and Company features McCauley, an African American performance artist, and a group of musicians, as well as a video artist. McCauley's work *Indian Blood* dealt with the connections and betrayals between Blacks, Native Americans and whites throughout American history and within McCauley's family history.

• R. Carlos Nakai is a Native American flutist of Ute-Navajo heritage whose work reflects "the duality of honoring cultural tradition and developing individual expression."

• Roadside Theater incorporates actors and musicians who come from the central Appalachian coal-fields of southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Roadside's *Leaving Egypt* dealt with change and impending loss of homeplace.

• El Teatro de la Esperanza is a bilingual, bi-cultural dance/theater group that draws on a rich Latino heritage for its work. The company performed *La Cantata de Santa Maria de Iquique*, a bilingual dance/theatre adaptation that dramatized the 1907 labor unrest in Chile, which has had a lasting impact on the modern labor movement.

• A Traveling Jewish Theatre was founded in 1978 to create theater giving "form to streams of visionary experience that run through Jewish history, culture and imagination." The theatre's Naomi Newman performed *Snake Talk: Urgent Messages from the Mother*, a contemporary re-telling of the myth of the Triple Goddess.

• The African-American dance/performance group Urban Bush Women, directed by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, combines modern, African and African American dance and folk traditions. The company performed a program of seven pieces, including *Working for Free, Girlfriends, Bitter Tongue, Lipstick, Madness, Shelter* and *I Don't Know, But I Been Told If You Keep Dancin' You'll Never Grow Old.* ■

Appalachian community upon whose stories and experiences Roadside Theater draws in creating its work. (This same community is also Roadside's first and most important audience, helping the theater company shape the work as it grows.) Or the community may be a political one, like the one that grew up around the Civil Rights movement. It may be ethnic or cultural as well.

An American Festival attempts to form a lasting bond between the community-based work of its artists and the local organizations that play an active role in the lives of a community's citizens. The festival at Cornell was extremely successful in engaging a variety of organizations in Ithaca and the surrounding region in this attempt.

All in all, there were 110 events in an array of settings. For example, the campus Hillel center sponsored Robbie McCauley and Naomi Newman of A Traveling Jewish Theater in a program about black and Jewish women and the issues they face, particularly in their relationships with each other. Ithaca's Southside Community Center, which is located in a mostly poor Black and Latino community, brought in Jawole Zollar and Urban Bush Women, who presented lecture/demonstrations for young people. (Several girls from the center eventually performed with the Urban Bush Women at Cornell in a piece called *I Don't Know, But I Been Told If You Keep Dancin' You'll Never Grow Old.*) McCauley, Urban Bush Women, Native American flutist R. Carlos Nakai and playwright/performance artist Jessica Hagedorn traveled to DeWitt Middle School for lecture/demonstrations with 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. The Unitarian Church hosted A Traveling Jewish Theatre, the Junebug Theatre Project and Nakai in a celebration during their Sunday service.

The American Festival Project is not intended to be a showcase of world-class art, although many of the artists have been so recognized; it is closer to the festivals of

traditional peoples, whose celebrations at once reaffirm and reinterpret their communities.

However, this does not mean that the works presented during the festival are solely defined by their origins. As Robbie McCauley explains, the participating artists "explore old traditions through new experimentation."

"We explore form and content," she says. "We deal with social issues in our work, but not at the expense of good form. We're not so hooked into art that we forget about the subject matter, yet we're not so involved in subject matter that we neglect the aesthetic."

Still, in many ways it comes down to roots.

The roots of the American Festival Project go back to 1977, when Roadside Theater director Dudley Cocke invited O'Neal to Whitesburg to see his company perform.

Roadside Theater is an Appalachian-based ensemble whose plays are drawn from mountain history; O'Neal, at the time, was director of the Free Southern Theater, a company founded to foster the goals of the Black theater movement. O'Neal was interested in seeing Roadside's work, but he was aware that Roadside's audience was primarily white and working class, born and raised in a region that had seen its share of Ku Klux Klan activity.

RITUAL AND REMEMBRANCE

What was it about Roadside Theater's *Leaving Egypt* that held the cosmopolitan audience at Cornell spellbound for the more than two hours? The piece, which takes place in Appalachia in 1969, is a simple story about a family — the grandfather who follows the old ways, the granddaughter recently returned from hard times in a midwestern city, and a nephew just back from combat duty in Viet Nam. All are trying to deal with each other, and with the impending loss of the family homeplace. The deputy sheriff is just down the road, serving property condemnation papers so a corporation can claim the land. That piece of information becomes a kind of clothesline on which the characters hang stories about their lives, the past and their folklore. It seems a thin cord on which to tie together a full evening of theater.

Roadside Theater in performance

Dan Carraco

But they had our intimate attention, no doubt in part because most of us could bring personal stakes to the matter of losing family digs and fighting corporate sharks. But there's much more than that.

Two years ago, shortly after seeing Roadside Theater's production of *Pretty Polly*, I spoke with one of the company's mainstay actors, Tommy Bledsoe, about what made this theater important to regional and wider-than-regional audiences.

"It's community-based," he said. "This isn't community theater. That's something else. This is based in the life of the people here."

Could he take this further?

"Our theater has a context. Context-less culture is like sexuality with whores, male or female. There is no continuity — just arousal, titillation, no relationship, nothing that really matters."

But we were still not at the heart of what makes Roadside resonate. Then Bledsoe found it. "It's deep memories," he said. "What we do is ceremonies, folk ceremonies. The stories connect with old, forgotten feelings and responses. And the stories are important.

"But what is also important is telling them directly to the audience, with nothing in between. Our eyes and theirs touch. Makes us do not so much performances but story rituals, and ritual moves us to new states.

"If the spirit is right, you suddenly remember — remember the deep memories, stuff that is long buried, prohibited. You remember at last the stuff that really matters."

What was being remembered at the performance in Ithaca?

Eureka Theater director Richard Seyd once commented on the thaw between the Soviet Union and Reagan's United States:

"It brought tears to many eyes, because suddenly there was a memory of hope. The future was possible. Fear lifted, and after forty years we suddenly remembered what it was to live without a gun at the head."

Deep memories. A spellbinding story from Tommy about Viet Nam.

Deep memories. An account by Kim Neal Cole of how empty was the life of a hill-country girl misplaced in the city.

Deep memories. Ron Short spins a yarn — is it a yarn! — about a bottomless pit far within a cave far within a mountain, where all evil can be thrown and dispatched.

Deep memories. They're what Roadside is after. If the resounding response at the end of the evening — as at so many of the festival events — was any indication, we were all remembering deeply as a temporary, but very real and nurtured, community. ■

— Doug Paterson

"I knew that many in Dudley's constituency were potential Klan members," O'Neal says. "The Klan was on a big organizing drive all over the country, and those folks were potentially dangerous to us and to themselves."

So his response, when Cocke asked his opinion after the performance, came straight from that perspective. "I don't see anything that would keep people from joining the Klan," he said matter-of-factly.

"So, what do you think we ought to do about that?" Cocke asked.

The two men reached the conclusion that they should trade audiences. Roadside would perform for FST's rural Black audience, and FST would travel to Appalachia to perform for the white Roadside audiences. These exchanges formed the basis for the American Festival Project.

The idea of exchange, of involving people on both sides of an issue or conflict, has driven the Project since its inception. Atlas explains: "In order to have any kind of significant conversation about the issues we want to bring forward, all the different people affected by these issues have to be involved. You need to include the people who have the biggest stake in the issues, because so often their voices are not heard."

Cocke and O'Neal expanded their original conversation to include other artists they knew to be concerned about the issues of cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Eventually, they began to build a coalition that included A Traveling Jewish Theatre from San Francisco, as well as some members of El Teatro Campesino, the Chicano farmworkers' theater group from Northern California; the end result was the founding of the American Festival Project in 1982.

Each company already had dedicated itself to working within the community from which it drew its inspiration and traditions; collectively, they hoped to foster increased understanding about those traditions — and, more importantly, about the multicultural nature of the United States — by bringing their performance traditions to regions and communities previously unaware of them.

They had done so on an ad hoc basis several times before the festival came to Cornell. Their first effort, in San Francisco in 1982, was part of the People's Theater Festival. It was followed in 1983 by two festivals, one at Appalshop and the other at Jacksonville State University near Anniston, Alabama. In 1985, the festival was part of the Funeral of the Free Southern Theater, a celebratory wake to mark the disbanding of that group. The festival returned to Appalshop in 1988, at which point the artists decided to institutionalize the project so that they could establish long-range goals and create the stability the festival needed if it was to grow.

In fact, plans already are in the works for six more festivals during the next two years, organized in partnership with arts organizations and community-based groups at each site. Primary sponsors will be the Painted Bride Arts Center in Philadelphia; Appalshop; the New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center; the Group Theater in Seattle; and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. The festival's advisory board is also researching rural sites for a festival in Mississippi.

Cornell was fertile ground for the ideas that the American Festival Project encompasses. Unlike most of its Ivy-League cousins, Cornell combines a privately-endowed school of arts and sciences with land-grant-supported programs in such disciplines as agriculture, human ecology and veterinary medicine. The university long ago established a tradition of community service; for example, the Theater Arts department takes visiting artists out to local schools, and has developed materials that use theater techniques to educate people about job skills or about issues such as date rape.

JOYOUS INTERACTION IS THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE FESTIVAL.

What's more, Cornell President Frank H.T. Rhodes is an advocate of multiculturalism in higher education, and has been working for several years to make Cornell a center for multicultural education. That commitment now extends throughout the university, according to Suter.

"As a newcomer to Cornell, I was gratified to find so much genuine interest in this issue, going way beyond lip service," he says. The university's decision to invest $275,000 in An American Festival up front, then launch a fundraising effort that would continue during and after the festival, was a key decision in making the event a reality, and proved that Rhodes was willing to put his money where his mouth was.

"The people working with me in programming were in the unprecedented position of being able to go ahead and spend the money before it was raised," Suter says. "It

Patricia Reynolds

▲ R. Carlos Nakai discusses the history and background of the Navajo people with a class of middle-school students

would have been impossible to pull it off otherwise. Cornell's commitment, which I thought was most remarkable, enabled us to go ahead and do it right."

That commitment was essential, he adds, because the festival's timeline was so short: The whole process — from the initial contact with the American Festival Project to the explosion of events that eventually characterized the Cornell festival — took little more than a year.

The final plan included three to four staged performances a day for four days on the Cornell campus; workshops, lecture/demonstrations and mini-performances on campus and at schools, community centers and other sites in Ithaca; symposia and roundtable discussions; and a "mini-festival" during the last three days, which took artists to Binghampton, Rochester, Brockport, Syracuse and north to the Akwesasne Indian Nation.

"It was big," Suter says. "In a way, it was too big; we laid too much on the artists' schedules, and that created a lot of problems. "On the other hand, I think a lot of the impact of the festival came from its intensity and size. The fact that there was so much going on in such a short time raised the community's consciousness. It said to them, 'This is big and important. Someone's taking it seriously.' "

Francisco González and his wife, Yolanda Broyles, were setting up for a mini-performance at the Ithaca Senior Center, while their three-year-old son, Panchito, explored the room. It had been a gloomy ride out to the center. González and Broyles' hearts were heavy with sadness for the third member of their group, Roberto Perales, who had flown back to California after a midnight phone call telling him that his mother had died. What's more, they were tired from traveling to workshops and performances for the past four days. They had hit bottom.

The audience of about 55 mostly-older people — with a few children and their parents sprinkled around the room — took their places. González opened with a traditional Mexican number on the solo harp; soon Broyles joined him on the jarana, an instrument similar to an acoustic guitar. When the two kicked into a Texas-style polka, Panchito spotted a little girl across the room and asked her to dance. The crowd went crazy with delight when the two little people took the floor; then, midway through the number, a very old woman got up and began to dance by herself. Soon the woman was kicking — "higher than her head," González says — and others were rising to join her on the floor. Suddenly, the room pulsated with dancing bodies, as the sons and daughters of Ukrainians, Italians and Poles performed dance steps that they had learned in their youths, to songs that the Mexican-Chicano artists playing for them had first learned in theirs.

"These folks were doing polkas that were rooted, grounded in loving the music," González says. "We played on and on, and they were cheering and it was really great. It was a turning point in the whole festival. It brought the energy back for me, gave me the spirit to continue."

That kind of joyous interaction is the heart and soul of An American Festival. For that reason, the planning of events like the concert at the senior center was a collaborative effort, involving both artists and community representatives.

"Our basic concept was that the American Festival artists represented a resource for the entire region," Suter says. "We wanted to be sure that the people who were going to be using those resources had as much to say as we did, or the artists did, about how they would use them."

To that end, the festival staff sent packets of information about the artists, provided by the artists themselves, to community and campus organizations. Each group submitted a "wish list" of activities it would like to host, and each artist indicated the kinds of groups for whom he or she would like to perform. At that point the festival staff — and particularly Janet Salmons-Rue, outreach director for Cornell's Theatre Arts department — began an intricate matching process.

"Because we hadn't seen the artists' work, it was pretty tricky trying to communicate to the sponsor here what an artist could do in a

workshop, and then trying to communicate back to the artist what the Unitarian Church was looking for," Salmons-Rue says. "But we had enough information to give them a sense of what each of these artists were about, and what they could do." (During this process, American Festival Project Site Coordinator Theresa Holden played what John Suter describes as "an indispensable role," acting as liaison between the visiting artists and Cornell.)

Community groups began coming back with requests in February and March; then began the long process of trying to find out what each party really meant by what it said. The festival staff encouraged community sponsors not to develop new programs for this festival, but to build the artists into their ongoing programs. This approach would be easier for sponsors, who would not have to create new events and market them to their audiences; more importantly, this approach best served the festival's goal of having a continuing impact on the community.

"Everyone was aware of the danger: A flash-in-the-pan, 10-day festival happens, it's exciting, and then it's gone," Suter says. "We wanted to build into this event the possibility and the incentive for this work to continue, in whatever forms the community organizations might take.

"Having the events in the festival be in some way integral to existing programs seemed to make more sense in terms of continuity."

The visiting artists also played a large role in the planning. In April, representatives from each artist or company went to Ithaca to meet with the Cornell festival staff. During that time, Cornell invited community cosponsors from Ithaca and the outlying region to a reception at the university.

"We put everybody together in the same room, opened up the wine and cheese and let everyone talk," Suter says. "It worked just beautifully; people all got to talk to the people they wanted to meet, and a lot of them made concrete plans as to what they wanted to do."

However, many of the artists found that they were eventually scheduled to do far more than they could easily manage. In fact, if there was one overriding complaint from the artists, it was that the organizers' reach sometimes exceeded the artists' grasps.

For example, on Robbie McCauley's most grueling day she and her group were on the go — performing and participating in panel discussions — from 7:30 a.m. until the completion of their 8 p.m. show. Although her schedule on other days was not quite so hectic, it was still heavier than she would have liked.

Francisco González and his group had a hectic schedule every day. Because the group was extremely portable — "we could get everywhere in one car: all the performers, all the instruments and the local guide," he says — they were booked heavily.

"I began to refer to us as the burros," he says. "We were everywhere — three times a day, sometimes four times a day in different locations. The people who were doing the scheduling did not understand what they were asking of us."

Naomi Newman in *Snake Talk: Urgent Messages from the Mother* ▼

Valerie Hammowitz

Because of the constant traveling and performing, González was unable to see any of the other performers in action, which he regrets. Indeed, lack of time to spend with the other artists was a common complaint.

"The artists needed more time to be with each other—socially, working together or talking about our work," Naomi Newman says.

Still, most of the artists were able to catch some of the performances. McCauley managed to see all but two, and was thrilled by what she saw.

"We were all blown out by each other's work," she says. "I came away feeling really good about the possibility that this work, which has been going on for a long time among artists all over the country, now has a forum that can grow."

While the visiting artists worried that they had too much to do, local artists worried that they had too little — at least at first.

A preview article in the *Ithaca Times*, titled

"An American Festival — For All?," reported the complaints of several local artists that the university had virtually ignored them. Suter admits that the festival was unable to involve local artists in the planning process to any substantial degree, which was particularly unfortunate since part of the Festival Project's mission is to involve local artists at each site.

"As artists we are not exempt from the problems that threaten the communities in which we live and on which we depend." — John O'Neal

Part of the problem, Suter says, was that the community arts council was in the process of coming apart at the seams, and there was no organization through which festival planners could establish relationships with local artists. In addition, the planners had made a conscious choice to emphasize relationships with community organizations rather than with individuals, and had asked the organizations to use local artists in the plans they presented to the festival.

"Some wonderful things eventually did happen with local artists," Suter adds. "For example, the community school for music and arts had workshops at which professional local musicians could work with Francisco González, the musicians from El Teatro de la Esperanza, and David Pleasant and Yekk Dlamini of Urban Bush Women. This led to an exciting outdoor concert of percussion music featuring David and some of the musicians who were in his workshop."

The festival also sponsored four noon concerts, three of which involved local artists on bills with visiting artists.

"There was a fair amount of local artist involvement, but it didn't receive the kind of attention and priority that the visiting artists would have wished for — and that we would have wished for, too," Suter says.

He has recommended that the American Festival Project offer training workshops to teach local artists how to work in a community setting.

"There are a lot of local artists who don't realize there's a need and an opportunity to do this kind of work in schools and community centers, that they can do more than simply go in and do a little enrichment performance," Suter says. "If the festival artists could plant the seed of that idea wherever they go, I think it would have an important sustaining effect on their work."

Sustaining the work after the festival has ended — and sustaining the dialogue about multicultural issues — is one of the American Festival Project's primary goals. As John O'Neal said in the festival program book, "The success of our efforts will be determined by the quality of the work that follows the festival throughout Ithaca, the Finger Lakes region, and in other places we reach with our lives and work, for our task is to defend the future of us all."

Several community groups already have taken steps to ensure that the festival's lessons about the importance of multicultural understanding did not end with the artists' departure.

The American Indian program on the Cornell campus, which never before sponsored artistic or cultural programs, will present a festival of Native American culture next spring. The Senior Center is working out a plan to bring Liz Lerman's Dancers of the Third Age back to town; what's more, a local dancer who attended Lerman's workshops wants to start a dance company for senior citizens. And as a result of its experience with Urban Bush Women, the Southside Community Center has decided to shift its emphasis from a predominantly recreational program to a program of arts and cultural activities that will help build self-esteem among young people.

During the third year of John O'Neal's residency, Roadside Theater will return to Cornell to join O'Neal in workshops dealing with issues of race and class in several area high schools, where there has been a lot of racial tension this year. Since the first American Festival seven years ago, issues of race and heritage have divided many communities across the country, and the number of hate crimes has increased to its highest levels since the civil rights era of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Perhaps the festival, with its messages of understanding, acceptance and participation, is reaching maturity just in time.

"People want to know about other people," González says. "I don't think people want to hate. A lot of times, they hate because they're scared.

"My songs come from people. They were created because of certain circumstances, because of certain feelings. If you can understand the feelings, you can understand the people; if you can understand the people you cannot become a bigot, because you have respect. And if you have respect, you will in turn be respected." ■

Gayle Stamler is editor of Inside Arts. *Angela Mitchell and Doug Paterson also contributed to this article.*