

**An American Festival – Cornell University
September 17-27, 1989**

FINAL REPORT AND EVALUATION

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American Festival Project

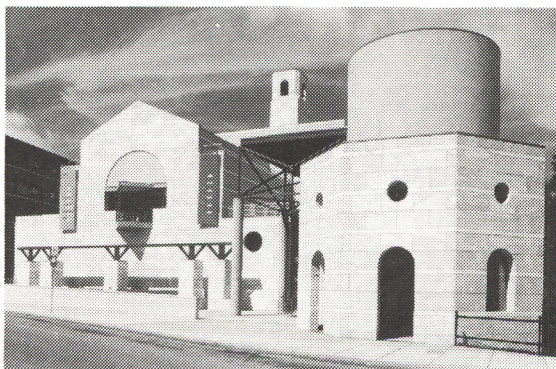
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American Festival Artists

A Traveling Jewish Theatre*
El Teatro de la Esperanza*
Francisco Gonzalez y Su Conjunto*
Jessica Hagedorn and Company
Junebug Theater Project*
Liz Lerman and the Dance Exchange*
R. Carlos Nakai
Roadside Theater*
Robbie McCauley and Company*
Urban Bush Women*

Local Artists: Mac Benford, Richard Koski, Eddie Smith, Mary Carey, John Simon, Josh Lachmann, Denise Wells, John Hoffmann, Chaka Zulu, Jurg Butler

** members of the American Festival Project Coalition.*



Cornell University's Center for Theatre Arts.

Roundtable Participants

Robert Ascher, Mario Baeza, Sally Banes, Donald Barr, Jose Barreiro, David Bathrick, Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez, Rodrigo Duarte Clark, Dudley Cocke, Jane C. Delgado, Elin Diamond, Ron Eller, Janet Fitchen, Kathy Fox, J. Ellen Gainor, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Jessica Hagedorn, Mary Hays, Margaret Hobbie, Joyce Ice, Frederick Jefferson, Peter Jemison, Biodun Jeyifo, Carol Kammen, Richard Koski, Thomas Leavitt, Liz Lerman, Robbie McCauley, Bruce McNally, Caroline Miller, James Moy, Harryette Mullen, Tim Murray, R. Carlos Nakai, Victor Nee, Naomi Newman, John O'Neal, Larry Palmer, Peter Pennekamp, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Richard Schechner, Yvonne Singh-O'Faolain, Mark Slobin, John Szwed, Mildred Warner, Barbara Wright, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Community Organizations

Community School of Music and Arts
Special Children's Center
Challenge Industries
DeWitt Historical Society
First Unitarian Church
Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC)
Hangar Theatre
Ithaca Youth Bureau
Southside Community Center, Inc.
Tompkins County Senior Citizens' Council, Inc.
Trumansburg Conservatory of Fine Arts, Inc.

Schools

Alternative Community School
Boynton Middle School
Dewitt Middle School
Ithaca High School
Newfield Jr./Sr. High School

Cornell Campus Organizations

Hillel, Center for Jewish Living
Department of English
Department of Theatre Arts
Hispanic-American Studies Program
Mexican-American Student Association
Department of Music
Graduate Students
Africana Studies
American Indian Studies Program

Regional Sites & Sponsors

Sodus, Wayne County Minority Performing Arts Project and the Cornell Migrant Program.
Akwesasne and Canton, The Akwesasne Museum, Traditional Arts in Upstate New York.
Binghamton, The Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences.
Syracuse, Metropolitan School for the Arts, Cultural Resources Council.
Rochester, Pyramid Arts Center, SUNY College at Brockport, Aesthetic Education Institute of Rochester.

An American Festival • Cornell University
September 17-27, 1989

FINAL REPORT AND EVALUATION

By John Suter

NOTE: This report represents a consolidation of information and evaluative judgements from a great many individuals who were involved with the festival in various ways. Most of the information was not quantifiable. I have tried to represent fairly the relative weight of various views, from general consensus to one person's perception, and to quote or cite sources where possible and appropriate. Nevertheless, this remains in some ways a personal report on the festival from the point of view of the coordinator at Cornell. (JS)

INTRODUCTION

In September, 1989, ten theater, dance and music companies representing ethnic communities from across the nation gathered at Cornell for a ten-day residency serving the campus, the Ithaca area, and five other communities in Upstate New York.

The visiting artists, who among them embody much of the cultural diversity that enriches American life, are dedicated to using theater, dance and music to stimulate communication and understanding across cultural boundaries. They joined with scholars, local artists, audiences and others active in the fields of culture and the arts to explore some of the opportunities and challenges facing us as a multi-cultural society.

An American Festival envisions America not as a "melting pot" society, where cultural differences are lost in a homogenized blend, but as a "gumbo", where each ingredient keeps its own identity and is valued for its contribution to the richness and vitality of the whole.

An American Festival was a large and complex project, unified principally by the underlying themes of celebrating cultural diversity and addressing the pressing issues of a multicultural society through the arts, and by the artists' shared belief that, "cultural exchange begins with an awareness of one's own cultural identity, and that the source and inspiration for this identity comes from the cultures and lives of the people in one's own community." (American Festival Project mission statement, Program Booklet, p. 34)

Many organizations and individuals participated in one way or another, and each had its own particular goals and objectives for the festival. The

organizers tried to design the program to meet as many of these objectives as possible. Inevitably, compromises and trade-offs were necessary, and the results met certain goals better than others. A central premise of this report is that, although most of the particular decisions, choices and solutions to problems reached here will not be directly transferrable to other settings, many of the issues we faced here will surface wherever people are doing this kind of work.

The report is organized in three main sections. The first is a narrative description of the festival—its structure, its mission, the planning process, what occurred during the festival itself, the evaluation process, and the follow-up activities that have been stimulated by the festival on campus, in the Ithaca community, and in the region. (This report is designed as a companion piece to the festival program booklet which contains essays and mission statements, detailed information about the schedule, biographical information about the performing companies and participating scholars, and descriptions of the organizations on campus and in the community that hosted and cosponsored events in the festival. The final report attempts to avoid duplication of this information.)

The second section contains the evaluation of the festival as a whole—what worked well, what didn't—and recommendations for the future. It incorporates information, responses and judgments from people who experienced the festival from various perspectives—performers, Cornell staff and administration, the American Festival Project, community cosponsors, audience members, and the press. This section looks at the festival in reference to its goals and objectives and frames much of the discussion in terms of the organizational, political and aesthetic issues we encountered in planning and producing the festival in Ithaca.

The third section is a financial report that includes a summary of the budget and some explanatory notes.

The regional programs of the festival that took place in Binghamton, Syracuse, Rochester/Brockport, and Canton/Akwesasne receive less attention in this report than is their due for three reasons: most of the issues that arose in the regional festivals also came up in Ithaca; the

Quotations are drawn from published materials, written evaluations and transcripts of evaluation meetings. Only those from published sources, festival staff, or artists are attributed by name.

The theater and the universities that care about it today must confront some profound questions for the humanities: What is culture? How do we construct, transmit, and receive it? Whom does it serve? At Cornell, we've reached a consensus that the theater arts should contribute to a new, inclusive canon that is vibrant with our polyethnic, polyglot traditions.

—Bruce Levitt, An American Festival Project Director and Chair of the Department of Theatre Arts, in Cornell Daily Sun.

Background

What was really exciting about the entire festival was the seriousness with which ethnic theater (so often marginalized) could finally be seen as the cutting edge of a new aesthetic process and sensibility, and that ethnicity, gender, age, and other forms of "difference" are being theorized by these artists in surprising new ways. Tradition without mothballs.

Postmodernist technique fused with political consciousness suggesting informed and compassionate activism as the viable substitutes for disdain or despair in a world going to hell in a handbasket.

—Roundtable panelist

coordinator had less direct experience and knowledge of these elements of the program; and full discussion would have made the report too long.

It is our hope that readers will find our experience here instructive both in planning particular events in different settings and in continuing to work for cultural equity and justice within and through large institutions and community organizations.

NARRATIVE

Background

An American Festival at Cornell resulted from a confluence of three streams of energy, resources and commitment devoted to addressing issues related to multicultural education and the arts in a pluralistic society.

The visiting artists who participated in An American Festival have been making a concerted effort to foster cultural awareness and self-esteem within oppressed communities and to encourage interaction and understanding across cultural boundaries. Their mission is embodied in the content of their art and in the interactive structures and contexts within which they choose to work. Eight of the ten groups are part of a national coalition, The American Festival Project, that was founded in 1981 by John O'Neal, then director of the Free Southern Theater in New Orleans, and Dudley Cocke, director of Roadside Theater based in the coal fields of Appalachia. The two, "were worrying together about the increasing Ku Klux Klan activity in the South. They decided to tour each other's communities—one predominantly black, the other predominantly white. Both theaters had a history of representing poor people's lives and cultures on stage. Since 1982 eight additional companies with similar histories and concerns joined the festival.

"Since it began in 1982, the American Festival Project has been produced on an ad hoc basis in a variety of forms. The festival's debut was in San Francisco as part of the Peoples Theater Festival (1982), and has subsequently been mounted in Anniston, Alabama at Jacksonville State University (1983), in New Orleans as part of the Funeral for the Free Southern Theater (1985), and twice in Appalachia sponsored by Appalshop (1983 and 1988). We concluded after the 1988 Open Windows Festival [at Appalshop] that it was time to institutionalize the project, not to create a new national organization, but to create the long range vision and stability needed to best accomplish the festival's purposes." (From the American Festival Project Overview statement, April, 1989) The

Festival at Cornell was the first of the American Festival Project's planned series of regional festivals to be held around the country over the next several years in Whitesburg, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Seattle, rural Mississippi, and elsewhere.

Cornell, for its part, has a strong and growing commitment to multicultural education, reflected in an increasingly diverse student body and faculty; the establishment of programs and centers including Africana Studies, African and Caribbean Literature, Latin American Studies, Hispanic-American Studies, Jewish Studies, Asian and Asian American Studies, and the American Indian Program; and the national prominence of Cornell President Frank H. T. Rhodes as an advocate of multicultural education.

The Department of Theatre Arts is manifesting this commitment in its theatrical productions and through its Outreach Program which addresses multicultural and other social issues. The department is committed to cooperative and ongoing relationships with the campus and greater-Ithaca communities. The Outreach Program's orientation to the broader community, and especially to poor and marginalized populations, is also central to the mission of the festival artists.

The work being done to address cultural issues on many fronts in communities throughout the region constituted the third source of energy and resource for the festival.

The opening of the new Center for Theatre Arts provided the occasion for the merging of these three streams.

The Players, Their Goals and Objectives

An American Festival was a multifarious partnership among ten visiting artist companies, Cornell's Department of Theatre Arts and College of Arts and Sciences, and 52 cosponsoring organizations, including other Cornell departments and programs, Ithaca artists, schools and community organizations, and regional cosponsors in Binghamton, Syracuse, Rochester, Canton, and the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation.

General Principles and Goals

Perhaps the most frequently articulated goal for the festival—articulated by the visiting artists and scholars, Cornell organizers, and community sponsors alike—was that it stimulate ongoing work leading to lasting change in the communities served. No one wanted an eye-dazzling flash in the pan with no continuing impact. Specific goals included:

- To promote awareness and appreciation of one's own heritage
- To promote multicultural awareness and appreciation

- To extend communication and understanding across community barriers: ethnicity and race, class, age, town-gown and rural-urban
- To broaden accessibility to live performance of theater, dance and music
- Another universally shared goal was that the festival run smoothly and harmoniously so that the participants could concentrate on the work at hand.

Given the short time available to organize the festival and the desire that it have a lasting impact, we encouraged cosponsoring organizations to use the resources of the festival to build upon or enrich existing programs rather than create new events with no ongoing context.

The organizers attempted to practice the essence of the mission throughout the planning process; in our view, this entailed involving a broad range of individuals and organizations representing the diverse nature of our community in the planning and programming, nurturing a coequal partnership among all involved, and basing important decisions on consensus wherever possible.

Cornell University

For Cornell's Department of Theatre Arts and the College of Arts and Sciences, the festival marked the opening of the new Center for Theatre Arts; it was designed to introduce the building to the campus, the community and the region, to test its state-of-the-art production facilities, to further the department's community service work through the Theatre Outreach Program, and to provide an intense, stimulating and provocative experience of theater, dance and music for faculty, staff, students and general audiences. The decision to open the Center with a campus- and community-oriented multicultural festival reflected the department's and the administration's commitment to addressing multicultural issues in the greater Ithaca and Cornell community and to building bridges between Cornell and its surrounding communities. It also reflected the university's commitment to multicultural education.

The Theatre Arts Outreach Program viewed its participation in the festival as an expression of its primarily educational mission; consequently, the planning and organizing of the community and campus events outside the Center for Theatre Arts concentrated heavily on interactive workshops, classes and the like, with less emphasis on performance as such. Outreach director Janet Salmons-Rue sought to build on existing relationships and initiate new ones with organizations and individuals in the region.

American Festival Project

The coalition's purpose is, "to build a new understanding of the multicultural nature of this nation, concentrating on presenting high quality work within community settings." (Program Book, p. 34) They view the festivals as part of an ongoing conversation among visiting and local artists, scholars and audiences across the nation. The coalition expects each festival to include significant community participation, provide opportunities for interaction among artists and audiences, and involve local artists in performance and dialogue. Within these broad guidelines, each local sponsor designs its festival to reflect its own and its community's needs and goals.

Festival Artists

There were several additional goals and expectations that were widely shared among the festival artists:

- to perform in a state-of-the-art theater facility;
- to reach large, varied and appreciative audiences;
- to give excellent performances with strong educational and artistic impact;
- to interact, collaborate, learn from and generally spend time with the other artists.
- to see the work of the other artists;

These goals, with the exception of the last one, were for the most part unstated in advance of the festival.

And finally, each of the community cosponsoring organizations had its own goals which it hoped to further through its participation in the festival.

Overall Festival Design

An American Festival at Cornell was comprised of the following four program elements:

Performances at the Center for Theatre Arts

Each of the companies performed twice at the Center for Theatre Arts for general audiences. These performances gave the artists the opportunity to perform together in a state-of-the-art facility and to see each other's work. It was the only venue in the Ithaca area where fully staged performances were presented.

Roundtable Conference

A series of six roundtable/panel discussions held at Cornell as part of the festival was intended to add a humanist, intellectual, analytical perspective to the aesthetic, cultural and social issues raised through the performances and other activities of the festival. It was conceived as part of the growing national dialogue about multicultural issues.

Festival Design

I thought it was going to be more of "this is our culture, this is our dance, this is our song," but that's not what I got out of it. It was a far more interesting statement. "This is what's happening in America and this is how it affects me and my people." And that I thought was superb.

—Community cosponsor



Robbie McCauley

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.

—Robbie McCauley, Festival artist

Organization

The juxtaposition of performances, workshops and post-performance discussions generated constant comments and lively interest about the festival. There was always something going on to keep the concept of the festival in the consciousness of everyone. More importantly, the structure was able to create a veritable festival atmosphere with an intellectual flavor—just right for a university environment.

— Roundtable panelist

Everyone that was involved in the festival really believes in it now, and I see Cornell as an equal participant with us.

— Community cosponsor in focus-group meeting

Campus and Local Community Events

The ten-day residency included more than 70 workshops, lecture-demonstrations, classes, discussions, performances and other activities by the ten visiting artist companies on the Cornell campus and in the greater Ithaca area. The residency activities served two main communities, broadly speaking: the Cornell University students, faculty and staff and the general population of the area, in all its diversity.

Regional Programs

The decision to include programming in cities and towns outside the Ithaca area was motivated by four factors: The American Festival Project intends its series of festivals to have broad regional impact wherever possible; it was clear that there were presenters and communities elsewhere in Upstate New York who could effectively and beneficially produce events in connection with the festival; Cornell was interested in introducing its facility and its programs to regional audiences; and the development office felt that regional programs would open up possibilities for corporate and foundation funding not available for programming limited to Ithaca.

All the companies were in residence for the entire festival. The Center for Theatre Arts performances and the conference component were compressed into the five-day period, Wednesday through Sunday, in the middle of the festival. The local residency activities ran throughout the festival, and the regional components took place during the last three days.

Organization and Administration

Staff

An American Festival was a project of the Department of Theatre Arts with Department Chair Bruce Levitt served as project director. In December, 1988, he appointed Prof. Sally Banes as his deputy to serve as liaison to the department and take over initial organization of the festival until a coordinator could be hired. Beginning February 1, 1989, festival coordinator John Suter assumed overall operational responsibility for the festival, coordinating the efforts of the Theatre Arts team working on the project. With the exception of the coordinator and temporary workers hired for the festival itself, all festival staff were adding their festival responsibilities to their regular jobs. The positions were structured as follows:

- *Project Director Bruce Levitt* oversaw the budget, monitored and tried to minimize the strain on the department's facilities and human resources, worked to enfranchise as many people as pos-

sible in partnership with the Department of Theatre Arts while furthering the department's artistic, academic and administrative goals.

- *Department Liaison and Roundtable Coordinator Sally Banes* served as faculty representative and liaison to the department, chaired the steering committee, and organized the conference component.

- *Festival Coordinator John Suter* coordinated the work of the team, served as a spokesperson for the festival, and took primary responsibility for the regional programs and the overall logistics.

- *Outreach Director Janet Salmons-Rue* was primarily responsible for the campus and community residency activities—their design, scheduling and final implementation.

- *Production Coordinator Daniel Hall* supervised the production of the 20 Center for Theatre Arts performances that formed the five-day performance core of the festival.

- *Marketing Director Graham Stewart* designed and directed the publicity campaign, designed the program booklet, and supervised the production of the festival publications (the poster/brochure, program booklet, and final report).

- *Development Officer Patricia Foster Haines*, from the College of Arts and Sciences, developed the funding strategy and wrote the necessary grant proposals as well as organizing VIP events during the festival itself.

- *Director of the video documentation project Marilyn Rivchin*, made the festival the focus of her course, "Film and Performance," and supervised the team of students who videotaped and edited footage of the performances and other events.

- *Director of Audience Services Steven Renner* ran the box office and supervised all front-of-house functions for the performances.

- *General Manager Ellen Kennedy* provided overall administrative guidance and support.

- *Administrative Aide Jinnie Dean* provided secretarial and logistical support.

- *Festival Assistants, and Temporary Staff.* Four festival assistants were hired in August to work with the festival coordinator and outreach director. Other temporary staff were hired for the days of the festival itself to serve as event coordinators (hosts and guides for the artists on their visits to community sites), drivers, and office staff.

Steering Committee

The steering committee was formed to insure ongoing campus and community input in the planning of the festival, to make key program design and policy decisions in conjunction with the Cornell festival staff, and to disseminate information and advocate for the festival in the community. It was structured to include three members from the Theatre Arts faculty, three from the faculty on the campus at large, and four from the community. Members of the Theater Arts Department staff with responsibilities for the Festival were ex-officio participants in all the Steering Committee meetings.

American Festival Project Staff

The coalition of artists and companies was represented by its director, Caron Atlas, and by the site liaison to Cornell, Theresa Holden (Theresa was also the agent representing two of the participating companies, Junebug Theater Project and Roadside Theater). The position of site liaison was a critical one, and Theresa was intimately involved in the planning at every level. The position entailed several functions: 1) to be the voice of the American Festival Project coalition as a whole in communicating with the Cornell staff regarding the coalition's mission overall and its goals for the festival at Cornell; 2) to give Cornell staff initial information about the companies—their work, their interests and capabilities and so on—from the perspective of someone who knew them and had seen the work, as we had not; 3) to coordinate the negotiations about fees and contracts and; 4) to convey to the companies Cornell's and the communities' concerns, interests and perspectives, as a supplement to our direct communication.

Program Planning

Bruce Levitt, Chair of the Department of Theatre Arts recalls, "An American Festival came out of a conversation between myself and John O'Neal at 2:00 a.m. at the State Diner in Ithaca in October, 1987. The notion of opening the new Center for Theatre Arts with the first of the American Festival Project's multi-year series of regional festivals seemed like a worthy and ambitious goal for the second year of John's three-year residency here. We began the planning process that fall by widening the discussions within the department, and the following spring we presented the concept to Geoffrey Chester, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Final approval, with an operating budget of \$275,000 guaranteed by the university, came in November, 1988—a scant ten months before the festival was to take place."

Process

In order to coordinate an event of this complexity in a short time, many decisions needed to be made swiftly by a small number of people. On the other hand, involving the community in the planning and decision-making process was a high priority for the artists and Cornell Theatre Arts. In particular, matching visiting artists and their residency activities with the community settings where they were most needed and could be most effective required extensive community participation in planning. The following process was designed to meet both these requirements.

The theme of partnership that characterized the relationships among the companies, Cornell organizers, and the campus, community and regional cosponsors also underlay the administrative and planning processes. The Theatre Arts staff followed a team approach. Final decisions on most matters were made by a small group of the relevant Cornell staff in wide consultation with others. Decisions would whenever possible represent a consensus both of the staff and of the other parties involved—the steering committee, visiting artists, local cosponsors, An American Festival site liaison, etc. Weekly briefing meetings kept the staff informed of developments in each other's areas of responsibility and allowed for cooperative decision making and the exchange of ideas and information on a regular basis. The steering committee met biweekly during the initial months of planning; in July, by which time most of the policy and planning decisions had been made, the schedule shifted to an as-needed basis and meetings were held much less frequently.

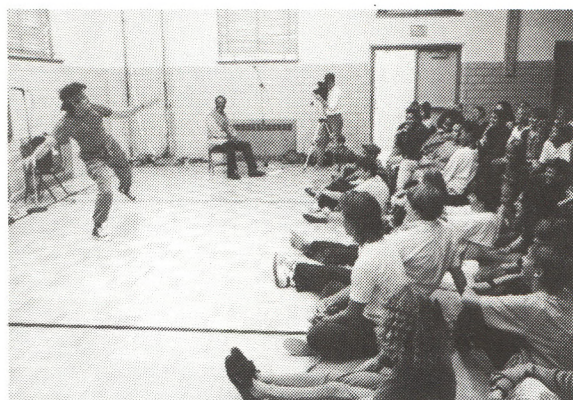
The initial structure of communication was analogous to two wheels joined by an axle—the artists making up one wheel, with the site liaison at the hub, and Cornell and the cosponsors making up the other, with the coordinator, outreach director and production coordinator at the hub.

The participation of the community in the planning process was encouraged through initial mass meetings, regular meetings of the steering committee, the dissemination of an information packet about the artists and the festival and a letter inviting local organizations to submit proposals for activities at their sites, and numerous subsequent meetings and phone calls with cosponsors to design each event so that it would meet the needs of the host

Program Planning

At the high school we have been trying to redefine what American culture really is. I think what happened in September helped us open up questions with students and among ourselves. What do we call American Culture, and what do we consider art? The walls got pushed out quite a bit, and I would like to see that continue.

— High school teacher



Ruben Castro Ilizaturri at Ithaca's Alternative Community School

Program Planning

organization, the artists, and the festival as a whole.

Communication and negotiations between Cornell and the artists were channeled through the site liaison almost entirely during the first several months of planning as the overall design of the festival was being developed. This approach reflected the coalition's need to speak with one voice on matters of mission, the structure of the event, policies, fees, contracts, logistics and so on. Cornell wasn't booking a group of unrelated companies for a festival; it was collaborating with a loose and diverse coalition that has a shared mission and approach. Similarly, the Theatre Arts staff at Cornell needed to provide central coordination among all the organizations and diverse interests at its end and to speak with one voice in its dealings with the artists.

Direct contact with the artists increased during the summer as the focus began to shift to planning particular performances and residency activities. In some cases conversations and planning took

place between artists and community cosponsors directly; in others, usually owing to logistical and scheduling difficulties, negotiation and information-sharing were mediated entirely through the outreach director or the coordinator.

A chronological outline of the planning and preparation process follows:

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER, 1988

General Planning

- Outreach director talked to community and campus people about American Festival while touring with John O'Neal.
- Theatre Department and Development Office developed initial funding strategies.
- Theatre Department met with American Festival Project Board in New York to begin joint planning.
- Theatre Department met with a small group of representatives from campus and community to compile larger list of possible participants in planning process.

JANUARY, 1989

General Planning

- Held three large brainstorming meetings (50 or so people each, drawn from Cornell and the

surrounding community) with the goal of assessing interest in the project and discussing its goals and overall design.

- Representation included faculty from throughout the university—we sought participation from Africana Studies, Hispanic American Studies, the American Indian Program, Asian American Studies, Jewish Studies, Women's Studies, the Council on Creative and Performing Arts, the Johnson Art Museum, and Cornell Cinema, as well as individual faculty members whose research, work with students, or political interests indicated they might be appropriate participants; from the community we invited religious leaders, school officials, social service agencies, cultural workers, local politicians, arts organizations, community organizations, middle schools, high schools, and all organizations involved in past Theatre Arts Outreach programs.

- At each meeting, encouraged people to expand the list for future meetings.

- Distributed American Festival Project mission statement and information about the artists

- Formed Steering Committee representing main constituencies from among those attending mass meetings.

FEBRUARY & MARCH

General Planning

- Hired full-time coordinator on Feb. 1.
- Began weekly steering committee meetings.
- Set goals, refined mission for Festival.
- Made final selection of visiting artists from American Festival Project roster.
- Began search for Native American and Asian artists.

Center for Theatre Arts Productions

Production coordinator, working with the steering committee and other festival staff, began working on the performance schedule. It was decided that this should be locked in before scheduling campus, community and regional events; the performance schedule was inherently easier to work out—fewer variables and fewer players, and it involved the most intense time commitment on the part of the artists (for performances, rehearsals and tech). It also provided a core around which to schedule the rest of the programs.

Roundtable Conference

- Formed sub-committee of the steering committee, composed of the six Cornell faculty members, to discuss content and participants.
- Held campus-wide meetings of interested faculty from many disciplines to discuss structure, content and potential panelists.



El Teatro de la Esperanza

It was a heady 10 days, rife with paradox—the focal one being the presence at all of troupes deriving from and speaking for dispossessed peoples of this nation in a multimillion dollar arts structure on an Ivy League campus.

—Caissa Willmer, Ithaca Times

Campus, Local Community and Regional Events

- Disseminated packets of information about the festival, the visiting artists, and their possible residency activities as widely as possible on campus and in the community; solicited requests and suggestions from each organization as to how the artists might best be used in connection with its program. Written proposals were due March 31.

- Coordinator and outreach director convened small meetings with potential cosponsors. The meetings, in conjunction with written proposals, served to gather information and suggestions about overall festival design, to begin program planning for each site, and to begin matching artists with sites for residency activities. This process continued through to the opening of the festival in mid-September.

- Potential events were evaluated in terms of appropriateness for particular artists, relationship to ongoing work of the sponsor, degree of internal support for the project, and feasibility within the schedule.

- Made contact with potential sponsors and lead agencies in Rochester, Syracuse, Binghamton, and the North Country who could develop the regional components of the festival. Sought individuals who would be excited by the mission of the festival, whose organizations would benefit from involvement with it, and who had the vision, energy and resources to create a program in a short time and with minimal organizing assistance from Cornell.

Throughout this planning process, which lasted until September, the outreach director and coordinator continued to develop new contacts and initiate new programs in order to fill perceived gaps and ensure that the residency activities would serve as many segments of the community as possible.

APRIL

General Planning

- Held two-day planning meeting with representatives of artists' companies, Cornell staff, American Festival Project staff and potential community cosponsors to get acquainted, discuss general festival design and technical production issues, and begin to establish relationships between the artists and the cosponsors.

- Overall shape of the festival became clear: two days of residency activities; then five days of performances at the Center for Theatre Arts, with residency activities continuing throughout; finally three days during which eight of the ten companies would move to their regional venues in

Brockport, Rochester, Syracuse, Binghamton, and Canton/Akwesasne.

- Reserved all available rooms at nearby motels to house artists, panelists, and visiting VIPs.
- Selected Native American and Asian artists to complete the roster.

Center for Theatre Arts Productions

- Finalized the performance schedule.
- Began gathering information on technical requirements from the companies.
- Developed strategy for assigning tech crews for each performance. A fixed crew was assigned to each theater and was responsible for all the performances that took place there.

Roundtable Conference

- Decided to hold four roundtable discussions at the Center for Theatre Arts. Began to explore possibility of other panels to be cosponsored by other campus entities.

- Solicited recommendations from the festival artists, from colleagues at other institutions, and from the festival staff regarding topics and participants.

- Began discussions of the format of roundtables and postperformance discussions, based partly on suggestions from the initial large-group brainstorming sessions.

Campus, Local Community and Regional Events

- Began detailed discussions with Theresa Holden, Cornell site liaison for the American Festival Project, regarding the design of each event, bearing in mind the needs and potential offerings of each company, the goals of the American Festival Project, the goals of the cosponsors, and logistical and scheduling concerns. These discussions continued throughout the planning process.

- Following discussions among artists and regional cosponsors at April 15 meeting, chose artists for each of the regional sites: Roadside Theater and Carlos Nakai to Canton and Akwesasne; John O'Neal of the Junebug Theater Project and Naomi Newman of A Traveling Jewish Theatre to the Roberson Center in Binghamton; Francisco Gonzalez y Su Conjunto and El Teatro de la Esperanza to Syracuse, coordinated by the Metropolitan School for the Arts; Urban Bush Women and Liz Lerman/Dance Exchange to Rochester, cosponsored by Pyramid Arts Center and the SUNY Brockport Dance Department.

MAY - SEPTEMBER

General Planning

- Negotiated contracts with the visiting artists.
- Site liaison Theresa Holden gathered fee re-

Program Planning

The last thing I want to suggest is didactic "messages." What finally makes the festival vibrant and fun is that all the works have the finish of art. They refine individual traditions into theater that touches us all.

— Sally Banes, *An American Festival Conference Coordinator and Associate Professor of Dance History and Theater Studies*, in *Cornell Daily Sun*

I think there are other ways of approaching the scheduling. Maybe you spread it out over a longer time. The artists won't see everyone, but more people can see more things. The flip-side is I spent the whole weekend here and it was incredible. The energy level was so high, and I sensed the artists building on that, too. The Roadside guys were in every audience I went to. I watched them sometimes to see how they were reacting. So I think you lose and you gain.

—Audience member

Marketing and Public Relations

We were in one classroom and Robbie [McCauley] and Jessica [Hagedorn] were performing together. The kids sat and listened, but when Robbie began her story [about a black girl who strays into a white neighborhood looking to buy bubble gum], they sat up wide-eyed, entranced. It was really magical—the kids realizing how their own lives were unique and important.

— Festival staff person

quirements and all other information pertinent to the contracts from the artists and developed a standard contract form that could be used by all the companies.

- Preliminary contract terms for most of the companies were negotiated between the festival coordinator John Suter and Theresa Holden. Refinements and final terms were negotiated directly with the artists. Cornell's production coordinator negotiated the technical riders directly with the company technical directors for inclusion in the final contracts.

Center for Theatre Arts Productions

- Negotiated tech riders with artists.
- Hired crews.
- Continued planning and scheduling of performances, rehearsals, production meetings, and technical rehearsals for all performances.

Roundtable Conference

- Decided to invite roundtable participants to spend up to five days at the Festival, so that they would be able to see several performances and participate in informal dialogue with each other and the artists outside the roundtable sessions.
- Contacted Cornell and visiting scholars and shaped the composition of the panels.
- Cooperated with the Council for the Creative and Performing Arts (CCPA) and the development office on a panel to address questions of cultural policy. The panel consisted of festival artists, representatives of funding sources, Cornell faculty and administration, and visiting scholars, some of whom were participants in other roundtable discussions.

- Worked with the Community and Rural Development Institute on a panel discussion with a performance component using Roadside Theater. The panel dealt with cultural diversity in rural New York. A workshop for Cornell Cooperative Extension agents on building multicultural work environments also evolved during this planning process.

Campus, Local Community and Regional Events

- Began planning of noontime outdoor performances at the Center for Theatre Arts.
- Identified local artists to perform with visiting artists based on artistic or cultural similarities and links with other community programs.

- Negotiated and planned regional programs.
- Continued planning and negotiation of campus and Ithaca area programs through local meetings in person and by extensive telephone conversations among Cornell staff, visiting artists, and local cosponsors.
- In August, hired four part-time assistants: two worked with the Outreach Director on coordinating community programs, one concentrated on transportation and other logistical issues, and one provided general assistance to the festival coordinator.
- In August and September recruited and held orientation meetings for temporary workers to serve as event coordinators, drivers, and office staff during the festival.

Marketing and Public Relations

Marketing Director Graham Stewart was responsible for all promotional and informational publications and activities, including:

- Distributing information about the festival to local and regional media, and as requested by other individuals and groups. (National publicity was the responsibility of the Office of University Relations.)
 - Coordinating and producing promotional and informational materials (poster, brochure, program book, ads, inserts, flyers, and letterhead)
 - Helping to coordinate box office procedure and policy.
 - Providing input on overall festival planning.
- The following section is excerpted, for the most part, from his final report.

The planning for this area of responsibility began in November, 1988. We were going to need a logo, a primary direct mail piece for distribution in July or August, a smaller brochure to use before the main piece was ready, a program booklet, and other support materials. The marketing budget (initially projected at \$15,000) wouldn't be sufficient to employ an outside designer, so we decided to use Cornell's publications design staff, whose services are free, for the main piece; we did the basic typesetting and design of the other pieces in house using Macintosh desktop publishing. We began meeting with the Cornell design staff in January, anticipating their 8 to 10 week turn-around time on major projects.

A central premise of the marketing and publicity campaign was that selling tickets would not be the main challenge, given the size of the festival, the attention it was bound to attract, and the relatively few seats we had available to sell (approximately 4,000 over the five-day period of performances). A much harder task would be getting across to the media and the public the true



Audience includes Urban Bush Women at Center for Theatre Arts outdoor performance.

scope, mission and purposes of the festival. We wanted people to understand the importance of the community programs and to view the festival as an attempt to address issues of a multicultural community.

Logo

An early challenge was to convince the designers that this was not a festival in the traditional sense—particularly, given its title, that it was not a festival of Americana. We fought hard to get rid of stars and stripes, streamers, banners, etc. The result was a straightforward design that incorporated a visual element of the building we were celebrating and provided continuity, image recognition, and legibility at all sizes.

Interim brochure

This piece was produced in-house and offset at the printer (quantity 1,000) at a cost of approximately \$300. It included basic information about the mission of the festival and the visiting artists, but no program details, because they were not yet available. The brochure filled the gap between April 15 and July 1 when we expected delivery of the large direct-mail poster/brochure.

Poster/brochure

The direct mail piece was designed as a combined poster and brochure. It needed to convey many kinds of information about a very complicated event; it needed to capture and hold the viewer's attention; it needed to suggest something of the tone and mission of the festival; and it needed to sell tickets. The festival staff reviewed drafts of the copy and preliminary design ideas. We had many conferences with the designer and editors about size of the piece, color, layout, emphasis of sections of text, graphics, and more. The theme of collaborative partnership carried through in our process of working with them, and the final result represented a blend of graphic and design ideas from both camps. The print run was 14,000 with about 7,000 sent to arts ticket buyers in the region.

Program Book

It was decided early on that we wanted to produce a commemorative program book for the festival that would convey substantial information about the artists, the building, participating organizations, and the mission of the festival. Because of the deadlines imposed by Cornell Publications Design, the delays in receiving program copy from the artists, and the control we needed over the project on a daily basis, it had to be produced in-house on the Macintosh. Initially, we planned to sell advertising, but few advertisers were willing to buy into both this booklet and the Center for Theatre Arts season playbill which was

coming out at the same time. We decided to proceed without the anticipated revenue from ad sales. This increased the net publications expenses by about \$4000. Throughout the process of putting the book together, we distributed copies of material for most everyone to review, met with staff at Publications Design for input, and worked closely with the artists and staff to see that all the key information was included and correct.

The resulting booklet is 36 pages long, printed on coated 80lb. text paper with a cover of recycled 80lb. cover stock.

Media Advertising Plan

Most of the \$3000 allocated for advertising was concentrated on a campaign blitz beginning two weeks prior to the events and continuing throughout the festival. Print ads consumed roughly \$2,000, with the remainder divided between TV and radio spots. To improve sales we gave nearly 80 tickets for the shows in the larger houses to local radio stations for giveaways.

Other Publicity

The local and regional print media saw the festival as a newsworthy event with ongoing significance for the community. We were able to discuss the project at length with editors and writers in a series of meetings begun during the summer.

At a meeting in January between Theatre Department festival staff and the Vice President for University Relations, it was agreed that University Relations would assume primary responsibility for national publicity. It was clear that the festival was going to be an event of national significance by virtue of its mission to deal with multicultural issues, its town-gown cooperative process, the blending of an academic conference, a performance series and community residencies in one project, and the caliber and diversity of the artists. However, the office limited their response to the mailing of a single press release sent to publications and editors interested in higher education.

Marketing and Public Relations



Ithaca musicians gather for outdoor performance with American Festival artists.

The connections between the artists didn't come across in the community. Once I'd seen the performances, there were so many themes that linked the different artists—about family values, community values, political values. But they didn't come through in the literature about the festival. You didn't really know what the themes were.

— Community cosponsor

Development

When the decision was made in the fall of 1988 to open the Center for Theatre Arts with a large multicultural festival, it was clear that the operating budget of \$275,000 would be extremely difficult to raise in its entirety from outside sources in the eleven months remaining before the festival. Many potential sources of government and foundation support would be eliminated because of deadlines already passed, and the staff would have to submit proposals to other sources before the festival design had been worked out. Without

secure funding from the start, it would have been impossible to move ahead with artists' contracts and the many other commitments that needed to be made. Consequently, the College of Arts and Sciences agreed to guarantee the full amount of the budget and charged the development office with raising as much as possible of the total budget

from outside the university.

Patricia Foster Haines, from the development office, submitted proposals to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the New York State Council on the Arts, and a large number of foundations and corporations beginning in February. The most difficult aspect of the development effort arose from the need to submit strong proposals with detailed project descriptions and budgets before the program had been thoroughly designed. We needed to avoid committing ourselves in proposals to program elements or budgetary expenses that would later prove unworkable or inappropriate as the planning process evolved.

In the end, funds were provided by government agencies, foundations and individuals, but the College of Arts and Sciences needed to make a substantial investment in the project to cover the shortfall in outside support.

The Festival

Please see the Program Booklet for the complete schedule and information on the artists.

The first event of An American Festival took place on Saturday, September 16, in the community of Sodus, New York, about 60 miles north of Ithaca near Lake Ontario. Francisco Gonzalez y Su Conjunto performed there for Fiesta Mexicana, a celebration of Mexican Independence Day for

Mexican migrant workers and members of the local community. Sponsored by the Cornell Migrant Program and the Wayne County Minority Performing Arts Project, Fiesta Mexicana embodied both the community orientation and the regional impact of the festival to follow.

On Sunday, nearly 60 visiting artists arrived in Ithaca and joined the festival staff for a catered supper and orientation meeting. In the evening, Roadside Theater, John O'Neal, Carlos Nakai, and Francisco Gonzalez y Su Conjunto played for a packed house at the Cornell Commons Coffee House and the radio audience of WVBR's "Bound for Glory."

During the next ten days, the artists took part in more than 100 events, including twenty performances at the Center for Theatre Arts; six roundtable discussions; workshops, lecture/demonstrations and other activities in arts organizations, schools and community organizations in the Ithaca area; and programs in Rochester, Binghamton, Syracuse, Canton, and the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation.

Center for Theatre Arts Productions

Each of the ten performing companies gave two performances at the Center for Theatre Arts over a five-day period beginning Wednesday, September 20. Performances took place in the Proscenium Theater (capacity 471), the Class of '56 Flexible Theater (175), the Black Box Theater (100), and the Class of '56 Dance Theater (130). Curtain times for evening shows ranged from 6:30 to 8:30 to permit working people to attend, and the schedule allowed an individual to see up to nine companies.

Roundtable Conference

Four panel discussions took place in the Film Forum of the Center for Theatre Arts. The week-day events were scheduled at 4:00 p.m. so as not to conflict with university classes or with the evening performances. Topics were: *American Culture: Melting Pot or Gumbo?*, *Women in Performance*, and *"New" Traditions: The Performance Paradigm*. Saturday's discussion, held at 10:00 a.m., was *Local Traditions: Bringing It All Back Home*.

In addition, the Cornell Council for the Creative and Performing Arts (CCPA) cosponsored *Whose Culture? Thoughts on Shaping Arts Policy in America* at the Johnson Museum, and the Community and Rural Development Institute cosponsored *Overcoming Cultural Barriers: Recognizing and Celebrating Cultural Diversity in Rural New York* at the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences. And Guillermo Gomez-Peña presented *The Multicultural Paradigm: A Lecture/Performance* in the Film Forum.

Cornell counts among its faculty a large num-



Roadside Theatre at Ithaca Youth Bureau.

Theater isn't like a lecture. I don't know what's going to happen to me when I come to theater. It's designed for magic—it reaches you at a spot that is transrational, so it puts little bombs inside your brain that go off later as you make connections. I think the festival tried to say something about the power of theater arts to the community.

— Community cosponsor

ber of distinguished scholars in various disciplines whose work addresses issues central to the concerns of An American Festival. Leading scholars from other universities and other leaders in culture and the arts from the Ithaca area and around the nation were identified as potential panelists. The American Festival Project was beginning to develop a roster of humanists who will be associated with the festival as it is incarnated in various venues over the next few years. And the artists themselves, some of whom are also scholars, have important contributions to make to the intellectual dialogue. Roundtable coordinator Sally Banes fashioned from this pool of resources the four panels at the Center for Theatre Arts; the CCPA and Rural Development Institute put together the panels for their respective events. Panel size ranged from five to 14. Most of the roundtables followed the traditional panel discussion format with presentations by each of the panelists followed by discussion among the panelists and questions from the audience. *Whose Culture*, the largest of the panels, was intended primarily as a discussion among panelists with shorter individual presentations and less audience participation.

Another dimension of the conference was the series of informal discussions which followed most of the performances. These followed various formats, according to the wishes of the artists. In general, they were more interactive than the panel discussions and were, naturally, more focussed on the performances themselves than on the issues addressed in the panels.

Campus and Local Community Events

Given the size and complexity of the festival and the short lead time available for organizing it, we decided to work through existing community and campus organizations and wherever possible to encourage cosponsoring organizations to work the festival artists into their existing programs rather than create new, time consuming and potentially expensive programs. Some programs were open to the public, others were for the in-house constituencies of particular organizations.

On the Cornell campus, academic departments, special programs and student unions sponsored class visits, workshops, discussions, social events, performances and lecture-demonstrations.

Middle schools and high schools in the area hosted assemblies and class visits. Workshops took place at the Community School of Music and Arts (CSMA) and the Trumansburg Conservatory of Fine Art, and the Hangar Theater hosted a discussion of arts management issues. The CSMA cosponsored workshops with the Special Children's Center and Challenge Industries. The Greater Ithaca Activities Center, Southside Com-

munity Center, Senior Citizens' Council and Unitarian Church all cosponsored several activities serving their communities.

Regional Programs

Each of the four regional programs was designed to meet the needs of the cosponsoring organizations and their communities using two of the visiting artist companies and local artists and humanists over a two- or three-day period. Cornell covered all the artists' expenses and provided an additional \$2,000 to each site to help defray costs. The Festival Coordinator at Cornell worked with the regional organizers to help design satellite programs that would further the underlying mission of the festival and to coordinate regional sponsors' needs with those of the artists and the festival as a whole.

Rochester/Brockport: Laurence Champoux of the Pyramid Arts Center, Jacqueline Davis of the Dance Department at SUNY Brockport, and Ellen Koskoff of the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester organized a two-week festival that culminated in the two-day residencies of Urban Bush Women and Liz Lerman/Dance Exchange.

After an initial planning meeting with John Suter and Pat Haines, the Rochester/Brockport group organized the events there with little input required from Cornell aside from logistical coordination. Working with arts organizations, schools, government agencies and community centers, they brought previously planned events in under the umbrella of the festival and organized panel discussions and performances especially for the festival.

Panel discussion topics included *Challenging the System: Cultural Diversity and the Community*, *Challenging the Image: Ageism in Dance*, and *Challenging the Norm: Cultural Diversity and the Artist*. Among the performances were *Platero and I*, performed in Spanish and English, performances by the Borinquen Dance Company and Garth Fagan Bucket Dance, and a joint concert by Urban Bush Women and Liz Lerman/Dance Exchange at the Pyramid Arts Center. The festival reached broad and diverse audiences including the African American community of Rochester, local artists of color, young people, seniors, and dance students and faculty at SUNY Brockport.

Syracuse: Francisco Gonzalez y Su Conjunto and members of El Teatro de la Esperanza were in residence in Syracuse for a series of programs

The Festival

We could have gone to see someone else perform on Saturday, but we had to see Urban Bush Women. They had become part of our family, and the kids still talk about them. That's the piece that's really important, the cultural piece that's missing. They are starved for that kind of connection and the feeling that, "hey, that's me on stage, that's my family, my culture." I don't know where else they can get that in this locale.

—Community cosponsor



Urban Bush Women

Documentation

organized primarily by the Metropolitan School for the Arts at various venues. The initial planning meeting included MSA director Annetta Kaplan and several of her staff, folklorist Daniel Ward from the Cultural Resources Council, and the Dean of the School of Education at Syracuse University, as well as John Suter and Pat Haines from Cornell. Arriving at a workable schedule of events in Syracuse was a challenging process that continued to within a week of the festival (see evaluation below). In the end a member from the theater faculty of MSA coordinated most of the activities, including a performance by Francisco Gonzalez for the sanctuary movement, school



John O'Neal as Junebug and Michael Keck as Jodie.

John O'Neal came into one of my classes and Michael Keck came to another on the same day, and that was a major moment. I had been trying to get the kids to value their own experience enough to write about it, and I think what John did in the story he told really opened some kids up. They were different the next day.

— High school teacher

visits, a guitar workshop, and a workshop and discussion with El Teatro and representatives of local Syracuse theater companies. Dan Ward arranged a performance for Francisco Gonzalez y Su Conjunto at a branch library in Syracuse and a class visit at the elementary school on the Onondaga Reservation south of the city.

Binghamton: The Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences had John O'Neal of Junebug Theater Project and Naomi Newman of A Traveling Jewish Theatre in residence for two days. On the first day, they gave assemblies and visited classes at the high school in the heart of the city. The second day, Roberson sponsored an evening that proved to be one of the most successful events of the festival. Naomi and John shared the stage for a performance during which each presented excerpts from their solo plays. Immediately after the performances a panel discussion took place that drew upon the work just seen and discussed related issues from the perspectives of African American history, Jewish Studies, theater, and folklore. The programs in Binghamton were organized by the Roberson's Curator of Education Donna Dajnowski.

Akwesasne and Canton: The programs at Akwesasne and Canton in New York State's North Country were organized in cooperation with the American Indian Program at Cornell, Donna Cole, director of the Akwesasne Museum, and Varick Chittenden, director of Traditional Arts of Upstate New York. Roadside Theater and Carlos Nakai were in residence first at the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation on the St. Lawrence River where they did assemblies and class visits and were guests at a social in the longhouse. They then moved to

Canton, a small town about 12 miles from the river, where they joined with local Adirondack storytellers and musicians for an evening at the Grange Hall.

Video and Audio Documentation

The size and scope of the festival, in particular the gathering of so many artists in one place for an extended period, offered an unprecedented opportunity for video documentation which could benefit each of the companies, future presenters of multicultural festivals, and audiences in educational and community settings for years to come. Professional videotaping on a large scale was out of the question for financial reasons, but the festival's need for documentation provided a unique pedagogical opportunity.

The Department of Theatre Arts offers a semester course, "Film and Performance", taught by Marilyn Rivchin. Marilyn agreed to use the festival as the project around which the course would be structured. Fifteen students, diverse in their cultural backgrounds and in their educational objectives, took the course. Using Super-VHS equipment, they videotaped approximately 180 hours of performances, residency activities and interviews, including complete performances of each of the companies. Each performance shoot used at least three cameras. The students then worked in teams editing the performance videos, and by the end of the semester, each company had a full-performance tape that it can use for its own purposes. In the spring semester, several students produced thematic video programs based on the American Festival material as independent study projects.

Most of the students had had no prior training or experience with video, so the course served as an intensive practical introduction to the field.

The performances are being broadcast over local access cable TV in Ithaca in 1990. Other footage is available to the companies at cost of duplication, and the entire body of work is being held in the Department of Theatre Arts archive. The six roundtable discussions were audiotaped and are available in the Cornell Library Media Room.

Follow-up

An American Festival has made a strong and varied impact on the Cornell campus, the Ithaca community and the regions where other events took place, judging from the number and variety of projects which are being conceived, planned or carried out. In some cases, the festival stimulated new programs or new program directions within an organization; in others it has infused existing programs with new life or a new empha-

sis. Below is a list of the follow-up activities we are aware of to date; there may be some we are unaware of, and there will undoubtedly be others that have not yet begun.

- For his third year in residence at Cornell, John O'Neal worked with Janet Salmons-Rue and others to design a course called "Issues in Community-Based Arts Development" which included class time and student involvement in projects in the Ithaca community. Built around the process of collecting and performing community- and family-based stories, the course included a return residency by the Roadside Theater and was open to people from the community as well as from Cornell. Students in the course participated in teams working in partnership with six community organizations selected to represent the ethnic and cultural diversity of the area: The Alternative Community School, Newfield Central School, Ithaca High School, Greater Ithaca Activities Center, Southside Community Center, and Trumansburg Conservatory of Fine Arts. At the end of the course, selected stories collected at each site were performed in their communities and all together at the Center for Theatre Arts. Cornell has secured funding to continue the course and related community activities through 1993.

- The American Indian Program at Cornell, which has never had a cultural component to its programming, is giving cultural issues a higher priority and is planning a festival of Native American culture modeled on An American Festival.

- The New York Folklore Society, a statewide organization devoted to traditional arts documentation and programming, changed its mission in 1990 to make an explicit commitment to addressing multicultural issues in its structure and programs. As a service organization reaching folk artists and folklorists throughout the state, it has the potential to influence the ways folk arts are presented and the issues addressed.

- The Community School of Music and Arts and the Senior Citizens Center are collaborating on a project to bring Liz Lerman back for a residency, and the Senior Center is has established an ongoing dance program and a performing company of senior dancers.

- Jacqueline Davis at SUNY Brockport near Rochester brought Liz Lerman back to the campus in the summer of 1990 to conduct a residency teaching dancers and dance teachers to work with seniors.

- The Southside Community Center decided to shift its emphasis somewhat from recreational to cultural programming and is eager to work with Cornell on particular projects—the return of Urban Bush Women is their first priority.

- A group of people from the Ithaca community, including representatives of the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, the Multicultural Resource Center, the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, the Centre for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy, and the American Festival coordinator, is working on a long-range multicultural community development plan for the county. Although the project deals with the full range of social, economic and political issues as well as cultural ones, the initial discussions were stimulated by the festival, and the cultural dimension is recognized as central to the process.

- The complete edited performance videos from the festival have been broadcast several times on the Ithaca cable access channel. Cornell Theatre Arts is receiving numerous requests from schools, colleges and community settings to use the videos in educational settings. Carlos Nakai's cassettes have sold very well at the Unitarian Church, and his music is being used as part of the service there.

EVALUATION

A central goal of the festival was that it should stimulate ongoing work leading to lasting change in the communities served. This goal informed the design of the evaluation process in two ways:

- We attempted to gather information and judgments that would be useful to people planning similar events or doing related work in the future; and
- We developed evaluation tools and processes that would encourage people both to reflect upon the festival *and* to think about ways the momentum of the festival could be maintained.

The following evaluation instruments were used (numbers indicate responses received or persons participating):

Questionnaires

- Event Coordinator reports filed after each event by the staff person on site provided basic information about what happened, who attended, the response of participants/audience and a preliminary evaluation of the event in terms of festival goals (27)
- Artist questionnaires (24)
- Community cosponsor questionnaires (17)
- Temporary and Support Staff questionnaires were submitted by event coordinators, other temporary staff brought on for the month of the festival, and Theatre Arts support staff (5).

Narrative reports from:

- Roundtable panelists (10)
- American Festival Project director (1)
- Department of Theatre Arts Festival Staff (9)

Evaluation

The American Festival...was a revelation to all concerned. Not only were there some moving and illuminating performances, but the impact of the whole was—as intended—a stunning demonstration of America's multicultural wealth. A miracle of scheduling, care-taking and cheerful communication, this was probably the most successful outreach in university history.

—Bea McLeod, *The Ithaca Journal*

Last week both Cornell and Ithaca were treated to an extraordinary event, a triumph of the vision and hard work of the Department of Theatre Arts....It is rare that the city and university can share so equally in a major event, showing us quality performances and allowing—no, demanding, that we participate.
—L.A., *The Grapevine*

Overview

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.

— Gayle Stamler, "Of The People, By The People, For The People" Inside Arts



Jessica Hagedorn in "Holy Food"

I was a discussant to one of Liz Lerman's post performance talks. It was a particularly instructive experience for me.... I could throw out ideas or questions and watch them develop in directions I had not even thought of. I was able to learn directly, on a first-hand basis, from the performers.

—Roundtable panelist

Evaluation meetings held by:

- American Festival visiting artists during the festival
- Cornell Theatre Arts festival staff
- Theatre Arts faculty
- Theatre Arts production staff
- American Festival Project advisory board
- Focus Groups - The coordinator and outreach director convened three focus-group meetings, each including festival staff, artists, community cosponsors and others involved in the project, to talk freely about the event and possible follow-up programs or activities. (7, 8, 10)

Post-performance discussions

Post-performance discussions served as important—and deliberate—evaluation sessions for several of the companies. Many of the works, though polished and performance ready, are continually evolving, partly in response to comments from audiences.

In addition to this report, the original evaluation materials are available at the Cornell Center for Theatre Arts with copies at the American Festival Project at Appalshop.

The intent of the evaluation process was to gather information and judgements that would enable producers and organizers of other large events or smaller programs that deal with similar forms and issues to benefit from our experiences. We did not have and could not afford the expertise to design professional evaluation instruments or to do statistical analyses of the results; nor were we convinced that this kind of approach would be necessary to achieve our main purposes. We did tabulate responses to quantifiable questions in surveys, and we grouped narrative answers with similar content into clusters so we could recognize major themes. The questionnaires provided valuable information as to people's overall impressions of the festival and their judgements about particular aspects of it from many different points of view. But the questionnaire format does not encourage longer, well-thought-out explanations of the judgements. On the other hand, much of the information we solicited from narrative written reports and focus-group conversations was specific and detailed, including anecdotal accounts, more thorough analyses, and prescriptions for improvement. The focus groups, which allowed people who had experienced the festival from different perspectives to interact with one another, were particularly interesting and valuable. The questionnaires, narrative evaluations, and evaluation meetings complemented one another well. The discussions that follow attempt to incorporate most of the issues raised and judgements made during the process.

Overview

Before evaluating the festival in detail, it may be useful to describe its overall tone and some of the common summary evaluations offered by artists, audience members, staff, members of the press, and others who participated in various ways. The Cornell administration and the Department of Theatre Arts received wide and enthusiastic praise for their decision to celebrate the opening of the Center for Theatre Arts with a community-oriented multicultural festival. Rather than open with a gala performance of stars or some other conventional event, Cornell chose a festival with substance and mission that in itself was an important resource for the campus and surrounding communities as well as a showcase for the Center.

An American Festival generated a great deal of enthusiasm in the Ithaca area, on the Cornell campus, and in the four other communities in the region where festival activities took place. People were impressed with its size and intensity. Many remarked on the sheer volume of activities that were taking place in a short time. Most seemed to understand that the festival had a purpose and a message beyond showcasing cultural diversity, and those that attended performances and other events felt that it was an important event for the whole community. Because of scheduling problems or particular focuses of interest, many people were able to participate in only one or two events, but many of them have stated that the meaning of the events they saw was augmented by their being part of the larger festival. Even people who didn't participate at all were moved and excited by the fact that it was happening in their community.

There was sentiment, strongest perhaps among the artists themselves, that An American Festival was too big, too intense. As a result, some participants were exhausted by the process, some events didn't receive enough attention in the planning stages, and the overall impact of the festival may have been broad but relatively shallow—a somewhat smaller festival might have reached fewer people but reached them more deeply.

It is safe to say that most people considered An American Festival an exciting, provocative, well executed project—overall a success.



The next several sections evaluate the festival in terms of its success in meeting the goals and expectations discussed above.

Performance Quality - Artistic and Technical

Our questionnaires did not ask for evaluations of specific performances, but we did receive numerous comments either about the performances as a whole or about particular ones. The great majority of comments were very positive. The following are typical: "Almost uniformly these [performances] were passionate, provocative, keenly aware of social and political forces in people's lives, and produced with an eye to quality;" "Performances I saw were generally of high professional, artistic, and intellectual quality." The most common criticisms were along the line that, "some of the groups seemed heavy handed and didactic." Given the common hostility in the United States toward "political" art and the tendency among some performers to subordinate their art to politics, it is a credit to the artistry and artistic integrity of the American Festival performers that this criticism wasn't more widely voiced.

Producing 20 performances by 10 companies in four spaces in five days was a technical *tour de force*. The four technical crews, one assigned to each performance space, managed an intricate and exhausting schedule of setups, rehearsals, performances and strikes nearly without a hitch. Key to their success were very detailed advance planning and negotiations with the artists regarding their exact needs. Because of the frequently rapid changeovers required from one show to another, the companies sometimes had to work with less than the full technical capacity of the facility. For example, there would have been neither the time nor the staff available to rehang lights for each new show, so the companies agreed to work within the constraints of a customized standard plot that represented the best possible blend of the requirements of the companies using each space. The artists had nothing but praise for Cornell's technical staff, both for their technical competence and for their approach to the work. Despite the gruelling schedule and the many unforeseeable and last-minute changes and adjustments, the staff maintained a professional, responsive, friendly attitude throughout.

The density of the performance schedule necessitated an attention to planning and detail that was anticipated on the whole less well by the artists and their technical staffs than by the Cornell crew. The technical flow of the festival would have been improved if the companies' technical personnel had attended the April planning meeting or arranged to visit the site sometime before the festival. Also, they needed to be in attendance at the festival during the days of rehearsal and production meetings before the performances to iron out difficulties in advance. Overall, it seemed

that the companies expected the festival to be similar to other residencies where only one or two companies are involved; they perhaps didn't make sufficient allowances for the tighter constraints and precision required for a larger, more complex event.

Audience Size and Composition

The performance venues within the Center for Theatre Arts were assigned to the companies based largely on their appropriateness for the performances, the technical requirements, and the exigencies of scheduling. Seating capacity ranged from about 100 to 476, so with two performances each, there was potentially a nearly five-fold difference in audience size between companies. The popularity of particular shows was not correlated to seating capacity—aesthetic and technical issues necessarily took precedence, and popularity is impossible to predict accurately in any case.

Most of the performances in the smaller spaces were sold out well in advance, but in nearly every case, most of the people who came to try their luck on the waiting list were accommodated in seats or standing room. The attendance for performances in the Proscenium Theatre varied more widely. El Teatro de la Esperanza opened the festival with about 50% capacity. They appeared to suffer from the lack of word-of-mouth momentum, the lack of a substantial Latino community in the area, and their mid-week scheduling. Urban Bush Women played to capacity crowds for both performances, and the houses for Liz Lerman/Dance Exchange were about 75% full.

Cornell University, the largest employer in the county, is an elite institution on a hill high above Cayuga's waters and the city of Ithaca. It can present a formidable psychological barrier to people in the surrounding communities. The newness of the Center for Theatre Arts and its severe parking problems compound the difficulties of access. We attempted to address this issue in several ways: by keeping ticket prices low (from \$6 to less than \$5 with discounts), by arranging programs of various kinds in the communities, and by offering free or deeply discounted tickets through community centers serving seniors and the African American community. Both Liz Lerman and Urban Bush Women involved local people in their Cornell performances, which helped to draw audience members who might not otherwise have come.

We did not attempt to survey the audiences, so we cannot offer a reliable audience profile for the festival. Nevertheless, there seems to be general agreement among the Cornell staff and others on several points: Cornell student attendance was

Performance Quality

The way it affected this town was awesome. I went to many of the performances at night—I was so moved by what I saw, the dance, the theater, the music. It really touched me. I felt it should not end, and that is the reason I'm here tonight.

— Audience member at focus group meeting

The main stage performances seemed to be the weakest element of the festival. Several seemed underrehearsed, others simply not very good.

— Cornell graduate student

I went to nine performances and only two didn't really move me. The rest were wonderful, deeply moving and informative. While sometimes heavy and heart-rending, they were very entertaining. Naomi and Robbie both made me look deep inside myself through their performances and deal with feelings I did not know I even had.

— Cornell staff member

Roundtable Discussions

I would suggest that another theater group from the dominant American culture should be included in the groups participating at the festival. Such addition would give a stronger impact to the concept of cultural exchange.

—Roundtable panelist

I was very struck by the diverse community audience attracted to the Festival and by the concerns voiced in our session that are both community and dramatic concerns.

—Roundtable panelist

lighter than either hoped for or expected; the festival did draw substantial numbers of people who were new both to the facility and to Cornell performances in general; small but significant numbers of seniors, African Americans, and other people of color from the community attended; based on the relatively low response to the July mailing sent to performing arts ticket buyers in the region, it appears that a large proportion of the audience came in response to the press coverage and are perhaps not regular ticket buyers. If this is true—and it is necessarily speculative—it would suggest that people were not treating these performances as just another arts event but that new people were attracted to the festival because there was something unique or particularly interesting about it.

Roundtable Discussions

The roundtable discussions proved to be the most controversial component of the festival. They were conceived as an integral part that would complement the performances and other artistic activities with strong intellectual and scholarly perspectives on the issues being raised. They also formed the festival's most obvious link with the academic mission of the university. Many participants in the conference, both panelists and audience, found the discussions interesting and important to the festival. "Panels were stimulating and helpful. They extended and supplemented the mixture of ideas, sounds and images set in motion by the performances." However, there were some widely shared criticisms:

- "Roundtable" was a misnomer. The Center for Theatre Arts does not have a room that can accommodate 75 to 100 people in a format conducive to discussion. Therefore, the panel discussions took place in the Film Forum, which has a small platform in front from which the audience ascends in steeply raked seats. This configuration heightened the separation between panelists and audience and hindered open discussion.

- The panels were too large. Once each panelist had made his or her presentation, there was usually little time left for discussion among panelists or with the audience.

- In some cases the chairs of the panels could have exercised stronger leadership in focusing the discussion and encouraging wider and more

representative participation. "There was little interaction between panelists and no real shape to the session: no summing up, no real pulling together the various themes." "Mind you, everyone involved had something interesting to say, but the panels did not make a larger statement."

- Some of the panelists seemed disconnected from the rest of the festival and were unable to tailor their remarks to its overall context and mission. Panelists had been sent information about the festival as a whole and the place of the roundtables in it, and they had been encouraged (by subsidizing their expenses) to stay for up to five days so they could participate fully and interact informally with the artists and other scholars. Some panelists were able to take advantage of this opportunity, but others did not. Most panel discussions were not set up in relation to any experience or information shared among the panelists or between panelists and audience, so true dialogue was rare.

- Too few students attended the roundtables. This was a problem for the festival as a whole, but it was often commented upon particularly in relation to the roundtables (see discussion below about campus involvement).

- Several of the panelists and the coordinator of the roundtables felt keenly the lack of a postmortem meeting on the roundtable component towards the end of the festival that would have permitted the panelists and staff to reflect on what had transpired and to learn more effectively from each other and from the process.

The panel entitled *Whose Culture? Thoughts on Shaping Arts Policy in America*, cosponsored by the Cornell Council for the Creative and Performing Arts (CCPA) at the Johnson Museum, presented some special challenges and problems. The American Festival Project, the festival coordinator, and the Development Office of the College of Arts and Sciences all were interested in gathering a panel to discuss major issues of public and institutional arts policy in a multicultural context. We wanted to include in the dialogue representatives of nationally known funding institutions, public and private, and national advocates for a multicultural agenda in arts policy. The intent was both to continue the national debate and to draw the participants' attention to the festival itself. The CCPA was approached to coordinate and help fund the panel discussion. The spirit of cooperative partnership that characterized the process of the festival as a whole never quite took hold in this project. Communication was poor, and the CCPA staff seemed not to be fully in tune with the intent of the panel as a part of the larger festival. The panel itself was intended to function less as a usual series of presentations on a theme than as a tightly moderated discussion among the panel-



Panel— "American Culture: Melting Pot or Gumbo?"

ists in front of an audience. It proved to be too large (14 panelists) to be successful, perhaps in part because neither the moderator nor the panelists had completely understood or embraced the format. The resulting discussion, held on the sixth floor of the Johnson Museum of Art, was interesting and well attended, but it lacked the depth or significance the organizers had hoped for.

The design of the conference and the selection process for panelists were sources of tension between some American Festival Project staff and artists and some of the Cornell organizers. There was a suspicion on the part of some American Festival Project artists and staff that a large, elite university like Cornell was unlikely to be able to break out of certain standard formats and habits of discourse into a more flexible, participatory, and intellectually stimulating mode more in keeping with the spirit of the festival. It is probably fair to say that while the American Festival Project had not yet developed their own clear vision of what they were looking for in the humanities components of their festivals, and they did not have a defined roster of "humanists", they did know what they didn't like when they saw it. Some of their concerns were in fact borne out in the criticisms outlined above. Some were part of the overall suspicion of large, establishment institutions as discussed below.

The most successful panel discussion, in the apparently unanimous opinion of those who saw it in person or later on tape, took place in Binghamton at the Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences. John O'Neal (Junebug Theater Project) and Naomi Newman (A Traveling Jewish Theatre) opened the evening by sharing the stage and exchanging brief performance segments from their repertoires that were selected to complement and reflect back on one another. Following their performance and a short break, four panelists representing various disciplines and both Jewish and African American cultures, engaged in a stimulating discussion that took the performances as its point of departure. Having a shared—and provocative—experience in common provided a focus for the conversation and discouraged the common tendency for panelists to deliver set pieces on their topic of choice irrespective of what others have said. Also, the panelists continually referred back to the work they had seen on stage, which kept the discussion grounded.

There is clearly room for new thinking and experimentation to develop ways for scholars, artists, students and other interested people to engage in dialogue about important issues in the context of a festival or conference. The goal should be to create an environment in which

everyone participating comes prepared to function both as teacher and student, regardless of official status, and where the structure and process allow meaningful exchange to happen.

Campus and Community Involvement

At Cornell

Of the 100 or so events that took place in the Ithaca area, about half were located on the Cornell campus. They included the 20 performances at the Center for Theatre Arts, four roundtable discussions at the Center and two additional roundtables held, respectively, at the Johnson Museum of Art and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and numerous class visits, lecture demonstrations, and social events. From the earliest meetings on, Cornell faculty, staff and administration from departments and programs throughout the university participated in the planning, and many took part as panelists, sponsors of events, and attendees.

Overall, the Cornell student community's involvement in the festival, both planning and attendance, was disappointingly low. This was a key weakness of the festival and was widely noted in written and oral evaluations. The nature and extent of student involvement were closely connected with the issue of timing (discussed more fully below). The festival began only a few weeks into the fall semester. Attempts to involve student organizations in the planning the previous spring were unsuccessful, in part because membership in the groups, and especially their leadership, changes from year to year, so continuity and momentum are almost impossible to maintain over the summer break. In mid-September, students are getting settled and adjusting to the new year's demands and are just beginning to form the friendships and organizational affiliations that later in the year result in student-run activities of all kinds. Early fall is a very difficult time to get their attention for a festival. As a result, student participation could be characterized as passive, on the whole; when programs were brought to them in class visits or residence halls, they were exposed to the festival, but relatively few students made the effort to attend performances, roundtables, or other events to which they were not already committed.

Some on the Department of Theatre Arts faculty felt that the lack of student involvement was due in part to a relatively lower priority given to the Cornell organizing effort as opposed to the attention paid to the greater Ithaca community. It is probably true that the coordinator and outreach director spent more time on the community activities, for two reasons: First, organizing on

Campus and Community Involvement

The big highlight at my school was when Urban Bush Women performed their piece celebrating kids' movements. They performed, and then they asked the kids to teach Urban Bush Women some of their own movements that the professional company could integrate into their pieces. It took the people a little while to trust that, but pretty soon the kids were learning each others' moves, everyone was learning from each other.

— Middle school teacher

Campus and Community Involvement

campus was approaching a point of diminishing returns during the late spring because of the coming summer break, and by the time the campus came to life again in the fall, there were neither the time nor resources available for last-minute organizing on a large scale. Second, the attempt to bridge the gulf between town and gown was a unique mission of the festival and a challenge that required a great deal of thought and effort. The barriers to active participation by the community in a large Cornell-sponsored event were presumably greater than those faced by other members of the Cornell community.

A related issue within the Department of Theatre Arts was the difficulty of integrating a production of this kind and magnitude into the workings of an academic department. Several faculty, including Chairman Bruce Levitt, felt that if the department were to take on another project of this kind, it would need to be much more thoroughly

integrated into the academic life of the department, involving both faculty and students. Students would become more deeply involved, and the festival would find resonance in their studies. The experience of the students who undertook the documentation of the festival is perhaps a good model to explore.

Had the festival taken place in the spring, it is likely, in the co-ordinator's opinion, that campus participation by faculty, staff, and particularly students would have been far more significant and that the festival as a whole would have had a much higher profile on campus than it did occurring in September.

In the Greater Ithaca Community

The active involvement of the greater Ithaca community in An American Festival was a key theme that underlay the conception and planning of the festival from the beginning. Cornell's Center for Theatre Arts is perched on the town side of a gorge that separates the campus from the surrounding community. Its primary mission, of course, is education of the Cornell students. But it fosters active participation by the community in many ways: The community provides about 50% of the Center's audiences, local artists participate in its productions, and the Theatre Outreach Program does much of its programming in the community. The American Festival Project and its constituent artists view interaction with local communities as a cornerstone of their work. They

saw this festival as an opportunity both to work with Ithaca's diverse communities on their own turfs and to address the town-gown relationship itself by modeling a truly cooperative program that would bridge the gap between them.

As outlined under Program Planning above, ideas for programs in the community came from community organizations in response to written solicitations and personal contacts. Cosponsors' needs were matched with artists' interests and capabilities through a process of negotiation and coordination carried on in a spirit of true partnership. In the end, more than 50 events took place in schools and community organizations in Ithaca, Newfield, and Trumansburg. Although most of the community-based events were part of ongoing programs of the cosponsoring organizations and were not open to the public, the public relations effort and resulting press coverage emphasized the involvement of the community and contributed significantly to the overall sense that An American Festival was an Ithaca area festival, not just a Cornell event. The written evaluations by community cosponsors, comments in the focus group meetings, numerous informal communications, and press commentary all reflected a high degree of satisfaction with the nature and extent of community involvement in the festival.

The programs that took place in community organizations were generally well received and judged successful by the artists and the host organizations. The judgements about programs in the schools varied more widely. Many of the school experiences were extremely successful, notably those at the Alternative Community School where students and teachers were well prepared for and actively engaged with the artists. In other settings the programs went well but there was less active involvement on the part of teachers and students. In a few instances, particularly at the Boynton Middle School, there were serious problems. Responsibility for the difficulties seemed to lie partly with the teachers and partly with the visiting artists. In some cases the artists, who had been briefed in detail about each of their residency activities, came into the classroom or assembly unprepared to deliver a program appropriate to the students. One of the artists was in general less experienced and less interested than the others in community or school residency activities, and her programs tended to be less well prepared and age appropriate. Another was somewhat erratic; he could be excellent in one class and quite ineffective in another.

Preparation was the key on the teachers' and students' side of the relationship as well. When the teachers were well prepared and had spent some time getting their students ready for the artists' visits, the programs tended to go well for



Francisco Gonzalez and Yolanda Broyles Gonzalez at Senior Center.

Because seniors know polka and like it, Francisco worked in quite a bit of Texas polka and things they could relate to. Then he got the whole group dancing. Two ladies danced, one 94 years old, the other 95 percent blind. It was the magical moment for me.

—Community cosponsor

everyone. In a few cases, teachers made the effort to meet with the artists several days in advance of the scheduled program, so when the classroom visits took place, the students had been thoroughly briefed and the teacher and artist already had the beginning of a working relationship. When the preparation had been poor, the programs tended not to go well. In some instances at the Boynton Middle School, lack of preparation plagued both sides. In one case, a teacher allegedly greeted the visiting artist in front of the class with the comment, "Well, I don't know why you're here, but since you are you might as well get started."

Some of these difficulties were a function of the timing of the festival and its size as well. There simply wasn't enough time for the outreach director or festival coordinator to do enough detailed advance planning with the teachers.

In the Regional Programs

With the exception of the Rochester/Brockport festival, the regional programs consisted of one- to three-day residencies by the visiting artists. Planning time was even shorter than in Ithaca, and the cosponsoring organizations generally could not devote the staff time necessary for extensive community organizing. Therefore, community organizations other than the main cosponsor were not generally involved in the design and planning of the programs in which they participated. Nevertheless, the regional cosponsors understood the mission and structure of the festival well, and the degree of community participation in the events themselves was generally quite high.

The Roberson Museum, which did not have a lot of experience with community-based programming, wisely chose to plan a modest two-day school residency and an evening of performance and discussion at the Museum. The evening with Junebug and A Traveling Jewish Theatre's joint performance followed by a panel discussion was very well conceived. The artistic collaboration was an experiment put together with little time for rehearsal but based on strong artistic affinities between the artists and on a mutual desire to explore the relationship between African American and Jewish cultures. The result was promising enough that the two companies are now working in formal collaboration on creating a new play. The panelists were well chosen and were able to use the performance as a point of departure for important discussions of issues relating to the African American and Jewish communities.

The Metropolitan School for the Arts and folklorist Dan Ward from the Cultural Resources Council in Syracuse have strong community connections, but because of the short time available,

it was not possible to involve the community in the planning to the degree that everyone would have liked. But, given the limitations, they were able to engage several community organizations in the project: a college, schools, a neighborhood library, and a Latino community organization.

At the Akwesasne Reservation, the institutions are thoroughly embedded in the community. The most significant event of the residency was Roadside Theater and Carlos Nakai's visit to a social dance organized for them at the Longhouse. The artists had been expecting—and expected by the organizers at Akwesasne—to perform as part of the evening's activities. But they learned at the door that they could not bring their instruments inside because of traditional teaching regarding fiddles. They were welcomed into the Longhouse without instruments and participated fully in the event. According to Susan Dixon, who works with the American Indian Program at Cornell and represented An American Festival on this residency, the confusion made for a moment of awkwardness, but, "it gave the chiefs an opportunity to articulate a part of their traditional culture to people who not only accepted it but deeply respected it....The initial visit built trust on all sides, an essential step in cross-cultural communication of any kind." All parties are interested in continuing the relationship.

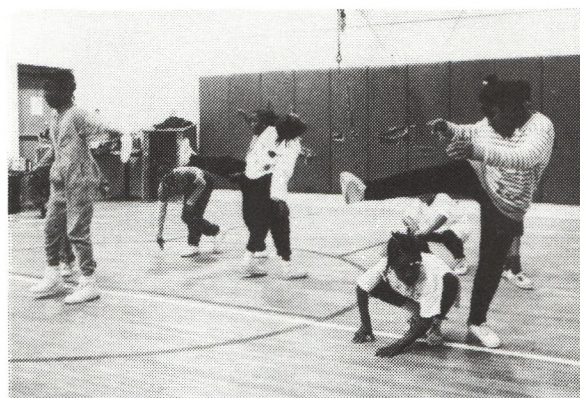
The following night in Canton, local storytellers and musicians, brought together by Varick Chittenden of Traditional Arts in Upstate New York, joined Roadside and Carlos Nakai for an evening of performances before an audience of about 150 local people in a Grange hall. It was a true community event with full community participation.

The strategy of the organizers at Rochester/Brockport was to add panel discussions, some performances and some residency activities involving the American Festival artists to a wide range of activities that were already planned for that time period in the area. The SUNY Brockport Dance Program and the Pyramid Arts Center in Rochester both had ongoing programs and missions that were in tune with the goals of An American Festival, so they were able to use the leverage provided by Cornell and the American Festival artists to put together a two-week festival involving a large number of community and educational organizations in a celebration and examination of the area's cultural diversity and challenges.

Campus and Community Involvement

I want to thank you for letting us go through the bios and choose who we wanted to work with. I knew Urban Bush Women was the group for us because they could really drive home the point that, "this is what you can do with your talent." For us to see our young people perform on stage with Urban Bush Women, I was so proud to see them doing this, I was in tears. To come in as an amateur and be part of that professionalism—what it did for their self esteem was incredible.

—Community cosponsor



Young dancers at Urban Bush Women workshop—Southside Community Center.

Local Artist Involvement

Local Artist Involvement

The question of local artist participation in the festival was a source of some tension and controversy between the American Festival Project artists, the festival organizers and the local community of artists and their supporters. The American Festival Project in its written materials and negotiations with festival producers makes participation by and interaction with local artists a high priority. The Ithaca area is home to a relatively large number of artists working in a wide range of disciplines. Many are employed by Cornell, Ithaca College, or other colleges in the area, but many



Ithaca storyteller Denise Wells at Ithaca Youth Bureau.

I saw posters, but until you called me, if I hadn't been personally involved, I don't think I would have given it a second thought. Being involved in the workshop and then performing with David (Pleasant, musician with Urban Bush Women), doing some drumming, was a wonderful experience for me and made me look closer at what was going on. The closer I looked, the more I thought, this is great.

—Ithaca musician, at focus group meeting

are independent of institutional affiliation. In the Ithaca artistic community there is some resentment about the tendency for presenting organizations and others to spend their money and energies bringing in outside artists and ignoring the local resources. The festival organizers understood these goals and sentiments and felt both internal

responsibility and external pressure to develop strong local artist participation.

On the other hand, among Cornell's several objectives for the festival, local artist participation was important but not the highest priority. The university's educational mission and the philosophical and strategic commitment to work primarily in partnership with the existing programs in the community resulted in an emphasis on trying to respond to the program requests of the local organizations. In some cases, those requests included local artist participation, which the festival staff encouraged; in many others, the requests centered around ways to make use of the particular skills and interests of the visiting artists.

There were some informal criteria that the festival organizers used in selecting local artist involvement. Principally, the artists needed to have a strong relationship to the mission of the festival, by virtue of either the content of their art or their membership in and service to particular communities. The American Festival artists are primarily interested in working with, learning from, and supporting artists who are firmly rooted in their communities and whose art is an expression of their communities.

The festival organizers faced a some practical difficulties in developing a strong local artist component. The Tompkins County Arts Council was in the midst of going out of business just as the American Festival planning was getting under

way. The director of the arts council was on the steering committee of the festival, but under the circumstances she did not really represent the arts community and was not active on the committee. There was no recognized spokesperson or organization that could represent the community of local artists in the planning process, and the organizers at Cornell did not have the personal contacts or the time to do a comprehensive search for the most appropriate artists to take part.

Initially, some in the Ithaca community voiced resentment that Cornell was paying substantial artist fees to bring outside performers while offering very few opportunities and little money for local artists to perform. (*The Ithaca Times* gave voice to these sentiments in its September 14 issue.) But as the planning progressed and the festival unfolded, it became clearer to most observers that An American Festival was not just a performance booking of expensive artists from out of town. Rather, it was a complex project that wove performance together with many other activities in a festival designed to educate, stimulate, and challenge the community around issues facing a multicultural society. And in the end, many local artists were involved.

- The festival included a series of four noon-time outdoor performances at the Center for Theatre Arts featuring pairings of visiting and local artists.

- The Community School of Music and Arts sponsored an evening of workshops and jamming by visiting artists and about 40 local musicians. The drumming workshop led to a performance by the participants a few days later in the noontime series.

- Several local artists took part in the Children's festival of music and stories at the Youth Bureau in Stewart Park.

- African American youth from the Southside Community Center performed with the Urban Bush Women in their Cornell performances, and senior adults from the Senior Center were integrated into Liz Lerman's performances at the Center for Theatre Arts.

- Local artists were involved extensively in the regional events in Sodas, Canton, Rochester/Brockport, and Syracuse.

Participating artists in the Ithaca area included African American community-based storytellers and drummers, a Finnish accordion player, an old-time string band, and Central American refugees, among others. Overall, local artist participation was not as prominent as everyone would have liked; several people mentioned this as a deficiency in their evaluations. Yet local artist participation was a significant component of the festival and was well integrated into its mission. Local artists who evaluated the festival were enthusiastic about their experiences.

Visiting Artist Networking

An American Festival was the largest gathering of American Festival Project artists to date. Eight of the coalition companies plus two additional ones (Carlos Nakai and Jessica Hagedorn) were in the Ithaca area together for a week to ten days. Yet they were so heavily scheduled with performances and residency activities that they had very little time to spend with one another. Most of the artists had assumed that the festival would provide a unique and much needed opportunity to see and discuss each other's work, explore possibilities for collaboration and the many issues raised in the course of their work, and deepen their personal and artistic relationships. Unfortunately, these assumptions had never been stated as explicit goals, and they had not been anticipated by the organizers at Cornell, so time for informal artist interaction was not incorporated into the planning and scheduling process.

Closely related to this issue was that of time off. The organizers had negotiated with the artists on an ongoing basis regarding the intensity of each company's schedule and had adhered, for the most part, to their requests. But no one had understood in advance the degree to which a large, intensely scheduled festival would put extra emotional and physical demands on the artists. As a result, many of them found the festival exhausting, they didn't have time to relax or explore the community, and they were unable to spend time with their colleagues. This was the most commonly and vehemently voiced complaint about the festival on the part of the artists.

Had we been able to anticipate these problems, we might have been able to free up common time off to allow for greater interaction among the artists. However, as the time off is increased, the question then arises to what extent the presenting organization should be responsible for paying artist fees and expenses for what could amount to a retreat during the festival that is of no direct benefit to the presentor. Achieving an equitable balance between the needs of the artists and those of the presentor in this area would have become part of the negotiating process.

Despite these difficulties and problems with providing enough complimentary tickets for the artists, most of the visiting artists were able to see the performances of other artists. Many mentioned this and the opportunity to be together with the other artists as highlights of the festival. Several artists commented that they found validation and support for their own work in seeing that other companies in the festival were addressing common concerns.

Media Coverage

For the most part, local coverage was extensive, thorough and positive, and much of it addressed the themes of the festival, making it clear that this was not simply a showcase of ethnic performing arts on stage. Coverage of the satellite festivals in the region varied but overall was excellent. National coverage was abysmal.

Graham Stewart was responsible for the local coverage. He was thorough and energetic. He worked closely with the festival coordinator on the PR materials and setting up meetings and interviews with the press. The daily *Ithaca Journal* provided excellent preview coverage in its Leisure section before and during the festival and printed news articles as well. The *Cornell Daily Sun* and the *Chronicle*, and the weekly *Ithaca Times* and *Grapevine* featured the festival prominently with long articles and event listings. The *Ithaca Times* was apparently unable to resist the whiff of controversy over local artist participation, which gave their piece a somewhat unsavory tone, but the other papers were remarkably thorough and positive in their coverage. The *Grapevine* printed an enthusiastic editorial following the festival, and the *Times* and *Journal* as well ran complimentary reviews. Paid print, radio and TV advertising and appearances on local cable access TV and radio talk shows rounded out the coverage.

From the Cornell organizers' point of view, the most important and gratifying aspect of the local coverage was that the media understood the mission of the festival and wrote about it at length. They treated it not just as another showcase of cultural diversity but as an attempt to use the arts to address issues that are important to this community as well as to the nation as a whole. The sense of excitement and significance generated in the Ithaca area by the festival was due in large part to the amount and quality of coverage it received in the media.

In early planning meetings with the John Burness, Cornell's Vice President for University Relations and Sam Segal, senior education editor at the News Service during February, it was agreed that the News Service would handle national publicity. Segal was briefed several times about the plans for the festival. He was given national lists of press contacts in the arts and story ideas and angles relating to the arts, multicultural education, ethnic and minority relations at universities, and town-gown issues. The size and scope of An American Festival, its unusual mission, its relevance to diverse issues, and Cornell's national prestige should have made it attractive to a wide range of national publications and media. Yet, the News Service limited its efforts to sending out a

Visiting Artist Networking

I began to refer to us as the burros. 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.

—Francisco Gonzalez,
Festival Artist, quoted in
Inside Arts

Not enough parties! Not enough time! We needed time together to socialize, meet local artists, etc.

—Festival artist

Documentation

I have a great concern. I feel like there has been a bond created here [between the artists and the community] and that the ball has been dropped. Kids, senior citizens, myself included, will feel the vacuum. I feel that Cornell and all of us have a responsibility to fill the vacuum and keep growing. I think that's all possible, I really do.

—Community cosponsor

Cornell has made a major commitment to this community and to artists with this festival. It would be a shame if all these bridges that have been built should suddenly disappear.

—Audience member

single press release to a national list of education editors. The Department of Theatre Arts and the American Festival Project, through their own contacts and efforts, were able to arrange for substantive articles in *Inside Arts*, published by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, and *American Theatre*. This was the extent of national publicity for An American Festival.

Documentation

The video documentation of An American Festival requires evaluation on two counts: first as to the extent and quality of the resulting videotapes, and second as to the success of the course which took on documenting the festival as its core project. The marriage of the course and the documentation project was an elegant and fortuitous solution to a difficult problem, but it couldn't be a complete solution. The problem was the need to document a very large event with very little money to spend. To professionally shoot and edit broadcast-quality footage would have been prohibitively expensive. Using students working with Super VHS equipment allowed comprehensive documentation, but the students' inexperience and the format ensured less than professional quality of the end product.

Given these limitations, the project was by all accounts extremely successful. The sheer volume of material (180 hours) constitutes an important archive of performance and residency activities of all the companies. Many of the companies came into the festival with little or no performance or residency-activity footage of their work to use for promotion or in their own process of evaluation and artistic development. Each company now has an edited full-performance video, and they have access to the performance outtakes and raw footage from their residencies.

The course was a stimulating challenge both for its teacher, Marilyn Rivchin, and for the ethnically and racially diverse group of students. It was a huge project for students inexperienced in video to undertake, and because of the content of the festival, it raised challenging personal and political issues for many of them. As Marilyn Rivchin reports:

The large majority of the twelve students in the class did immerse themselves in the videotaping of performances and events and interviews with artists and participants. In general, they accomplished a great deal, working seriously and thoroughly in team-editing the performance videos. As the course continued after the festival, they became more deeply interested in and aware of issues of multiculturalism, political art, activist theater, and activist video. It was clear that for many students, contradictions in

their own attitudes toward race, difference, political art, censorship and compromise had never been openly discussed before in a college classroom....I tried to encourage a non-competitive, collective spirit in crew work and group discussion of issues,...aligning our working methods and opening new channels of communication with the values of the American Festival Project.

Long Term Impact

As this report goes to press nearly two years after completion of the festival, some outlines of its long term impact are discernable. The list of programs and influences under Follow-Up above suggest some of the more concrete and measurable impacts. The periodic returns of Roadside Theater and Junebug Theater Project now tentatively planned through 1993 are providing ongoing stimuli to the people and organizations they touch. Clearly, a significant number of people at Cornell, in schools, and in community organizations were inspired and encouraged to build programs on the work begun or nurtured during the festival. Beyond the list, one can only be speculative and subjective, imagining the impact on individual students or senior adults who may have been deeply touched by their experiences during An American Festival. Suffice it to say that the programs and activities that have sprung from the festival are evidence of some long term impact, and that maintaining the momentum of the festival was a high enough priority of some people in this community that ripples from An American Festival are sure to be felt far into the future.

Festival Organization and Logistics

An American Festival ran smoothly, for the most part, and most of the glitches occurred behind the scenes where they were neither visible to the public nor particularly damaging. In evaluations, written and oral, many people commented on the efficiency and reliability of the organization and logistics. Given the number of people involved, the number of events at different venues, and the tightness of the schedule, very little could be left to chance, and fortunately, there were funds to hire temporary staff adequate to the task.

The Bible of logistics for the festival was the American Festival Master Itinerary and Schedule, a looseleaf booklet that contained:

- Master Itinerary — a grid with one event (performance, workshop, trip to the airport, van rental or drop off, etc) per row and columns showing pick-up time, location, event time, driver,

event coordinator, vehicle, # of passengers, company involved, contact at destination, event name, and end pick-up time. Each company had one of these so if something went wrong, they would know what was happening everywhere else.

- Event Schedule in two versions, one organized by company (Roadside's schedule on Monday, Tuesday, etc.) and one by day (all events taking place on Monday, etc.) Each artist had one of each.

- Accommodations List — a grid organized by motel with one room per row and columns showing company, room number, number of people, configuration of beds, number of nights, price per night, total cost, guests, dates of occupancy. Each company had one copy of the full list.

- Phone and Contact List of artists, staff, accommodations. The festival coordinator and outreach director used beepers.

The degree of detail and precision in the itinerary and schedule provided reassurance to staff and artists that things were under control. The schedule had built into it some slack in terms of time and equipment to allow for the unexpected. For most of the time, a spare van was on hand in case of emergencies, and the office was staffed with someone available for information or troubleshooting. The system worked very well, but it was never severely tested—there were no vehicle breakdowns, accidents or illnesses that might have stretched our resources too far.

One area of logistical inadequacy was the accommodation and transportation of roundtable panelists. Several panelists were staying in a motel about two miles from campus. They were not highly scheduled and were frequently not travelling together, so their transportation couldn't be scheduled in advance and there was not an extra vehicle that could be put at their disposal.



The following sections contain discussions of issues which we encountered in planning and producing the festival.

Timing of the Festival

September was chosen for the festival for two good reasons: As the inaugural event for the Center for Theatre Arts, it needed to be at the beginning of the performance season and the academic year; and it would be less disruptive of the Department of Theatre Arts' normal activities at that time. Once the season is underway, the Center for Theatre Arts is in intense and constant use for teaching and productions. The festival dominated all four performance spaces and for weeks before as well as during the events made extraordinary demands on the production staff. The September schedule allowed most of the final planning and preparation to take place before the students arrived.

However, the timing of the festival was probably the most widespread complaint voiced by the organizers and cosponsors in schools and some community organizations. For anyone involved with organizing programs on campus or in schools, the September date made planning extremely difficult. As discussed above under Campus and Community Involvement at Cornell, student participation in planning was virtually nonexistent despite early contact with student organizations; in the midst of their activities for the current year, which are often reaching their peak during the spring, students could not become seriously involved in an event that would take place the following year and for which they would miss the final three months of planning.

Similar problems arose in the schools. Teachers were engaged in the early stages of planning during the spring, and many were excited by the project and strongly committed to it. But they, too, were effectively absent during the critical planning period in July and August. Most teachers wouldn't know their teaching schedules for the coming year until they returned for school, so they couldn't make firm commitments in advance. Once back in school in the fall, they were deluged with the immediate pressures and responsibilities of getting the year under way. In some cases, teachers were able to maintain continuity with the planning process they had participated in during the spring, but in others, the momentum was lost. Also with the festival coming so close to the beginning of the year, there was little time to prepare the students for the activities that would affect them.

Timing



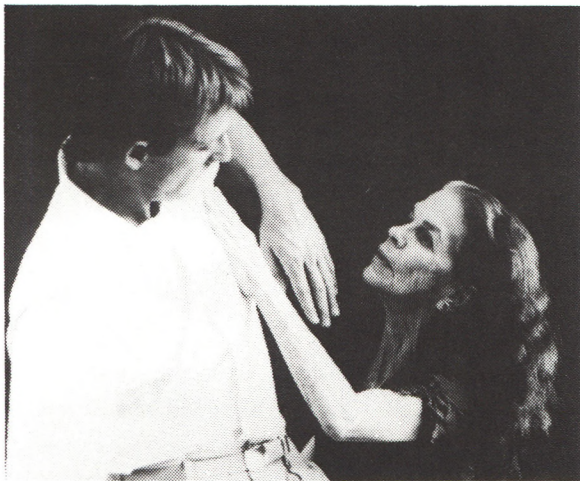
Carlos Nakai performs at Cornell's Commons Coffeeshouse

The staffing and organization were great, the best I've experienced.... I was impressed with the friendliness of the staff; I always felt there was someone to call if I needed help. Efficiency was high.... Thanks for going through the logistics with us; it was really important because of our budget limitations... The Ithaca lodgings could have been more centralized so we would have had a zone of interaction outside the performance arena.... Flexibility was a key word.... Organization was excellent. Thank you. Staff was very easy to work with—consistently! So willing to “go the extra mile.”
—Various festival artists

Size and Intensity

Size and Intensity of the Festival

The size of An American Festival—some 60 artists and 110 events in 10 days—was one of its greatest strengths *and* one of its weaknesses. The festival was widely praised for the sheer number and diversity of activities it sponsored, for its broad reach in the community and the region, and for the impact it seemed to have on the community as a whole. The twenty performances at the Center for Theatre Arts proved to be an excellent showcase—and production challenge—for the facility itself, and with the addition of the many residency activities on campus and throughout the region, the festival provided extensive and



Liz Lerman's Dancers of the Third Age

The size of the festival was staggering. I don't know if it necessarily adds up to more than just a lot of work available to be seen in a two-week period.

—Festival artist

I work and my work didn't allow me to do very much. There were tons of activities during the day that I couldn't get to, and I felt a loss in that. The negative I kept hearing was, "I can't get there!"

—Community cosponsor

very positive public relations for the Center for Theatre Arts, the department, and the university. The festival's overall impact on the greater Ithaca area, most agree, was partly a function of size. Anyone who attended a single event or read the papers was likely to be aware that multicultural issues were being explored through the arts all over the community during the same ten-day period.

But the size of the festival created frustrations for people in all camps. Artists were exhausted by the intensity of their schedules and in some instances frustrated by the briefness and superficiality of their interactions with people in the community. The organizers were unable to devote enough planning time to some of the residency activities because there were so many of them. And community members complained that because so much was happening in a short time, an individual could only sample a small part of the festival, unless, as marketing director Graham Stewart suggested wistfully, "everyone just takes the week off and 'does' An American Festival."

In the judgement of the festival coordinator, the general scale of the festival was about right; it needed to be a large, intensely scheduled project in order to have the strong and broad impact that it did and in order to meet many of the objectives of its participants. But some limited trimming of residency activities and rescheduling to give artists and staff a little more slack could have noticeably relaxed the pace and eased some of the tension without noticeably reducing the festival's impact.

Large Festival, Small Events: Intimacy and Interaction

An American Festival was not a large event; rather it was a large number of small events, intense, intimate, and interactive. The largest audience in the festival was fewer than 500 people, and by far the majority of events involved fewer than 50 participants. In designing a festival with performance and residency components there are many choices to make that determine its tone and likely impact. At one end of the spectrum, one could plan a few large performances that would attract large crowds, and the artists could offer one or two workshops on the side. At the other, the artists could perhaps perform once and then concentrate on an intense residency with one small group—a school class or a senior center, for example. In making such choices, one is forced to weigh the relative benefits of many factors, among them: reaching a large number of people superficially against affecting fewer people more deeply; and creating distance and allowing only one-way communication between artists and audience against allowing intimacy and the possibility of interaction and dialogue.

The artists of American Festival Project rate intimacy and interaction among their highest priorities, not only in residency activities but also in performance. They often address the audience directly in the performance and nearly always encourage discussion after the show. The small performance spaces at the Center for Theatre Arts (100 to 475 seating capacity) were well suited to the intimate style of the companies.

The festival's emphasis on residency activities reflected the artists' and Cornell's commitment to community work and to interaction that could go beyond the superficial. But the artists and organizers were aware that by creating a large festival that reached many diverse institutions and segments of the community, we were limiting the options for concentrated, deeper impact on particular organizations or individuals. Although some artists indicated in their evaluations that visiting fewer sites more often might have had a stronger impact, this was not an area of controversy, because people seemed to understand that limitations of time and money forced this kind of trade-off. Also, Cornell's interest in forming a partnership with the community as a whole for this project had necessitated that we invite the whole community's participation and attempt to serve as many interested parties as possible. Had we chosen to do residencies in only a few organizations, it would have meant excluding many others whose needs and interests were equally important, and the spirit of community involvement would have been undermined.

The structure of An American Festival never brought huge crowds together for a shared experience of large celebration, but it was perceived and experienced by people in the community as a large, important festival that was accessible in intimate, interactive settings. It is a model that has worked consistently for American Festival Project artists in smaller programs. Here, it proved to be workable on a larger scale.

Working Within a Large Institution

Among the stated goals of the American Festival Project is a strong commitment to cultural, economic, and social justice. Theirs is an agenda for social change and a challenge to the injustices perpetuated through existing power structures and institutions. These goals and values are shared by many individuals at Cornell University and other large institutions, but they are generally not embraced by the institutions themselves. The partnership between the American Festival Project and Cornell in An American Festival raised a central issue faced in every arena by people attempting to effect change in the status quo: Can people and organizations work effectively within or in partnership with establishment institutions, making use of institutional resources, without their principles being severely compromised or their agendas coopted?

As the planning for the festival got underway, it became clear that some of the artists and others in the American Festival Project had grave doubts about the wisdom of collaborating with Cornell. They appeared to question the depth of Cornell's understanding of the mission of the festival, the sincerity of their commitment to it, and their ability to carry it out, particularly in the areas of community involvement and the humanities program. (A similar skepticism regarding Cornell's intentions was also in the air in the Ithaca community.)

Overall, in this writer's view, these were understandable concerns based in many cases on long experience dealing with large and often unresponsive institutions that might give lip service to progressive ideals but fail to deliver in action. The skeptics were justified in being cautious and making their case as strongly as possible.

But in the cases where skepticism veered towards cynicism the prejudgments were based on a misunderstanding of the relative significance of this event within the total picture at Cornell and on a lack of awareness of the complexity of large institutions within which many wonderful and utterly contradictory things can happen with official sanction and support. If some of the ideals inherent in the work and rhetoric of An American

Festival were ever realized and implemented as public or university policy, they would pose a direct challenge to certain powerful vested interests at the university. Curriculum revisions now being debated nationally, for example, could result in shifts of emphasis and money within the University to the detriment of particular programs or departments. But such a scenario is still a long way off, and no one in the Cornell community seemed to feel threatened by the content or intent of An American Festival. On the contrary, it is probably true that many who might suffer loss of privilege or even their jobs if the ideals of social and economic justice were finally attained strongly and sincerely support the ideals in principle.

Cornell is an elite (not to say elitist) institution nationally and a nearly overwhelming presence in Tompkins County physically, economically, intellectually and simply in terms of its clout. As is always the case with very large or powerful institutions, it is often viewed as monolithic by those who are affected by it but aren't part of it or privy to its inner workings. And they are partly right, for when it pulls together and focuses even a portion of its resources, it can pack a monolithic wallop. (A benign yet telling case in point is the university's ability to build a multi-million dollar Center for Theatre Arts in a town where there is practically no performance space available and then launch An American Festival to celebrate its opening.) But Cornell is far from monolithic. Practically any issue can find powerful and articulate allies here. Many of the people in the university who were actively involved in the festival represent potential allies to others who are also struggling for cultural equity and social and economic justice. They are people who would like to see the university and the society change and who don't want to be targeted as part of the problem while they are trying to be part of the solution.

The university also offered resources that would be difficult if not impossible to find outside a large institution. Cornell was able and willing to take the considerable financial risk of producing the festival with no guarantee that the money could be raised; it provided a dedicated and very professional staff who added the festival to their ongoing responsibilities; it made use of its state-of-the-art Center for Theatre Arts, and it provided substantial subsidy for events taking place in the surrounding communities and throughout Upstate New York.

In the end, the American Festival Project did find enthusiastic, capable and committed allies within the university, and in the judgement of most of the artists the resulting festival was remarkably true to their mission.

Working Within a Large Institution

Focus group meeting exchange:

One of the ways human engagement works is by really having a human engagement—not by having people relate to an image. If you push an image too hard, then when you get there people don't see you, they still relate to the image. That's the "star" dilemma.

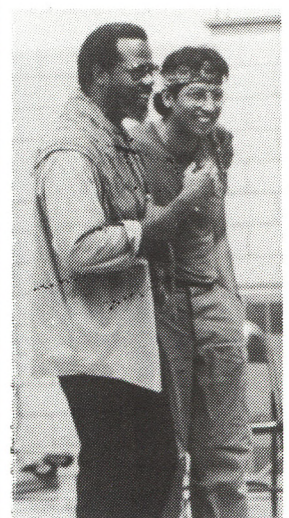
— American Festival artist

Do you think these people really don't want to be stars?

— Community cosponsor

We can't be and do the work.

— American Festival artist



John O'Neal and Ruben Castro Ilizaturri at Alternative Community School.

Decision-making Process

Decision-making Process – Whose Festival Is It?

In order for An American Festival to be successful, it needed to balance the interests and objectives of the many participating organizations and achieve a result that would be satisfying to everyone—or nearly everyone. This meant that everyone had to be educated about the needs of the other participants so that the necessity for specific compromises could be understood and accepted by those affected. The concept of partnership, applied to all levels of organization, provided the framework

for communication and negotiation. In general it worked very well. Judging from the evaluations, most participating organizations and individuals seemed to feel that their needs had been met reasonably well under the circumstances and that they had had a significant role in shaping the aspects of the festival that affected them the most.

It was not all smooth sailing along the way. The partnership with the Metropolitan School for the Arts (MSA) in Syracuse, for example, was hampered by inadequate communication and indecisiveness on both sides. From the point of view of the MSA, Cornell was slow and inconsistent in letting them know exactly which artists would be available to them at what times and for

what kinds of events. MSA operated with a consensus decision-making process involving a significant number of their faculty. In order for their inherently slow process to work, they needed information and commitments before Cornell could give them. Cornell organizers experienced some of the same frustrations in the other direction. MSA's adherence to the consensus process during the crucial summer planning period when many of their key faculty were away slowed to a crawl the planning for that segment of the festival while decisions about the rest of the events were being made with increasing decisiveness and speed. In the end, one of MSA's faculty assumed overall responsibility and very capably organized most of the Syracuse component. But by that time, opportunities had been missed on both sides, and the program was perhaps less successful than it might have been.

Tensions also arose in the relationship between the American Festival Project and the Cornell staff. An American Festival was a bold and risky undertaking for both the American Festival

Project and Cornell, and both had a lot at stake in making sure their goals and objectives were achieved. As an arts presenting situation, An American Festival was very unusual, if not unique. Under usual circumstances, performing artists have a repertoire of performances and residency activities from which they select items to bring to each venue. The presenter designs a program—a concert, a teaching residency, a festival—and books the artists. The presenter has little to say about the artistic or pedagogical content of the work presented, and the artist has little input into the design of the program. (It is rarely quite this clear cut, but in general the roles are well defined and understood.)

For An American Festival, the roles were overlapping and being negotiated throughout the process. The overall design of the project was developed through a true partnership of two strong-willed organizations each of which had its own clearly felt—and not always clearly articulated—agenda. The American Festival Project presented Cornell at the outset with its mission statement and a set of guidelines that it expected each presenter of the festival to follow; at the same time, it stated that, "Each festival takes on the character and needs of the host community, and each host community is expected to define its own long-range goals in collaboration with the festival's overall mission." The Department of Theatre Arts' acceptance of this general framework, with all its inherent ambiguity, committed both sides to a challenging exercise in collaboration. The potential for tension and conflict was obvious, but equally obvious was the potential for an innovative, exciting project that would be of great benefit to both organizations and that would contribute to their larger goals. The key requirement was that each side come to trust that the other respected its needs and goals; both sides needed to feel that they were collaborating on a project that would be to everyone's benefit.

For the most part, the process worked remarkably well. The festival coordinator and site liaison worked deliberately and successfully to maintain a spirit between them of true collaboration and to avoid adversarial negotiations. The same tone characterized most of the negotiations between the artists and American Festival Project staff on one hand and the outreach director, production coordinator and other staff at Cornell. Channels of communication remained open, and discussions of sensitive issues were usually conducted with restraint and respect on both sides.

Inevitably, conflict did arise from time to time. Cornell staff sometimes felt that the American Festival Project was losing track of the "character and needs of the local host community" and being too heavy handed in its attempt to shape the



Naomi Newman – A
Traveling Jewish Theatre

I don't think there was anywhere near enough communication between the teachers and the artists. It could have been much more productive if the teachers and performers had sat down together and talked about what was actually happening for the students at that time in the year.

— High school teacher

details of the festival. Disagreement over the selection of scholars for the roundtables was a case in point. The American Festival Project sometimes felt that Cornell was neglecting aspects of the festival—local artist participation, for example—to which they had agreed in principle. But the tensions eased over time. As the opening of the festival drew near, the level of trust had grown to the point that most people on both sides were confident that the festival would work reasonably well and that the interests of both partners would be served adequately. Tensions and disagreements remained, but they no longer seemed as threatening as they might have earlier in the process. This was a remarkable achievement in a collaboration of this kind.

Marketing - Getting the Real Message Across and Making It Attractive

The marketing effort of An American Festival was intended to meet two objectives: to attract audiences to the paid performances at the Center for Theatre Arts and to other events that were open to the public, and to educate the community at large, including the majority that would not attend any events, about the nature and purpose of the festival. We needed to develop the language and images for promotional materials that would work for both objectives. It was a tall order and the results were only partly successful.

The festival was ambitious, both in the diversity of objectives it was attempting to realize and in the depth, urgency and volatility of the issues it was addressing—issues of race, gender, class, cultural equity, town-gown relations, and so on. One of the strengths of much of the festival artists' work is that it delivers strong messages but in a form that is accessible, positive and celebratory. It challenges its audiences in the areas where they are stuck, but it doesn't tell them that where they are stuck is who they are. So it can appeal to audiences who may not share the artists' political or social analysis. It was important that the marketing effort neither trivialize the festival in order to make it appealing nor convey the mission in a heavy handed way that would drive away audiences who could be touched by the work.

The public relations formats that allowed the space or time to discuss the festival as a whole and in its diversity (press releases; press, radio and TV interviews) worked quite well. The brochure, logo, and short media spots were less successful. The subtitle of the festival, "A Celebration of Heritage, Community and the Arts," may have worked well enough as a marketing slogan—celebrations sound like fun—but it didn't suggest anything about the larger purpose of the festival.

It could have described a standard multicultural variety show. The poster/brochure, which people seemed to like or dislike in about equal numbers, did not convey graphically what the festival was about, and one had to read fine print to find it in the text. The variety of organizational agendas had made it difficult to find a coherent, lively theme in words or images, and the sheer amount of information that had to be included in the piece undermined its unity and impact. In the view of the coordinator, we tended to err on the side of timidity. The responses we have received to the festival as a whole and to much of the writing about it suggests that we could have done well with a stronger, more focused thematic approach graphically and in our use of language. Testimonials or other approaches that focus on the audience member's experience of the work as entertaining *and* challenging might have helped get the real message across and make it attractive.

Marketing

I want to touch base on the brochure. I thought it was very confusing and didn't catch what the festival was about. I was really disappointed. You had pictures of the artists but no sense of who they were.

— Community cosponsor

I'll just pass on a comment from one woman who posts a lot of flyers in her bookstore downtown. She told me it was one of the most readable things she ever seen. She thought it was wonderful.

—Community cosponsor

Summary of Recommendations

The link between schools and actors seemed to be weak, although I know a lot of time went in to this. Sometimes the underlying purpose or expectations of the [residency] events was vague, so actors and coordinators walked "blind" into a situation.

— Festival temporary staff person

The big dance party at the end of the festival was also a pleasure. I enjoyed the opportunity to celebrate with the performers an event that has continued to produce new ideas and topics for my own work in literature.

— Roundtable panelist

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations stand out either for the frequency with which they were mentioned in evaluations or for their weight and good sense.

Recommendations for American Festival Project Coalition

Most of what the artists did in the planning and production of the festival was excellent and should be continued. The recommendations tend to focus on what could be changed. Often they apply to only a few companies.

- The similarity in names between the coalition and the festival at Cornell made it almost impossible to communicate to cosponsors, the press and the public the existence of the American Festival Project, its significance, and its relationship to what was happening here. Try to make sure each festival has a name distinct from yours so the AFP's role can be more visible and clear.
- Rewrite artists bios to reflect the nature and intent of the work offered at a festival such as this, both for program notes and for the benefit of presenters, publicists and community cosponsors during the planning process. The current notes seem to be written for standard theater or concert presentations. Generally, they give little information about or emphasis on your sense of mission, your openness to interaction with audiences, or the tone and spirit of your work.
- Make sure you have good quality, reproducible 8x10 glossies. They make a big difference, and good ones get used—bad ones don't.
- Develop materials that more clearly describe what you offer for residency activities, and indicate how you approach a class, workshop, etc. (e.g., do you have a fixed program, do you size up your audience and improvise?) Indicate more clearly your preferences for types of settings and audiences (e.g., if you are uncomfortable working with middle-school kids and love working with seniors, say so). Also, indicate technical requirements for different kinds of residency activities in different settings.
- Make sure technical directors, not just company managers or artists, can meet with presenters early in the planning process, and make sure they are on site for production meetings at the event.
- Try to do more collaborative workshops with two companies working together. Several artists requested this, and several community organizations did, too.
- The AFP site liaison is a critical position and should be maintained for future festivals. It allows the coalition to speak with one voice in its dealings with presenters and makes for a more harmonious and efficient process than would be possible if the presenter had to deal only with

individual companies.

- If you have goals or expectations not directly related to the performances and scheduled activities, make them clear to the presenters early in the planning process—don't take it for granted that they will be addressed otherwise (e.g., rehearsal time, dance classes, time to socialize, free time required, days off, child care needs, etc.).
- Look for ways to include a training component to help local artists who are interested learn your ways of working in communities.
- Talk with each other about the common themes that run through the work of different companies—family history and relationships, the land, political struggle, and so on. If you have a clearer sense of what the common threads are, it will be easier to communicate to presenters, the press and the public what the festival is about, and you are likely to come up with exciting possibilities for collaboration.

Recommendations for organizers and presenters

- Begin planning at least two years, and fund raising at least 18 months or more before the event so the program can be designed before applications are due and the planning and preparation can be thorough.
- Budget for in-depth planning meetings on site well in advance of the festival and involve community cosponsors, visiting artists, company managers and technical directors if at all possible.
- Avoid scheduling school or university programs at the beginning of the school year. There is insufficient time to plan and prepare, and the overall atmosphere is still too unsettled when the events happen.
- Plan a schedule that is lighter for each company than it would expect to be able to handle as the only artist. The grouping of several companies at a festival magnifies the demands, formal and informal, on their energies and time.
- Schedule free time held in common among the artists, either each day for a short time or less frequently but in larger blocks so the artists can have informal time together. If possible, find a comfortable common space where the artists can hang out and see each other during the day and evening. And throw a couple of parties.
- In scheduling residency activities and performances, take into account that until the artists have completed their performances, they are likely to need unexpected amounts of tech and rehearsal time and may be preoccupied with the upcoming performances. This can drain both time and focus from the residency activities that take place before the performances.

- Make sure that the humanities component of the festival is thoroughly integrated into the festival as a whole—specifically, that the humanists are fully aware of the scope and mission of the festival, and that they participate as audience members in events besides their own panels. Ideally, they should be involved in the planning stages much the way the artists were.

- Try some alternate formats for humanist involvement. We found that the best discussions occurred when the panelists had seen the same performance and had a common experience as a point of departure.

- Encourage community cosponsors to use the resources of the American Festival Project in the services of ongoing programs rather than creating special, one-time-only events. This approach is generally cheaper, easier to organize, and more likely to have a lasting impact.

- Establish personal contact between artists and community sites at least two months in advance so that both parties feel comfortable with each other and cosponsors can prepare their audiences (students, community agency clients, etc.) accurately for the artists' activities. Make it clear to cosponsors that preparation of the audiences for the artists is an essential part of the process.

- Decide in advance what segments of the community you want to be sure are represented in your audiences. Make sure you have a mechanism for setting aside tickets for those who are likely to hear about the events or make their decision to come at the last minute. Work out the distribution of artists' comps to performances, and comp policy in general in detail, before tickets go on sale.

- If the performances are being held in a mainstream facility away from the neighborhoods where poor people or people of color live, try to arrange for tickets to be sold at a discount or distributed free through community agencies, and provide free transportation to the theater. Success in attracting marginalized communities to a mainstream venue usually requires a culturally sensitive, proactive, and creative approach.

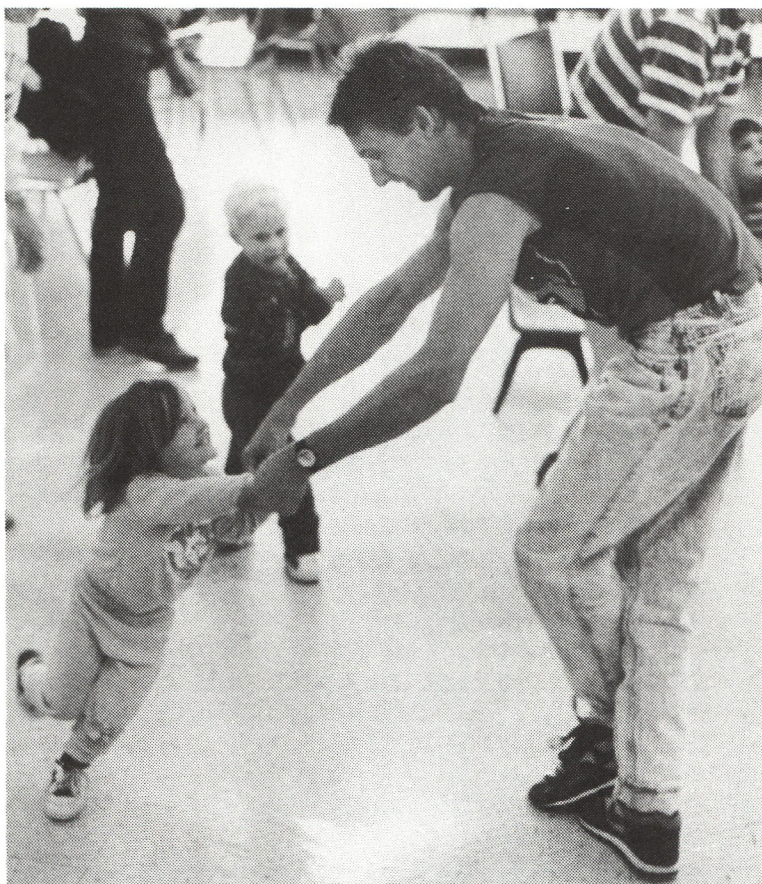
- Think through your staff needs very carefully, then increase your estimate by 25% or more. In addition to the full-time coordinator, Cornell provided approximately 2 full-time-equivalent positions in-kind over the year's duration (outreach coordinator 75%, publicity and publications 55%, production coordinator 20%, documentation 20%, secretarial 15%, front-of-house and box office 10%, project director Bruce Levitt and other administrative support 5%).

- Work out transportation, lodging and other logistics in meticulous detail. Put the information in a format that can be distributed to staff and company managers so that each person knows what he or she needs to do but also has the overall picture. That way, if things go wrong, the person on the spot may have enough information to come up with a solution. Try to have extra resources (vehicles, keys, staff) available for emergencies.

Summary of Recommendations

Even the skeptical staff members had a ball! The children were very engaged in the event, and the verbal ones have talked about it often since then. Some shy and depressed kids really loosened up and joined in.

— Special Children's Center staff



Liz Lerman Dance Exchange at Special Children's Center

FINANCIAL REPORT

The following budget shows the direct cash expenses incurred by Cornell University in connection with An American Festival. It does not show substantial in-kind contributions by the university, including approximately 2.5 full-time-equivalent staff positions, university design and graphics services, and overhead costs; nor does it show the costs incurred by the many participating community, campus and regional cosponsors.

EXPENSES

Personnel - Administration & Production		
Coordinator (salary & benefits)	29,000	
Production Labor	23,964	
Temporary Labor (admin & logistics)	<u>3,454</u>	56,418
Personnel - Artists & Panelists		
Artist Fees (incl travel & lodging)	154,267	
Panelist Fees (incl travel & lodging)	<u>9,760</u>	163,937
Regional Programs (seed money) - Binghamton, Syracuse, Rochester, Akwesasne, Canton		7,562
Marketing		
Brochures	\$10,204	
Banners	1,046	
Advertising	3,430	
Miscellaneous	<u>535</u>	15,215
Program Booklet		6,832
Documentation - Photography and Video		3,709
Local Transportation		3,712
Production Equipment & Supplies		6,200
Administration & Communication - Telephone, copying, mailing, computer and printer, supplies, travel		9,802
Meetings - Travel, accommodations, hospitality		3,481
Evaluation - Meetings and final report		1,600
Hospitality		4,960
Miscellaneous		<u>1,478</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$284,905
Earned Income		(16,235)
NET EXPENSES		\$268,670

Notes on the Budget

Budget Summary

The Department of Theatre Arts was charged with producing An American Festival within a budget of \$275,000 which had been committed by the University. The Department was permitted to use earned income from ticket sales and advertizing to offset the expenses as long as the net expenses stayed within the \$275,000 figure. The Center for Theatre Arts performances generated \$16,235 in ticket sales. The resulting net expense figure was \$6,330 under the budget allocated for the project.

Contributed Income

As explained in under Development above, because of the very short time available for fund raising, government, foundation, corporate and individual support for the festival fell far short of the budgeted costs. However, generous support was provided by a number of sources listed on the following page under Credits and Acknowledgements.

Campus and Community Programs

The budget did not permit direct funding of the program costs of campus and community programs incurred by cosponsoring organizations. The project did absorb all costs related to the visiting artists and provided some assistance with publicity through listings in the festival's general public relations materials and press coverage. Cosponsors' responsibility in the partnership with An American Festival was to cover any direct costs of their own events, such as house staff, local artists' fees, refreshments, and publicity to their specific audiences. Most cosponsors worked the festival programs into their ongoing activities. This approach usually was less expensive than creating new programs, and it meant that the festival artists' participation tended to be better integrated into the ongoing life of the organization.

Artist Fees

This figure includes fees paid to the ten visiting artist companies for the ten-day residency, including all travel to Ithaca and accommodations during their stay in the region. This line also covered local Ithaca area artists fees. Local artists in the regional programs were paid out of the local budgets.

Regional Programs

The regional sponsors would not have been able to take part in the festival without financial assistance. Cornell provided seed money for each program to help cover local artist, publicity and other costs. In some cases, the subsidy covered all the direct costs; in others local cosponsors raised or committed additional funds.

Documentation

This line covered mostly tape and some equipment. The student labor was free as part of their course work, and Marilyn Rivchin's salary is not included.



Festival artists perform at Commons Coffeehouse

Credits and Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

An American Festival was produced by Cornell University in cooperation with the American Festival Project. Generous support was provided by the New York State Council on the Arts Theater Program, the National Endowment for the Arts Inter-Arts Program, the Gannett Foundation, the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, Bill Cooke and Ellen Adelson.

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- The regional festival coordinators: Annetta Kaplan and Daniel Ward in Syracuse; Laurence Champoux, Jacqueline Davis and Ellen Koskoff in Rochester and Brockport; Donna Dajnowski in Binghamton; Donna Cole at the Akwesasne Museum and Varick Chittenden of Traditional Arts in Upstate New York in Canton;
- All the performing artists and panelists, many of whom, in addition to performing or speaking, have contributed in other ways to the festival;
- The many people from Ithaca, the region and around the country who have offered their encouragement, assistance and time to the festival.

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The American Festival Project is based at Appalshop in Whitesburg, KY.

Final Report

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