



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS

# NEARTS

A GREAT NATION DESERVES GREAT ART



## 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows

America's Master Folk  
and Traditional Artists

Este colateral se hizo  
en el Año 2003

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# Honoring Our Nation's Cultural Heritage

## NEA National Heritage Fellowship Program

**"The class of 2006."** That's the way Mavis Staples described herself and the other distinguished recipients of our nation's highest form of federal recognition of folk and traditional artists, the NEA National Heritage Fellowships. In September 2006, a group of 11 musicians, craftspeople, dancers, storytellers, and cultural conservators came to Washington, DC to be honored for their lifetimes of commitment to creative excellence and cultural heritage. Admission to this class is no small accomplishment. These artists joined such luminaries as B.B. King, Bill Monroe, Ali Akbar Khan, Michael Flatley, and Shirley Caesar as honorees.

Each year a panel of experts spends four days discussing thousands of pages of materials and reviewing hundreds of media samples supporting the more than 200 nominations received from the American public.



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#### ON THE COVER:

**2006 NEA National Heritage Fellow Charles M. Carrillo working on a new altar screen for Santa Maria de la Paz Church in Santa Fe. Photo by Paul Rhetts, courtesy of [www.nmsantos.com](http://www.nmsantos.com).**



**Folk and Traditional Arts Director Barry Bergey with 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellow Mavis Staples at the awards ceremony and concert rehearsal at the Music Center at Strathmore. Photo by Tom Pich.**

In the end, a slate is recommended to the National Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts Chairman for final approval.

The process culminates in September with a banquet in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress, an awards ceremony on Capitol Hill, and a public concert. This year the concert was

held for the first time at the new Music Center at Strathmore in nearby Bethesda, Maryland.

The events in 2006 marked the 25th year that these fellowships were awarded, and more than 325 artists and groups have now been recognized as NEA National Heritage Fellows. With the generous support of Darden Restaurants and Darden Restaurants Foundation, we plan to celebrate the 25th anniversary in 2007–8 with special concerts, tours, exhibitions, publications, and media programs around the country.

The cumulative history of the NEA National Heritage Fellowships provides a striking portrait of our nation. Bess Lomax Hawes, the NEA Folk Arts Director who conceived and initiated the program, perhaps said it best: "Of all the activities assisted by the Folk Arts Program, these fellowships are among the most appreciated and applauded, perhaps because they present to Americans a vision of themselves and of their country, a vision somewhat idealized but profoundly longed for and so, in significant ways, profoundly true."

*Barry Bergey*  
*Director, Folk and Traditional Arts*

# A Night To Remember

## The 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows Concert

**A celebration was underway** as members of New Orleans's Treme Brass Band paraded through the aisles of the Music Center at Strathmore. The audience enthusiastically joined in, jumping to its feet and clapping hands in time with the bass drum as the band mounted the stage. So began the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert.

Produced in partnership with the National Council for the Traditional Arts, the annual concert is the culmination of the new Fellows' awards week in Washington, DC. The Music Center was a first-time host for the 2006 concert, which featured performances and craft demonstrations by the Fellows.

Emceed by Public Radio International radio host Nick Spitzer, the concert's first act included *cuatro* maker and player Diomedes Matos, who performed with his students, the Camacho Brothers, and his son Pucho; and blues pianist Henry Gray, backed by a four-piece band and demonstrating his legendary barrelhouse style.

Invoking a centuries-old family tradition, Finnish *kantele* player Wilho Saari demonstrated his skill on the 36-string lap harp. Saari's great-great-grandmother "Kantele Kreeta" originally popularized the instrument in 19th-century Finland.

Welcomed to the stage by her singing granddaughters, Haida traditional weaver Delores Churchill also appeared in the program's first half. Churchill noted that she had been a bookkeeper until age 45. "Then I became insane and became an artist," she recalled, prompting



**The Treme Brass Band opened the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert with a parade through the concert hall aisles. Photo by Tom Pich.**

applause from the audience.

As Spitzer introduced Tewa linguist and storyteller Esther Martinez, he said, "Language is the music of the storyteller." Accompanied by her daughter and grandson, Martinez taught Spitzer to say a few words in Tewa and shared passages from her favorite stories.

Tight harmonies and sonic fingering are the hallmarks of bluegrass and gospel artist Doyle Lawson who, with his band Quicksilver, wowed the crowd in the program's second half. Dressed in a vibrant yellow suit, *kumu hula* George Na'ope brought

Hawaii to the mainland, playing ukulele with his band after a traditional dance performance by some of his students.

Master *santero* Charles Carillo shared the stage with his blue-tinged portrait of San Rafael. Bess Lomax Hawes honoree Nancy Swezey also shared the stage—with a slideshow of photos from her decades long career as an advocate for the folk and traditional arts.

The evening's final performer, gospel and rhythm-and-blues artist Mavis Staples, kept things up-tempo as Spitzer called the 2006 class of NEA National Heritage Fellows to the stage for a group bow. The concert ended as it began, with the audience applauding, dancing, and hollering for more.

In the pages that follow, a brief biography of each Fellow is presented along with an excerpt from interviews that the NEA has conducted with the artists. Read full versions of the interviews at [www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/Heritage06/NHFIntro.html](http://www.nea.gov/honors/heritage/Heritage06/NHFIntro.html).

## CHARLES M. CARRILLO

Santero (Carver and painter of sacred figures)  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

**A trained archaeologist**, Charlie Carrillo developed his interest in *santeros* during a research project in the late 1970s. He explained, “As I read through documents I was fascinated with all the references to *santos*....I decided one day to paint an image of [Santa Rosa de Lima] based on a historic picture I had seen of her from New Mexico.” In 1980, Carrillo made his first appearance as a santero at New Mexico’s Spanish Market, a bi-annual traditional crafts market.

Carrillo’s work is in the permanent collections of museums, including the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington, DC, the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, and the Denver Museum of Art. His honors include the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Spanish Market and the Museum of International Folk Art’s Hispanic Heritage Award.

In this excerpt from an NEA interview, Carrillo spoke about what it takes to be a master artist, the traditional



**Nuestra Señora del Pueblito de Queretaro (Our Lady of the Village of Queretaro) bulto by Charles M. Carrillo. Collection of Paul Rhettts and Barbe Awalt. Photo by Ron Behrmann, courtesy of www.nmsantos.com.**

techniques of santeros, and why he remains compelled by his craft.

**NEA: What special skills do you think santeros need?**

**CHARLES CARRILLO:** You need the desire to understand traditions. Some of the santeros in the past weren’t great artists. The artwork is sometimes very crude. But they had a deep feeling for what they were trying to impart with their images.

This is not just about art, it’s about a people’s philosophy. It’s about a people’s way of life, a people’s outlook on life. The santos express not only the hopes and dreams of people, but also the sadness. We need our saints for the good things in life and the tragedies. The total package. And in

New Mexico there’s a saint for everything.

**NEA: Are the techniques being used today different from the past?**

**CARRILLO:** I’ve been the one pushing for the re-introduction of traditional pigments and other traditional elements. Twenty-five years ago at the Spanish Market, very few people were using natural pigments, natural homemade varnishes, natural production methods of hand daubing the wood, or using cottonwood root for carving, and so on. Now it’s the norm, the standard.

**NEA: Why do you continue to be so invested in this work?**

**CARRILLO:** It’s a passion. I look forward every morning to getting up and doing what I do. Not just the making, but the research, too. I love to find new historic images that inspire me to do new things. I love to teach. Teaching about the santos and New Mexico history is a passion.



**Charles M. Carrillo shows his work during the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.**

## DELORES E. CHURCHILL

Haida traditional weaver  
Ketchikan, Alaska

**Delores Churchill** is a Haida master weaver of baskets, hats, robes, and other regalia. Using such materials as spruce root, cedar bark, wool, and natural dyes, she creates utilitarian and ceremonial objects of unmatched beauty and cultural significance.

Churchill learned these skills from her mother, Selina Peratrovich, a nationally recognized master weaver. Peratrovich asked her daughter to burn her baskets for the first five years of the apprenticeship. “I am well known for my baskets,” Peratrovich told her daughter. “If you say you learned from me, you better be good.”

Churchill’s honors include a Rasmuson Foundation Distinguished Artist Award, the Governor’s Award for the Arts, and an Alaska State Legislative Award. She continues to teach young people the knowledge and skills related to the weaving tradition, observing: “As long as Native art remains in museums, it will be thought of in the past tense.”

In this excerpt from an interview with the NEA, Churchill reminisced about how her children learned to weave and teaching others Tlingit weaving.

**NEA:** Did your children learn weaving in the traditional way?

**DELORES CHURCHILL:**

Yes. In fact one time when [my daughter] April was visiting my mother, she said, “Grandmother, I would like to learn to weave,” and Mother said, “No, no, my dear. You’ll neglect your housework and your children if you start weaving so, no, you shouldn’t do that.” So April would just drop in



**Delores E. Churchill demonstrates Haida basketweaving during the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.**



**A seaweed basket by Delores E. Churchill. Photo courtesy of Delores E. Churchill.**

and sit by Mother and watch her weave. Then one day she came in with a basket and put it in front of my mother who asked, “Who made that nice basket?” And April said, “I did, Grandmother.” From then on, Mother started teaching her.

**NEA:** What advice do you have for young basket makers?

**CHURCHILL:** It takes years before one can do a basket like the ones I see in the museums. It’s just like ballet. My daughter took ballet. She wasn’t allowed to get into toe shoes for years. She had to learn all the steps and all the moves before she could get into toe shoes. It’s the same thing with basketry. Before you can do an artistic piece there are years when you’re just learning to prepare your materials. Preparing your material is actually the most important part of it. When the university asked me to teach an evening class because there were so many people wanting to learn to do basketry, my mother told me, “You’re not ready.” For the next two years all I did was material preparation.

## HENRY GRAY

Blues piano player and singer  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**Baton Rouge, Louisiana, blues pianist**

Henry Gray has performed for more than seven decades, having “played with everybody from the Rolling Stones to Muddy Waters.” He has more than 58 albums to his credit, including recordings for the legendary Chess blues label.

Gray helped to create the distinctive sound of the Chicago blues piano while playing in Howlin’ Wolf’s band in the 1950s before returning to Louisiana in the 1960s where his big, rollicking sound became part of the region’s “swamp blues” style. Having received a Grammy nomination and four W.C. Handy nominations, Gray continues to tour as a soloist and with his band Henry Gray and the Cats.

Gray spoke with the NEA about the start of his long career and the future of the blues.



Henry Gray takes the audience on a tour of the “swamp blues” he helped create during his performance at the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.

**NEA:** Tell me a little bit about when you started learning to play the piano.

**HENRY GRAY:** When I was a child my grandmother bought me an old piano. I started out playing a harmonica when I was about six or seven, but I didn’t like that thing. I liked my piano and I just started to play.

I grew up in rural Louisiana, a little town called Alsen. I doubt there were 100 people there. There was a lady, Ms. White, who had a piano and starting when I was seven or eight I would go by there. She played the blues and showed me a whole lot of stuff on the piano. I was quick to learn. All I wanted was to get the fundamentals of it and learn the keys. After learning that, I had it made.

You know, my daddy whupped me a couple of times because I’d skip school to go over to Ms. White’s to play piano. I didn’t want to go to school. I just wanted to play the piano.

**NEA:** Do you see any challenges to keeping the blues tradition alive?

**GRAY:** The blues are here and are going to be here to stay. Now they’ve got a whole lot of this stuff, the rap and all that, but that’s not like the blues. The blues have been here and are always going to be here.

**NEA:** What advice do you have for young artists who are learning piano blues?

**GRAY:** Keep at it. Just keep at it because you’re not going to learn it overnight. There’s too much going on with it for you to learn it overnight. You just have to keep at it and keep going. You’re going to make a lot of mistakes, but you’ll correct them.

## DOYLE LAWSON

Gospel and bluegrass singer, arranger, bandleader  
Bristol, Tennessee

**Raised in a musical household**—his parents were part of an a cappella trio and later his father formed a quartet—Doyle Lawson decided to be a professional musician as a teenager, becoming proficient on the mandolin, banjo, and guitar. Before forming his own group—Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver—in 1979, Lawson played with bluegrass legends Jimmy Martin, J.D. Crowe, and the Country Gentlemen. He has appeared on nearly 40 albums, many of them with his own band.

Although Lawson's band has numerous recordings of the classic bluegrass repertoire, the group is best known for his stunning gospel vocal arrangements, which resulted in a renaissance of tight harmony bluegrass singing. For several years, Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver have received the International Bluegrass Music Association's Vocal Group of the Year Award.

In a conversation with the NEA, Lawson talked about his music, shared some advice for young musicians, and revealed why he's kept singing for more than 40 years.

**NEA: You play both religious and secular music, correct?**

**DOYLE LAWSON:** I started off playing just bluegrass music. But gospel music has always been an integral part of bluegrass as far back as the man we call "the Father of Bluegrass," Bill Monroe. He had the Bluegrass Boys and the Bluegrass Quartet and they always played a fair amount of gospel. And that carried right on down through the Stanley Brothers, Flatt and Scruggs, all the early bluegrass pioneers. Gospel music was still a part of that. Gospel was not only a part of bluegrass, but part of the country world, too. When I came along, I introduced a lot of different songs new to the world of bluegrass.

**NEA: Do you have any advice for young gospel or bluegrass musicians?**

**LAWSON:** I don't think there's any one for-sure answer. Sometimes some things work out and sometimes they don't. The one thing I can say is that if you truly believe that your mission in life is to play this music, then stay the course. You'll have to endure the hardships along with the good times, and there will be hard times.



Doyle Lawson (left) and his band harmonize during the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.

**NEA: What has kept you performing through the years?**

**LAWSON:** I love the sound of music and I love to sing harmony. That's my thing, putting four or five voices together. To me there's nothing any sweeter to hear than a church choir singing or a church congregation with everybody lifting their voice up in song and praise. There's a beauty to that and a feeling like no other.

## ESTHER MARTINEZ

Native American linguist and storyteller  
Ohkay Owingeh, New Mexico

**Known as P’oe Tswa** (Blue Water) and Ko’oe (Aunt) Esther, master storyteller Esther Martinez was a much beloved tradition bearer of the Tewa people. New Mexico state folklorist Claude Stephenson succinctly summed up her contribution to Tewa culture: “She serves as the rock that has firmly anchored the ancient and the timeless stories of the people to the present and guaranteed their survival for the pueblo people of the future.”

Martinez was raised by her grandparents in San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico (now called Ohkay Owingeh), where she was immersed in the pueblo’s communal traditions. As an adult she became an advocate for the conservation of the Tewa language. Her efforts included storytelling, teaching, and the compilation of Tewa dictionaries for each of the six Tewa dialects. “When my grandfather said something that I didn’t know,” Martinez said about creating the dictionaries, “I would ask him and I would write it on a paper. It took me a long time.”

In her late 70s, Martinez traveled throughout the U.S. with Storytelling International, for the first time telling her traditional stories in English to non-Tewa audiences. Martinez eagerly embraced her role as a tradition bearer, especially among the pueblos’ young people. She said, “People still come to my house wanting help with information for their college paper or wanting a storyteller. Young folks from the village, who were once my students in bilingual classes, will stop by for advice in traditional values or wanting me to give Indian names to their kids or grandkids . . . This is my *po’eh* (my path). I am still traveling.”

Martinez was killed in an auto accident in September 2006 after attending the NEA National Heritage Fellowships ceremony in Washington, DC. During the awards ceremony on Capitol Hill earlier that week, she was joined by U.S. Representative Tom Udall (New Mexico–3rd District),

who spoke eloquently of Martinez’s contributions and presented her with a plaque. Chairman Dana Gioia noted upon learning of her passing: “New Mexico and the entire country have lost an eloquent link to our past. We can find solace in remembering her lifelong commitment to keeping her culture alive and vibrant. Our prayers are with Esther and her family—and all those who have come to know and love her.”

Congress has since passed the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006. Introduced by U.S. Representative Heather Wilson (New Mexico–1st District), the bill authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services to award competitive grants to establish native language programs for students under the age of seven and their families to preserve the indigenous languages of Native American tribes.



2006 NEA National Heritage Fellow Esther Martinez with daughter Josie, NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Director Barry Bergey (left), and NEA Chairman Dana Gioia (right) at the Library of Congress banquet. Photo by Tom Pich.



## DIOMEDES MATOS

*Cuatro* (10-string Puerto Rican guitar) maker  
Deltona, Florida

**Diomedes Matos** has been referred to as the “master’s master” *cuatro* maker. The *cuatro*, a distinctive 10-string guitar known as the national instrument of Puerto Rico, is played by *jibaro* musicians from the mountainous inner regions of the island. Matos was surrounded by instrument makers where he grew up in the Puerto Rican village of Camuy. He built his first guitar at age 12, later mastering construction techniques for several traditional stringed instruments including *cuatros*, *requintos*, classical guitars, and the Puerto Rican *tres*. His instruments are in great demand; even popular singer Paul Simon asked Matos to build him an instrument and accompany him on the soundtrack for the Broadway show *The Capeman*.

Matos has passed on his extensive knowledge to future tradition bearers through programs such as the New Jersey Folk Arts Apprentice Program. He said, “I like teaching even more than *cuatro*-making itself, especially when I see a student’s progress and maturity.”

Matos spoke with the NEA about becoming a *cuatro* maker and shared his advice for young instrument makers.

**NEA:** Tell me a little bit about how you were attracted to the tradition of making these instruments?

**DIOMEDES MATOS:** My younger brother is a luthier [stringed-instrument maker], too. On my mother’s side of my family there are a lot of musicians—my uncles and my other brothers play guitar and *cuatro* and they know how to work with wood. They are craftsmen, too.



**Diomedes Matos (left) shows off one of his handmade *cuatros* while playing with his son Pucho at the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.**

What really inspired me was a *cuatro* maker named Roque Navarro. He passed away some years ago. I used to walk from my house to school every day and on the way I’d see Mr. Navarro working on guitars and *cuatros* in his workshop. One day, when I was about 10 years old, I was watching him from the fence in front of his house and he invited me in and showed me what he was doing. I knew from that first visit that’s what I wanted to do.

**NEA:** What advice do you have for young *cuatro* makers and players?

**MATOS:** I always tell them to keep the tradition going, don’t lose this knowledge. And try to do what I do—teach other people. Keep learning and become a teacher, too. I also tell them to try to be as best as possible. The more they learn the better they get. It’s a process that requires a lot of patience—don’t stop after making one or two. Keep making *cuatro* after *cuatro* because the more experience you have the better you’ll become at it and the better the finished products will become as well.



**A *cuatro* made by Diomedes Matos. Photo by Robert Stone.**

## GEORGE NA'OPE

*Kumu hula* (hula master)  
Hilo, Hawaii

**George Na'ope's full name** is George Lanakilakekiahiali'i Na'ope, which means "the protector of things of Hawai'i." As a *kumu hula*, Na'ope has taken this charge quite seriously for nearly six decades. "Uncle George," as he is known throughout the state, is recognized as a leading advocate and preservationist of native Hawaiian culture worldwide.

Na'ope was three when he first studied hula under his great-grandmother. He himself has been a teacher for nearly 60 years, passing down his knowledge of ancient hula, which is hula developed and danced before 1893.

In 1964, Na'ope founded the Merrie Monarch Festival, an annual week-long festival of traditional Hawaiian arts, crafts, and performances featuring a three-day hula competition. The state of Hawaii designated Na'ope a "Living Golden Treasure" in 1960.

Na'ope spoke with the NEA about why he founded the Merrie Monarch Festival and about passing on the tradition to the next generation.

### **NEA: Why did you feel there was a need for the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival?**

**GEORGE NA'OPE:** I felt the hula was becoming too modern and that we have to preserve it. [David Kalakaua [king of Hawaii 1874–91, aka The Merrie Monarch] brought the hula back to Hawaii and made us realize how important it was for our people. There was nothing here in Hilo, so I decided to honor Kalakaua and have a festival with just hula. I didn't realize that it was going to turn out to be one of the biggest things in our state.

### **NEA: Can you tell me a little bit about your teaching?**

**NA'OPE:** I've been teaching now for about 58 years. I've taught in Japan, Guam, Australia, Germany, England, North and South America, and also in the Hawaiian Islands. I've mostly been teaching in Japan because they

are very interested in the culture. I've been telling them, though, that while it's wonderful that all these non-Hawaiians are learning Hawaiian culture, they need to remember to learn their own culture as well. When we [Hawaiians] became part of America, most of our people forgot our ancient dances.



George Na'ope watches one of his students perform a traditional Hawaiian dance during the rehearsal for the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.

### **NEA: What is the main message that you think that the hula and the chanting is conveying?**

**NA'OPE:** We must remember who we are and that our culture must survive in this modern world. If you love your culture you will teach tradition and the love of the hula. Teach it and share it and not hide it. I tell the young people to learn the culture and learn it well, preserve it so their children and their children's children can continue with our culture and that our culture will live forever.

## WILHO SAARI

Finnish *kantele* (lap-harp) player  
Naselle, Washington

**Washington native Wilho Saari's** great-great-grandmother, Kreetta Hapasalo, popularized the *kantele* in her native Finland in the 19th century, supporting her 11 children with public performances throughout Finland and appearances at northern Europe's royal courts.

Saari grew up hearing his father play the *kantele*, a stringed instrument related to the lap-harp or zither. It wasn't until after his father's death that Saari, at the age of 50, took up the instrument himself. He had waited, in part, because Finnish tradition reserves the playing of the *kantele* for the family patriarch. Saari's first performance was at a family wedding, after which he started to appear at Finnish and Scandinavian festivals. Since then, he has led the revival in playing and teaching the *kantele* in Finnish-American enclaves throughout the U.S. Saari is also a prolific composer, having written more than 1,700 songs for the instrument to date.

Saari spoke with the NEA about how he began playing the *kantele* and the tradition of *kantele* music.

**NEA: Why did you decide to begin playing at the age of 50?**

**WILHO SAARI:** I grew up hearing my dad play almost every night after work. That was Dad's thing. My two uncles also played. My great-great-grandmother was a well-known *kantele* player in Finland in the 1800s. Naselle is a small community of about 1,500 people, which used to be very heavily Finnish—there are still a lot of Finns here—and being the Finnish national instrument the *kantele* was a big deal. I grew up playing band instruments, piano and organ—I wanted to play the



**Wilho Saari performs on the *kantele* during the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.**

instruments that the other kids played. The *kantele* was Dad's thing. And though I didn't play it, I knew how he played it.

He passed away in 1968 and I inherited his *kantele*. One day in 1982, I was at home and my wife was at work, and I took out the *kantele* and just decided to try it out. As I said, I knew how it was played. I had so much fun I got hooked on it right away.

**NEA: What does the *kantele* mean to the Finnish community?**

**SAARI:** They associate it as being Finnish. Not that everybody in Finland plays it, but you find pockets throughout the country where *kantele* is played more than in other places. I'm often asked to play at different Finnish festivals and other occasions where Finnish people come together. They want a *kantele* player. It's the Finnish thing.

## MAVIS STAPLES

Gospel, rhythm-and-blues singer  
Chicago, Illinois

**When Mavis Staples heard** that she'd received an NEA National Heritage Fellowship, her first thought was, "Well, Pops, you know, you're the cause of all of this." She was referring to her father, the late 1998 NEA National Heritage Fellow Roebuck "Pops" Staples, leader of the legendary Staple Singers. After meeting the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, the group—which found success on the gospel, soul, and pop charts—became one of the leading voices of the civil rights movement, bringing their distinctive style to protest songs such as "Freedom Highway."

Mavis Staples recorded her first solo album in 1969. Since then, she has recorded more than 10 albums as

**NEA: Tell me about the evolution of your music.**

**MAVIS STAPLES:** We went from strictly gospel to protest songs—freedom songs—after we met Dr. [Martin Luther] King. After we felt things were coming together like Dr. King wanted, we made a transition to what we called message songs. But we never got far away from gospel—we've always considered ourselves basically gospel singers. It's the message we put in our songs and our harmonies that made us so different. My father gave us harmonies to sing that he and his brothers and sisters used to sing down in Mississippi, a kind of Delta and country sound. It was just so unique and different from everyone else's. And the messages in our songs were

special. We were singing songs of inspiration to uplift people. Music is so good like that—it can be healing, it can make you dance, sing, smile, or cry. It calms and it comforts.

**NEA: Can you jump back a little bit and tell me about some of your earliest memories of singing?**

**STAPLES:** Well, I'll tell you, I would sing and people would come up to me afterwards with tears in their eyes and put money

in my hand. And when I'd get home I'd ask, "Mama, why are these people crying? Why are they putting this money in my hand?" "Mavis," she said, "You make them feel happy. They're crying happy tears and they want to give you something." I would get so much money. My mother had to sew little pockets in my little dresses because I'd put the money on the piano or somewhere and then forget it.



**Mavis Staples shows her singing prowess during the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.**

a solo artist and collaborated with a range of master musicians, including Prince and Bob Dylan. Her honors include induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and a Grammy Award for Lifetime Achievement.

In this excerpt from an NEA interview, Staples discussed the evolution of her music and her earliest memories of singing.

## TREME BRASS BAND

New Orleans brass band  
New Orleans, Louisiana

**For more than 15 years**, the internationally known Treme Brass Band has been part of New Orleans's sound, whether playing jazz funerals down the city's streets or performing for packed houses during their regular Friday night club gig in the Treme district. The son of noted New Orleans musician Chester Jones, Benny Jones, Sr. founded the Treme Brass Band after stints with the Olympia, Dirty Dozen, and Chosen Few Brass Bands.

After Hurricane Katrina, the band's members were scattered across the country. Most of the band eventually reunited in Arizona where they were able to get new instruments and find gigs. Many band members have now returned to New Orleans, though it remains difficult to find work. Jones explained, "Many of the clubs we play had to close down because so few people were coming to town, or they had to do renovations. Then when they started hiring cats to play, they had to pay a percentage of the door rather than a guaranteed fee. Before the storm we worked for a straight salary. It's harder that way, but that's the way it is."

In this NEA interview excerpt, Benny Jones talked about the music that influenced him and the tradition of jazz funerals.

**NEA:** Was the music you play unique to the Treme neighborhood or was it found throughout New Orleans?

**BENNY JONES:** In that neighborhood, back in the '50s and the '60s, you had jazz funerals and parades always passing by. There were a bunch of social and pleasure clubs in that neighborhood, in the Old Caledonia, at a club called the Square Deal, and so on. My father and a

bunch of old musicians played a lot of jazz funerals—when someone in a club died they always wanted a jazz funeral. On the weekends they might play for a parade. Social and pleasure clubs have annual parades every year and his band would perform. I was very inspired by that.



The Treme Brass Band brings a little of New Orleans to the Washington, DC audience during the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows concert. Photo by Tom Pich.

**NEA:** Have the jazz funerals changed over time or have they stayed pretty consistent?

**JONES:** They have changed. There are younger bands playing modern music for jazz funerals rather than the traditional hymns and dirges. When the young people have a jazz funeral they don't want sad music. They want up-tempo music. They want fast music. But we continue to play the traditional music. I tell people, "If you've got young people and you want a young band, hire a young band. If you want to hire my band, we're going to play the old, traditional music on the street." I'm a traditional musician and I want to try to keep the traditional jazz funerals going in New Orleans.

**NANCY SWEEZY** (2006 BESS LOMAX HAWES AWARD)

Advocate, scholar, presenter, and preservationist  
Lexington, Massachusetts

**The long list of seminal**

**events** in Nancy Sweezy's extensive career includes the founding of the crafts organization Country Roads, the revival of North Carolina's historic Jugtown Pottery, and the creation of the Refugee Arts Group for immigrant folk artists. Her advocacy work also has included creating markets for traditional artwork, developing apprenticeship programs, and writing authoritative texts on U.S. and international folk pottery.

Her interest in craft began with pottery lessons in her native New England in the 1950s. That eventually led to an association with Ralph Rinzler, who was then working with the Newport Folk Festival Foundation. Collaborating with Rinzler, she established a craft program and sales operation within the Newport Folk Festival. That started her on a career championing the folk arts.

In this interview excerpt, Sweezy spoke with the NEA about how she became involved in the folk arts and some of her accomplishments in the field.

**NEA: What attracted you to traditional craft work?**

**NANCY SWEEZY:** My earliest hook was seeing some pottery in a shop. I can't even remember where. I had never seen pottery before—I had seen china and porcelain, but never pottery. And I was very attracted....I liked them because they were strong and sturdy and honest.



Photo by Sam Sweezy.

**NEA: How did you become involved with refugees from Southeast Asia?**

**SWEEZY:** In the mid '80s, there was an enormous influx of refugees from Southeast Asia into the region, particularly in Lowell, Massachusetts, and in Boston as well. The International Institute of Boston was trying to figure out ways to help these people adjust. They were teaching them how to use banks and grocery stores and what not, but nothing to do with culture. The state wasn't doing anything with that nor were any of the organizations working with them. I thought these

people really ought to be reconnecting to their own cultural work. We got a grant from the NEA and did a big survey of the cultural activities they had done at home in Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam.

**NEA: You've had such a full and rich career in this work. What are the accomplishments you're most proud of?**

**SWEEZY:** I'm very proud of the exhibition and book, *The Potters Eye: Art and Tradition in North Carolina Pottery*. I worked with people in North Carolina to bring out a book about the work of contemporary potters and the influences on their work.

What I'm concerned with is how the great traditional arts can be made relevant today. That's what these contemporary potters are doing in North Carolina. I think it's fabulous. The work that we did in *The Potter's Eye* exhibition sums up my philosophy of what ought to happen in the pottery field.

## In The News

# Operation Homecoming Authors Tour

***Operation Homecoming: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families*** (Random House, 2006)—an anthology of writing by U.S. troops and their families developed through the NEA National Initiative Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience—was selected as a *Washington Post* Best Book of 2006 and has been called “beautifully edited” (*Publishers Weekly*), “dark, funny, searching” (*Media News*), and “history-making” (*Booklist*). The volume comprises nearly 100 never-before-published eyewitness accounts, private journals, short stories, letters, e-mails, poems, and other personal writings from military personnel who have served since 2001 and their families.

Since its release, Andrew Carroll, the anthology’s editor, and contributors have been on the road to more than 30 cities nationwide discussing the book and its uniqueness as a historical document.

The *Operation Homecoming* book tour, sponsored by The Boeing Company, has encompassed military bases as well as traditional literary venues such as bookstores, universities, and book festivals. Readings have been held at sites ranging from Randolph Air Force Base (Texas) to the National Book Festival (Washington, DC).

The audio book of the anthology was one of six books to receive *Publishers Weekly*’s 2006 “Listen Up Award” in the full-cast recording category. The annual award is given by the magazine’s audio editors to



The Museum of Flight in Seattle, Washington, hosted a discussion and signing of the book *Operation Homecoming* on December 7, 2006. Photo courtesy of The Boeing Company.

acknowledge excellence in the audio book industry.

Readings by some of the anthology’s contributors also aired on National Public Radio’s syndicated program *Day to Day* through January 2007. The program included discussions with Carroll and NEA Chairman Dana Gioia.

In March 2007, Red Car Films will premiere a documentary on the Operation Homecoming initiative at the National Archives in Washington, DC. The film features readings by anthology contributors and the nationally recognized writers who led writing workshops during the program, such as Richard Bausch, Jeff Shaara, Richard Wilbur, and Marilyn Nelson.

National Endowment for the Arts



THE ARTS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:  
INVOLVED IN ARTS, INVOLVED IN LIFE



## NEA Releases New Research Brief on Civic and Arts Activities

In November, the NEA released *The Arts and Civic Engagement: Involved in Arts, Involved in Life*, the first large population survey to articulate links between arts participation and community health. Based on data from the 2002 NEA Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the study reveals that people who participate in the arts also engage in positive civic and individual activities—including volunteering and attending sports events—at significantly higher rates than non-arts participants. The study also found that young adults are less involved in civic life. For a copy of the report, please visit [www.arts.gov/research/Research\\_brochures.php](http://www.arts.gov/research/Research_brochures.php).

# 2006 NEA Fellows on Capitol Hill

## NEA National Heritage Fellows feted at banquet and awards ceremony

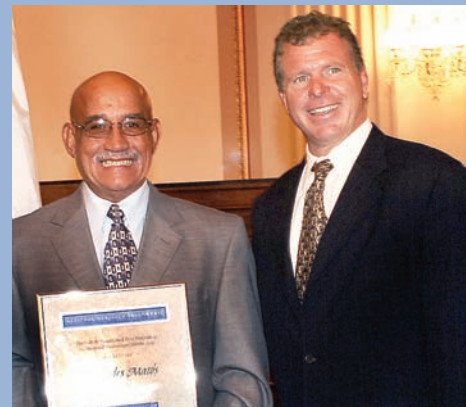
On September 13, the celebration of the 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows kicked off in the nation's capital with a banquet in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress co-hosted by the NEA and the American Folklife Center. NEA Director of Folk and Traditional Arts Barry Bergey emceed the event, which included an address by NEA Chairman Dana Gioia and remarks by Deanna Marcum, Associate Librarian for Library Services, and Peggy Bulger, Director of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. U.S. Representatives Ed Case (Hawaii–2nd District) and William L. Jenkins (Tennessee–1st District) and former NEA General Counsel Catherine Stevens also attended the dinner.

On the morning of September 14, Members of Congress, representatives from the folk arts field, and the family and friends of the new Fellows gathered in the Cannon Caucus Room on Capitol Hill for an awards ceremony. NEA Chairman Dana Gioia recited each fellow's list of accomplishments in the field of folk and traditional arts as each fellow stepped forward to receive a framed copy of the citation emblazoned with the title "Master Artist".

U.S. Representative Thomas Udall (New Mexico–3rd District) attended the ceremony in support of the two National Heritage Fellows from New Mexico—



**Presentation of 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellowship awards at a September 14 ceremony in Washington, DC, clockwise from top left: Nancy Sweezy receives her award from U.S. Representative Ed Markey; Diomedes Matos receives his award from U.S. Representative Tom Feeney (right); Esther Martinez receives her award from National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Dana Gioia (right) and U.S. Representative Tom Udall (left). Photos by Tom Pich.**



Native American linguist and storyteller Esther Martinez and *santero* Charles Carillo. While congratulating Martinez and Carillo, Udall said, "Arts bring to us the civility we seek, the peacefulness we seek, and we need a lot more of that in the world." Congressman Udall also applauded the NEA Folk Arts program for reaching out to the nation's communities and allowing the American people to nominate their master artists for the award.

U.S. Representatives Brian Baird

(Washington–3rd District), William Jefferson (Louisiana–2nd District), Ed Markey (Massachusetts–7th District), Tom Feeney (Florida–24th District), and William L. Jenkins also participated in the awards ceremony.

The NEA National Heritage Fellowships program is made possible through the support of the Darden Restaurants Foundation and the Darden family of restaurants—Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, and Smokey Bones Barbeque & Grill.



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