

Imagine Maryland

Date: August 13, 2008
Location: Annapolis Maritime Museum
Annapolis, Maryland
Forum: Folklife Artists Forum
Facilitator: Cliff Murphy, Shirley Howard
Scribe: Janel Cohen

SUMMARY OF MAJOR THEMES:

About Maryland, people appreciate:

- Maryland's identity is rooted in its folk traditions/icons
- Strong infrastructure of professional folklorists
- It has a culturally and geographically diverse landscape

Major Issues:

- Despite the fact that Maryland identity is bound up in traditional culture/icons, these traditions fall outside the scope of most of the Arts Council's grant work and lobbying efforts;
- The importance of traditional arts/culture are often not appreciated until that tradition is lost;
- Pace of change in Maryland is alarming, Folklife needs attention/promotion in order to garner support;

Future Goals:

- Maryland Citizens for the Arts is seen as helpful to the bulk of MSAC's vision, but not to folk arts – folk arts needs lobby representation as well;
- Maryland legislature needs to develop cultural policy that states explicitly that folk & traditional arts/culture should be protected;
- State needs a Maryland Folklife Center with dedicated staff;
- Funding for MD Traditions and Folk & Traditional Arts grants needs to be expanded to be more sustainable for traditional communities/practitioners/organizations

Advice to Arts Council:

- Folk & Traditional arts grant awards need to be more sustaining
- Folk & Traditional Arts/MD Traditions needs a "friends" network to lobby, raise funds, promote awareness
- MSAC needs to support creation of a Maryland Folklife Center

SOME KEY QUOTES:

"Maryland's Iconic Traditions/Communities are what make MD Unique: Decoys, Painted Screens, Skipjacks, Maritime Traditions, Stuffed Hams, Smith Island Cake, Chicken Necking, Rag Rug tradition in Western Maryland, Arabbers, Crab cakes, Oyster fritters, Steamed Jimmies"

"Any place worth singing about is a place worth saving."

"It's great to identify individual artists, but is there a better way to maintain arts/crafts within the community itself? ...not just develop for heritage tourism?"

"Need a bigger investment than the apprenticeship grant and smaller grants. You find really worthy organizations competing for the same money and they get just enough to fail."

"Create a curated and accessible place to educate the general public (Folklife Center)... the business of addressing community and culture in the state is a project that goes beyond the arts council and is fundamental to the preservation of this place."

"We need a cultural policy in the state."

"[We need a] Center for Maryland Folklife and culture between Baltimore and DC that would serve cultural traditions... there could be an archive."

"Need a friend's group/advocacy group for folk and traditional arts."

RAW TRANSCRIPT OF THE MEETING:

Cliff Murphy Welcome/Introduction:

Thanks for coming today. MSAC is doing a series of focus groups across the state for our strategic planning process. Minutes from this meeting will be posted within 7-10 days on www.msac.org. Other MSAC staff here today: Shirley Howard and Janel Cohen.

- Around the room - Why Maryland?
 - I came to Maryland 5-6 years through the Maryland traditions program as the folklorist. Became interested in Eastern shore traditions, and felt welcomed. Able to connect to different constituencies, the place is accommodating, and the community is hospitable.
 - There's a simple answer to that. I was watching TV, and came across show with Bernie Mac and he said "it's about love" and Tavis Smiley said he never heard of that used for comedy, but you have to love it. What makes Maryland a place that ii love is being able to have had the opportunity to come into relationships with people who are passionate and love what they do, and that's here across the state
 - I'm a newcomer (almost 1 year here). I discovered Maryland through job position; I've stayed because it is such a great mix, landscapes, people, cultures. Lot of different facets that are wonderful to explore
 - Came back to Baltimore to write a dissertation and "forgot to leave". What continues to amaze me - the calls come in that make you so excited, people can convey their own excitement. Discovery of community/territory. People want to talk to people in their communities, why they're here, why something 'was', etc. When I was in graduate school, some of these communities didn't exist, and now they're entrenched in the community. You never know what you'll be seeing "tomorrow"

- Reside in Maryland, but work nationally. First came to the bay in 1983 and that allowed me to work on the boats and made early connections. Built a lot of relationships. Came here because of my fishing past, and was looking for a place that still built wood boats. Remained because I'm still gaining knowledge and able to pass on knowledge as well. You really get to know the people, open and welcoming, encouraging.
- I work in Baltimore, but we extend regionally. I don't live in Maryland, but I can see Maryland from my backyard, and have in-laws from Baltimore. Thrill to be here, thanks for inviting me.
- I'm a native and had no intention of staying after graduate school, but I came home after grad school to visit and "forgot to leave". Interested in "place". Possible to have a place based/heritage based career here. Terrific career opportunities for folks like us. I've had opportunity to travel, and when you return home, I always thrilled to come back. Great place to live, economically, etc.
- We came in 1976. We were on food stamps, 3 kids, etc. Came down here to feed a family. It's such an incredible place; things have changed for us as a result of Maryland. We're art collectors. We've been able to do so many things because of the connection and affordable spaces.
- Started a business and moved to Howard County. We're very interested in the arts; we've been art patrons for a long time. Interested in Education and the Arts.
- I arrived here on a sailboat 30 years ago. My first view of Annapolis was coming under the Bay Bridge, and I felt like I was home. Been able to accomplish arts in our educational and general programs. I'm also a musician and developed a music organization geared towards the Chesapeake Bay. Any place worth singing about is a place worth saving. Been able to help kids connect with the Bay. That's what makes me excited.
- This is my 12th year anniversary. I have done exhibits and research. I grew up in New Mexico and Oklahoma. I'm used to skylines and outlaws.
- So many traditions, we're very cosmopolitan and there is richness in the state.
- Share traditions, icons, communities, that make Maryland unique or special
 - Maryland has decoys
 - Painted Screens
 - Skip Jacks
 - Maritime Traditions
 - Stuffed Hams
 - Smith Island Cake
 - Chicken Necking
 - Rag Rug tradition in Western Maryland
 - Food ways
 - Crab cakes
 - Oyster fritters
 - Stewed Jimmies
 - The showcase (Maryland Traditions) where people come in and connect with people they didn't know they had connections. Connection forged through creativity
 - Able to rise above all the changes through creativity. Watching someone bloom through creativity and connecting.

- Maryland Humanities has a speaker's bureau, and they let a Smith Islander go around the county telling her story, and it's a gift to watch her connect with others. If we don't know what we've got here, we won't know how to make a difference in the world. We have to not take for granted the things we find at the micro-level. Keep asking what's special, before we lose traditions.
- Still can find communities that are isolated enough that I've never seen anything like it before, but with change the communities are being overrun. Where does the maintenance come in? Best preservation technique is maintenance. In waterman's communities I grew up in, my peers and their children actually resent what I do "preserving their heritage" because it implies they are all done. It's great to identify individual artists, but is there a better way to maintain arts/crafts within the community itself? To help them continue, and not just develop for heritage tourism. Pretty soon it will all be made, because the tradition will be gone - Needs to involve the voice of community, economics, it's a case-by-case thing.
- One thing true is that culture always changes. But it's the pace of the change that can be damaging.
- It is imperative that if we care about this stuff, we do get comprehensive. Invest in stewardship; try to keep them in the community, etc. measure success and failures. Time to get serious about it.
- Maintenance funding needs to come through comprehensive survey. Museums are positioned more towards a tourism front.
- In addition to comprehensive, efficacy of an inventory of a small fund-strapped institution. How much do you want to spend vs. taking inventory that's already done and using that money to celebrate? Funds are difficult to come by. Need to spend money to educate and document.
- How can MSAC help organizations do what they need to do to effectively engage with these issues?
 - Need to continue the 'keep learning' attitude. Need to get together to inventory issues and how can we dance together in the future?
 - Biggest challenge is getting the institutions and individuals to self identify and become a part of the MSAC mission. Hardest thing to do is to get people to come and apply for the money.
 - Need to go into a community and find out their priorities and let them identify the mentors. That's what we're trying to do.
 - How do you get to those people/identify those people (masters) and articulate the problems/issues?
 - You provide a gift to the (skipjack) owners and pass on the knowledge, but you need a structure that's going to last longer. The idea came up to purchase a boatyard for the waterman's boats as a long-term solution. They can't afford a place to keep their boats. Could be economically viable in time.
 - The Folk and Traditional arts could deal more directly with issues like that (above).
- How would we engage the community in long-term format?
 - Need a bigger investment than the apprenticeship grant and smaller grants. You find really worthy organizations competing for money and they get just enough to fail.
 - MSAC could help to make the connections.

- There are tantalizing models like the Quebec system. MSAC could get serious about working with this. Authenticity certification/living treasures program. Don't know if that gets us to where we want to be. I think Maryland is poised and cares about this stuff.
- Look at all the money put into heritage areas. The best-funded cultural program might be the heritage area program. To this day, getting them to take the cultural component seriously is an issue.
- Are there other areas that the MSAC could help with?
 - From the museum standpoint, at the Walters for example, there are so many kids and the liveliness and excitement (a lot are Baltimorean kids)... suppose there was a museum with sounds and smells. Lighting can be pollution, smells, and sounds. Transliterate that to the Walters focused on the kids. The exposure would be phenomenal. The interesting thing is that it doesn't deface the art.
 - Trying to do that here, stimulate all the senses. Need to stimulate the senses to replicate why that place is so special.
 - Create a curated and accessible place to educate the general public, but we also want to preserve the original place. In terms of the MSAC role, the business of addressing community and culture in the state is a project that goes beyond the arts council and is fundamental to the preservation of this place. That relationship best served by knowledge of the particularities of a certain place. Government can create a systematic rational assessment with the other side (i.e. artistry). If state government could trust each other enough and can be nimble enough to poise Maryland as a "prime maritime location". MSAC role might not be too much, but I was proud to foster a network. You can't ask the right questions without the connections. Leadership. I think state government sometimes falters in the connectivity.
 - Cultural policy in the state. Folk and traditional arts range in scopes.
 - We have to support the efforts where the knowledge of a 'master' can continue to flourish.
 - If we pay attention to the things we love in the community, they grow.
 - Build a network and after awhile, magic starts to happen.
 - Advisory panels, I constantly here the "been here yesterday" sort of thing and find myself chasing people about to die, rather than the growing/emerging traditions. Can't neglect the living thriving things.
 - We need to do the network better, stronger.
 - Meet with peers more, meet more often
 - Better marketing/outreach
 - Our own strategic plan
 - Empower the people to do it better.
- 5 years from now?
 - People engaged and interested, Bridged gap between arts and folk/traditional arts
 - Is the mainstream (TV, McDonalds) making people do less of traditional arts?
 - ♣ Many of the tradition bearers I work with are running away from that mainstream and want to feel like they accomplish something at the end of the day
 - Support mental well being of tradition bearers
 - Public education center/boatyard/place for the community that the state would support.

- Center for Maryland folk life and culture between Baltimore and DC that would serve cultural traditions. People could take classes. Place that would be well designed for ritual and for communities to have meaningful events. They would have the ability to communicate to the community more broadly; there could be an archive.
- Showcase gathering would be flourishing. Stars would be identified and well supported. People could participate.
- Looking at the model of finding out what the community wants/needs. Let's look at projects and make them stronger.
- Traveling folk art festival featured in a different county each year. Funding from a lot of different sources. Every community gets a chance to highlight. Would be for the public as well as participants and community leaders.
- Communication, collaboration, orchestration.
- Festivals can bring both diminishing and vibrant traditions together.
- Double staff/program coordinators so that directors can keep an eye on the bigger fish.
- To be representative. To have infrastructure on the ground in every county/region. Someone in every region who is tasked with folk and traditional arts on the regional level who can work with those communities. We've wanted to brand folk life, and we do during a few times a year (i.e. showcase), but then we need to do the next big thing, having people/place on the ground could keep that branding going. (Vermont, Alabama folk life centers).
- By whatever means, (investment, focus, expecting more of county arts agencies), having every community and/or elected leader know that vibrant folk and traditional arts relates to vibrant community. Got to get smarter about tourism aspect.
- Keeping the PR coverage out there.
- Need a friend's group/advocacy group for folk and traditional arts.
- Maintain folk arts list, those should be our "friends". Are we asking enough of those people?
- Greater density of local culture, and folk and traditional can be the connector.
- Maryland's revitalization. We have an abundance that we never realized. Seize opportunities. Culture needs to be the foundation/de-homogenize
- Prosperous thickly dynamic culture.
- Rediscover what we have here. We'll have a very Maryland culture/way of life/identify, and everyone will come here, people will want to embrace it.
- Reacting to conditions on the ground, new arts talents, and decline in traditional arts... should be properly forecasting and being proactive. People moving toward buying locally and living locally.
- Partnering
- Have to use local press/weekly's, what people read at the grass roots levels.

Thank you for coming