pfp philadelphia folklore project

[1987 - 2007]

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magazine of the philadelphia folklore project

Works IN PROGRESS

Volume 19:3 winter 2006-2007 ISSN 1075-0029

- Tibetan mandalas
- Hmong culture
- Anti-racist zone
- Wobbly songlore
- Ukrainian weaving

Works IN PROGRESS

Works in progress is the magazine of the Philadelphia Folklore Project, a 20-year-old public interest folklife agency. We work with people and communities in the Philadelphia area to build critical folk cultural knowledge, sustain the complex folk and traditional arts of our region, and challenge practices that diminish these local grassroots arts and humanities. To learn more, please visit us: www.folkloreproject.org or call 215.726.1106.

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we gratefully acknowledge support from:

- The National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great arts
- The William Penn Foundation
- Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
- The Humanities-in-the Arts Initiative, administered by The Pennsylvania Humanities Council, and funded principally by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
- The Philadelphia Cultural Fund
- Philadelphia Music Project, a grant program funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the University of the Arts
- The Pew Charitable Trusts
- The Malka and Jacob Goldfarb Foundation
- The Samuel Fels Fund
- Independence Foundation
- The Philadelphia Foundation
- Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation
- Philadelphia Cultural Management Initiative, a grant program funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the Drexel University Arts Administration Program
- and wonderful individual Philadelphia Folklore Project members
- We invite your support: thank you to all

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
A great nation deserves great art.

PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS 40th Anniversary

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Front cover:
Paj ntaub of the journey of the Hmong people from Laos to Thailand, during the War. From the collection of Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun. Photo: Will Brown

About the extra cover…
The Anti-Racist Zone sign included here was originally produced by Eric Joselyn as part of a series, created for use by activists convening in Philadelphia in response to a tide of Anti-Asian violence and immediately put to use in the streets. 1992

Knowing our place / going on 20

The Folklore Project turns 20 this year. One thing we know for sure is that we are just beginners in this work. This issue of *Works in Progress* features writing by and about people who have been engaged for much longer than two decades in the cultivation of folklore and local knowledge. These are people devoted to community, deeply responsible to the times and places where they find themselves. These are people who know particulars— details of ordinary experience and exacting craft— that escape the notice of many. Another thing that we know: this matters a lot.

In one of my favorite books, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, ethnographer Keith Basso writes of riding the Arizona landscape with Apache friends who instruct him about local place-names. Handed-down and "handsomely-crafted," these names (rarely found on maps) are fine story prompts. Telling what happened here, making claims and judgments about the history of a place, stories do a great deal of useful work. Some stories tell about people's experience, about foolishness and wisdom. Others provide guidelines for how to behave, for how to live a good life. And taken together, these stories give people intimate connections to the places where they dwell.

Place-names (and stories about them) are disarmingly simple forms of folklore that do powerful work. They keep us responsible to other people and other times. Intensely local knowledge, folklore anchors us to community and reminds us what is at stake. These pages share examples of people using folklore to name where they stand, to pay attention, to work for balance, beauty, equity and justice.

In the 1910s and 1920s, under the leadership of Ben Fletcher, an African American dockworker and a union organizer for the International Workers of the World (Wobblies), the Philadelphia docks were unusual in being racially integrated. In his essay on Wobbly songlore in this issue, eminent folklorist Archie Green shows what might be known of such radical working people as Fletcher through the record of the songs they may have sung. What did workers have to say in these songs? Why did they sing? In what languages? For what causes? Archie's writing, to be published as the preface to the forthcoming *Big Red Songbook* roots PFP in time and place as well, for his lifelong work has paved the way for a public interest folklore agency like ours.

Artist Eric Joselyn's handy reworking of a common street sign (What rules do we really want to require? What priorities should the state really follow?) and his clip-and-use fortune-teller are 20th anniversary gifts to readers: examples of the kind of playful seriousness with which this artist engages the world. A retrospective exhibition of Eric's work, "What you got to say?" is in PFP's gallery through February. Adapting folk traditions and popular culture, Eric has found his place supporting local struggles, and the show is a sampling of what a range of people have had to say, often at some risk, over the past 25 years here. In March we will open a second retrospective exhibition. This one documents a different slice of more than 28 years of cultural work here, featuring paj ntaub textiles from the workshop of Upper Darby artist Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun, who has over the decades organized dozens of other Hmong women and kin in stitching versions of Hmong peoples' experiences. Their changing needleworks tell stories of a remembered homeland, war and loss, and resettlement. Just as important: the needlework has served as an ongoing and reliable resource for negotiating these challenges.

One of three immigrant artists featured in this issue, exiled Tibetan sand mandala-maker Losang Samten carries his sense of place with him— by turning any space at all, wherever he finds himself, into a sacred space through his art, bringing us with him. Shaping mandalas, Losang teaches patience, perseverance and a sense of the interconnectedness of all things. (He will be in residence at the Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School this winter— the school that PFP founded with Asian Americans United.) Vera Nakonechny's commitment to reconstructing specific ethnic Ukrainian weaving traditions— beginning with the traditions of the Hutsul region where her mother was born— has carried her across three continents, and distinguishes her activities here in Philadelphia. She is literally helping people re-knit their connections to home places with her needlework. The ethnic and tribal patterns were forbidden, and dangerous to make, under Soviet rule, and much has been forgotten. Her work counters this loss.

These artists remind us: there is no lack of important work to be done. We register in these pages concerns with diminishing freedom of expression, literacies, patience, local knowledge: all core folklore issues here and now, requiring attention.
Every day in Philadelphia, folk arts — mandalas, paj ntaub, songs, weavings, slogans, demonstrations and more— are among the resources people use to enact responsibility to one another and to this place, now home.

No less than Apache ranching families long in a single place, all of these people are experts in a kind of local knowledge: they know where they stand, and in revealing the details and complexity of this knowledge, they help us to know where we, too, need to stand.

— Debora Kodish

We try to be strong.

Paj ntaub (story cloth) from Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun. Photo by Will Brown. Inserts, top to bottom: Pang Xiong and her family in Laos, c. 1959. Pang playing a jaw's harp, with T-Bee Lo. Photo: Jane Levine, 1993. Pang and other Hmong women in the early years of producing paj ntaub for sale here in Philadelphia. Photo: Tom Morton, c. 1990

by Sally Peterson

Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun

Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun says that she would like to make a movie of her life in four parts. Pang Xiong has lived in Philadelphia, and devoted herself to sustaining Hmong culture, for more than 28 years now. She and I worked together on several projects in the 1980s. My visit now, after a long absence, comes when Pang is preparing a retrospective exhibition of her needlework, and in particular the paj ntaub (flower cloth) of the Hmong people, an art that she has developed in many ways here in Philadelphia. She begins to reflect on a life that began 63 years ago in Xieng Khouang province in the mountains of northern Laos, not far from the borders of Vietnam and China.

The first part of the movie, explains Pang, would establish the geographic and historical setting of the Laotian Hmong, an ethnic group that migrated southward from China to the northern highlands of Southeast Asia several hundred years ago. Self-reliant and industrious, Hmong clans farmed the lands alongside their mountain-top villages and slowly expanded their settlements throughout the highlands of Laos. Though without a written language until the 1950s and the arrival of Christian missionaries, the Hmong retained a highly sophisticated oral literature and history, and the women excelled in minute and delicate forms of embroidery and appliqué that embellished their clothing. In Pang's movie, the picturesque scenery of the Laotian highlands and the stability and familiarity of home, family, and tradition form the backdrop to the love story of her parents, which ended tragically with the death of her mother when Pang was just seven years old.

"In the second part of my movie," she says, "the communists come." In 1945, when Pang Xiong was just one year old, the occupying Japanese surrendered the country to the French, who had ruled Laos since 1890. Vietnamese-backed nationalists struggled for control, and Xieng Khouang was contested territory. One of Pang's earliest memories is a hurried departure to nearby caves to escape a bombing attack. "Where is my spoon? Don't forget my spoon!" She laughs to remember her childish anxiety in the face of such danger. She knows she was wearing toddler clothing, so she must have been about two years old. "I loved my spoon, I had my own spoon. And my little basket for the back."

Pang Xiong's safe, insulated Hmong world changes in part 2 of her movie with the death of her mother and the constant threat of war. Life is dangerous and difficult. Though only seven, she is the older sister. Her mother was her father's third wife. There are 14 children to care for. She learns quickly, helped by her aunt and her grandmother. A stepmother joins the family with several of her own children. Then she too dies in childbirth. There are more children to care for, and soon a new mother and new siblings.

Describing the events that formed her character, Pang Xiong introduces themes that echo throughout her story: the obligation to family and the value of selfless generosity. Her father, Xia Cao Xiong, encouraged her to be strong, to understand her place in the extended family, and to have compassion for its other members: "My father told me, 'You have a dad. But they don't have a dad. Your mom can help you, but your dad is like a tree

[Continued on next page →]

Samples of paj ntaub from Pang's workshop by Will Brown.

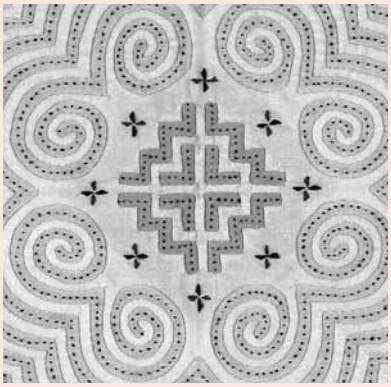
standing up, and you are like a bird under the tree. They don't have the tree. So you are happy already. Accept for them to call me their dad. Sometimes they get more than you. But don't be jealous. Love is more important.'"

If Pang Xiong's movie has a message, I think it must be an inspirational one. Her inner wellspring of exuberant life and dynamic creativity cannot be suppressed.

Pang Xiong always wanted to be either a teacher or a nurse—she needed to help people, she says, but she also wanted the uniform! But her father could not afford to formally educate a girl. Xia Cao knew his daughter was bright, and a good learner, and so he encouraged her to become a student of Hmong culture itself: to learn to cook, to sing the intricately rhymed kwx txhiaj songs (used in a kind of semi-improvised verbal display and duel, during courtship), to play musical instruments, to do her paj ntaub. Xia Cao shared with his daughter his own repertoire of Hmong lore, teaching her things not usually shared with children so young or with females. A shaman who diagnosed and treated spiritual and physical illnesses before his conversion to Christianity, Xia Cao was also versed in the protocols and recitations of marriage settlement mediators, knew the legendary stories of Hmong history, and enjoyed telling a good folktale. Pang Xiong quickly excelled as a kwx txhiaj singer and developed her paj ntaub skills, executing minute and complex cross-stitch patterns. She learned to fold and cut the intricate designs of Hmong appliqué, anchoring the cut fabric to the backing cloth with tiny "mos mos" stitches, intrigued by the challenges of the unfolding geometry. The two-inch-squares she produced became borders for jackets, collars, aprons, and skirts for herself, her brothers, and her sisters.

"One day I had to know how to read," she says. She repeats, in a whisper to herself, "One day, I had to know how to read." She persuaded her brother to teach her so she could read and answer the notes coming to her from boys. Soon she had organized the younger brothers and sisters and the household tasks well enough that her parents allowed her to attend the night classes offered by the local Christian pastor's wife. Eventually, the family would rely on her ability to learn.

Isolated no more, Hmong



Pang Xiong teaching children needlework. Photo: Jane Levine

villagers in 1954 Xieng Khouang were at the edge of a war that would eventually engulf them. Ho Chi Minh's communist forces defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, not far to the east in Vietnam. Soon refugees fleeing the communists began streaming into Xieng Khouang. Pang Xiong's family sold produce and farm products to the new arrivals. Pang Xiong became fluent in Lao and Thai: languages used for exchange among people from many ethnic groups who spoke different "first" languages. An able and effective communicator, she was quick to read nuances of character and motivation. She understood the persuasive power of language and behavior, and she used it wisely. One terrifying night, her emerging abilities were put to the test.

In the late 1950s, the Pathet Lao communists, backed by North Vietnam, began an offensive to occupy more territory in Northern Laos. Pang Xiong recalls Hmong soldiers of the opposing Royal Lao Army interrupting a community-wide New Year's celebration and ordering everyone to evacuate because the Pathet Lao were expected to overrun the area very soon. Taking only what they could carry, the village population fled. The next night, Pang Xiong, her sisters-in-law, and her younger brothers crept back to feed the animals, cook food, and retrieve whatever they could from the abandoned farm. It was too dangerous for men and older boys to go; the Pathet Lao were detaining those of military service age. Pang's little group had almost finished its tasks when an enemy patrol interrupted them. Pang Xiong nerved herself to respond gaily to the suspicious questions: "No, no, we didn't run away. We are just farmers. No, no, we don't know any soldiers." The commander believed her and let them go, but she never saw her home again.

In the late 1950s, Thailand and the United States became increasingly concerned about the growing influence of Vietnamese-backed nationalists pursuing a socialist agenda in Laos, supported by both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Prohibited by

> My father told me, 'You have a dad. But they don't have a dad. Your mom can help you, but your dad is like a tree standing up, and you are like a bird under the tree. They don't have the tree.'

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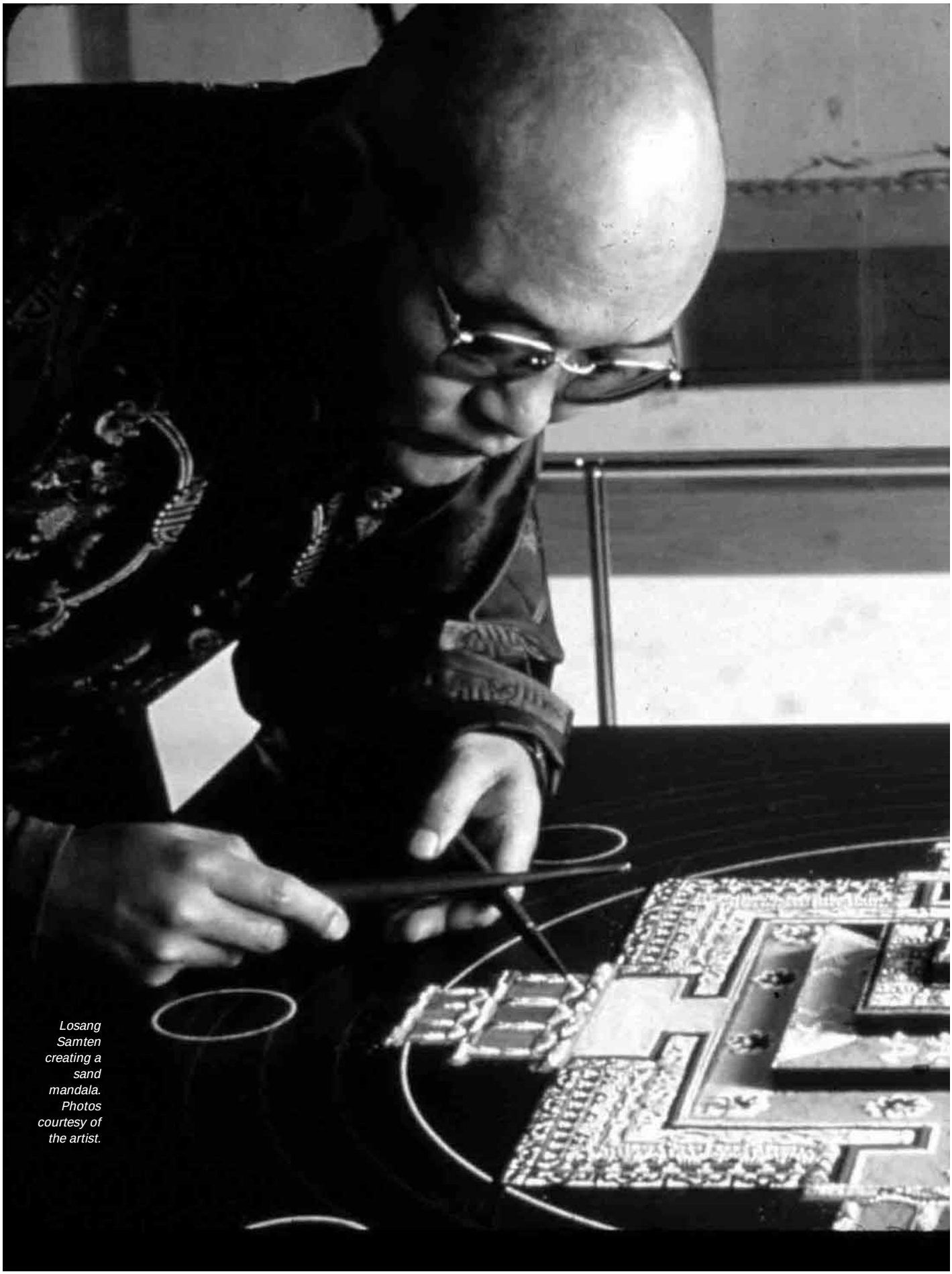
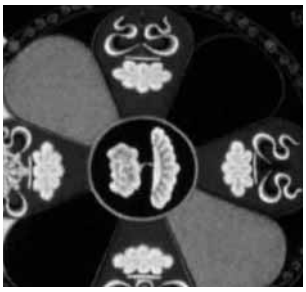
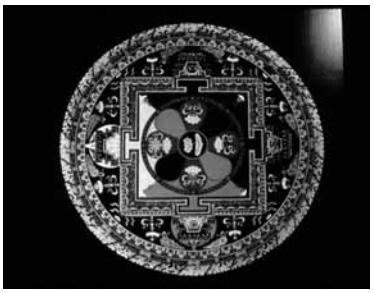


Losang Samten creating a sand mandala. Photos courtesy of the artist.

by Toni Shapiro-Phim

the witnessing of patience: losang samten





A mandala (literally, "circle") is an intricate diagram of the universe or cosmos in sacred terms. Ancient Buddhist and Hindu temples built as mandalas still dot South and Southeast Asia. In Buddhist Tibet, further north, mandalas have been painted on walls or scrolls since around the 12th century. Tibetan mandalas can also be made out of colored sand. Each of the numerous Tibetan mandala designs has its own complex iconography and its own purpose—to heal, to represent and teach compassion, to explore the roots of suffering, and so on.

Losang Samten has been painting mandalas with sand for more than three decades. Born in Tibet, and a resident of Philadelphia for the past 18 years, Losang made his first sand mandala in the U.S. in 1988 after the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's highest-ranking spiritual authority, invited him to work on a piece at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Whether the site is a museum, a Buddhist temple, a library, or a school, artists of sand mandalas both share their understanding of the cosmos and create a temporary sacred space through their "paintings." Artists may work on a single intricate design for weeks, painstakingly layering grains of colored sand. Yet, in keeping with the Buddhist principle of impermanence, ultimately the picture is wiped away, the sand ceremoniously poured into a lake or river or some other body of water, where it becomes, again, one with the environment.

Losang is particularly intrigued by the design known as "The Wheel of Life," which he has recreated many times over the years. "I have seen the power of this mandala to introduce ways for people to start asking questions about where the suffering of our world comes from and our individual and community troubles as well," he says. "When they start to ask these questions, and to see the roots of suffering, they can act in ways that will change things for the better. The impact is on the individual, as well as the community."

The Wheel of Life mandala, as Losang explains, focuses on the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. "There are four

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point of view

BULLETIN No. 5.

AN APPEAL TO THE SEAMEN

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE OF THE
MARINE TRANSPORT WORKERS' INDUSTRIAL UNION, NO. 510,
INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD
PHILADELPHIA BRANCH

The Big Red Songbook: 100 Years of Wobbly Songlore

Few workers' associations in the United States exist long enough to celebrate their centennials. Trade unions, fraternal organizations, and neighborhood alliances all fall victim to shifts in ideological or physical environments. Before a labor union reaches its hundredth year, it is likely to have merged with parallel or subordinate groups. Thus, members face their anniversaries with diverse feelings: do we honor old age alone; is it only survival that matters; or, alternately, do we elevate a particular symbolic emblem or special formulation to represent out identity?

From its inception in Chicago in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World chose as its guiding cause revolutionary industrial unionism. To the extent that IWW members concerned themselves consciously with cultural theory, like rival radicals, they relegated expressive material to an auxiliary role. In short, bedrock economic struggle took priority over secondary artistic forms.

Songs, stories, sayings, skits and related ephemera commented upon class conflict, but did not rise to the level of direct action in mine, mill, forest or factory. Whether rebel viewed work through Darwinian or Marxian eyes, each job site determined the contour of life itself. A song, however categorized, might ease a worker's pain, help in getting through the day, or, even beyond individual needs, assist in transforming society.

As 2005 approached, in recognition of the IWW's centennial, a group of friends discussed the possibility of publishing *The Big Red Songbook*, a comprehensive gathering of songs and poems as they appeared in the various editions of the IWW's "Little Red Songbook." These individuals did not constitute a formal (or even an ad hoc) editorial committee. We undertook to research and write the various portions of the new edition, forthcoming from the Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company. It is my task, here, to present an overview of IWW songlore.

Even before the IWW's formal chartering a hundred years ago, farsighted industrial unionists spoke in many tongues reflecting different nativities and philosophies. Accepting the responsibility of building a then-new workers' movement, labor-union loyalists, anarcho-syndicalists, and socialists framed their messages in a rainbow of voices. Similarly, hard-rock miners, straw cats who harvested wheat, fruit and other crops, lintheads in textile mills, mariners, castaways and wanderers shouted or whispered as their separate skills demanded.

Some IWW writers and orators both in their journalism and

by Archie Green

Flyer for striking IWW members, 1920s, and Little Red Songbook. From PFP archives.

soapboxing mastered high rhetoric; others favored vernacular style. Readers of the IWW press and street-corner listeners encountered language derived from Shakespeare and Shelley, as well as the saloon and the brothel. Unlike many radicals before and after 1905, the IWW accepted strange accents, surreal deliveries, zany humor, and pungent cartoons as proper in the organization's discourse.

IWW words declaimed or sung in poem and song functioned similarly to those in writing. Industrial-union pioneers did not create a rich body of songlore either by calculated design or by divine inspiration. Rather, founders came to Chicago well acquainted with plural musical genres: classical radical fare (e.g. items in *Socialist Songs with Music*, issued by Charles Kerr, 1901); popular hits of stage and parlor (Stephen Foster to Irving Berlin); evangelical hymns (Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey); traditional occupational folksong (not yet gathered in published anthologies but present in plural craft, regional, and ethnic communities).

In short, to understand the IWW's contagious musical blend, one must hear in the mind's ear rebel unionists who knew "L'Internationale" and "La Marseillaise," as well as homespun shanties and ballads indigenous to ranch bunkhouse, hobo jungle, or mountain mining camp. Before and during the IWW's formative years, textile workers literally sang "Hard Times in the Mill"; coal diggers and hard-rock "ten-day stiffs" shared the mournful "Only a Miner"; itinerant toilers along countless miles of railroad tracks spun out pieces such as "Big Rock Candy Mountain"— in straight or bawdy form, compensatory vehicles for rootlessness.

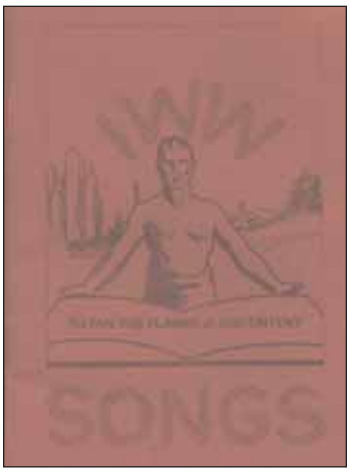
Of the many musical idioms available to IWW members, one form dominated: the polemical. With the appearance of IWW newspapers *(Industrial Worker, Spokane; Solidarity*, Cleveland), readers submitted new tests usually set to then-popular vaudeville tunes or gospel-hymn standards. Editors varied in their reception to minstrel contributions; they printed some items in their journals and others on pocket-sized cards, reminiscent of earlier broadsides. In 1909, the Spokane IWW branch gathered two dozen numbers, new and old, into a red-jacketed booklet titled *Songs of the Industrial Workers of the World*.

In 1968, Richard Brazier reminisced about his role on the committee which prepared the first songbook. A few of his words reveal the editors' rationale: "…to destroy the old myths that have enslaved us for so long. We will have songs that hold up flaunted wealth and threadbare morality to scorn, songs that lampoon our masters…[Our songbook] will exalt the spirit of Rebellion."

Subsequent editors in 1910-11 added phrases to the booklet's title such as *Songs of the Workers: On the Road, in the Jungles, and in the Shops; Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent.* No one knows who first tagged this gathering the "Little Red Songbook." It proved to be the IWW's most popular publication; it caught on beyond the Union's ranks.

The nickname "Wobbly" began circulating in 1913-1914; it has been joined at the hip to the organization's songbooks. In continuous print from 1909 to the present, these booklets have gone through 37 editions. (Bibliographers still puzzle over the exact number of printings and the sequence of editions.)

Over the years, editors have deleted particular items either for dated content, in response to



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VERA NAKONECHNY: my art is my passion

I was born in Germany after the war, in a displaced persons camp, to Ukrainian parents who had been taken from Ukraine to forced labor in Germany. Later on, my parents moved to Brazil, where I grew up. Since my early childhood, I enjoyed working with my hands. Embroidery and art crafts were mandatory subjects in grade school, and I developed a real passion for embroidery. Seeing my interest, my mother talked to me about Ukrainian embroidery patterns and different stitches, particularly recalling a technique where you embroider from the reverse side of the fabric. I was very intrigued and determined to learn this art one day.

When I came to United States in 1962 and settled in Philadelphia, I continued to embroider and to research the technique my mother had spoken of. I soon found out that the technique was called "nyzynka" and it was from the Hutsul region of Ukraine, in the Carpathian Mountains, the region where she had grown up. I joined the Ukrainian Women's League of America, Philadelphia branch, which offered a comprehensive course in Ukrainian embroidery. I also found someone to teach me nyzynka—Mrs. Eudokia Sorochaniuk.

Mrs. Sorochaniuk is from the Hutsul region also, and she is a master craftsperson where Hutsul native embroidery, weaving, and folk costume are concerned. She is an authority on nyzynka and is the author of the book *Nyzynka: The Embroidery of the Hutsuls*. She showed me many different folk artifacts from that region—more than I had ever seen: leatherwork, beadwork, and cutwork as well as embroidery and weaving. I fell in love with her mastery and skill, and with the intricate patterns and motifs, colors and styles. I wanted to learn everything that there was to know about it. I wanted to go to Ukraine to visit the region where all this folk art originated.

In 1992, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, when Ukraine became independent, I took my

mother to visit her homeland, her native village, and relatives, after 50 years of separation. During that trip I also took the opportunity to visit the Hutsul region. It was a very exciting and emotional visit. In one of the villages the Hutsuls were having an annual festival, and besides sampling the traditional foods, I had the opportunity to see people wearing different styles of embroidered patterns, with breath-taking color combinations and compositions of old and genuine Hutsul folk costumes.

But speaking with some of the younger Hutsul women, I found out that they didn't know how to embroider with the nyzynka technique. During the Soviet occupation the authorities would severely punish you if you were embroidering or weaving traditional ethnic or regional patterns. Their objective was to destroy any Ukrainian art and to create the so-called Soviet art for everyone instead. So much knowledge was lost. That really puzzled me, and upon returning to the States I contacted Mrs. Sorochaniuk for help. She put together a package of embroidered samples of "nyzynka" patterns, instruction manuals, and her book and sent all this material to the local Hutsul embroidery guild group back in the Ukraine, and also to teaching institutions in the Hutsul region. Thanks to her actions, there is now a strong rebirth of nyzynka embroidery technique among Hutsul people.

I have now made 12 trips to Ukraine, and I have discovered that the embroidery patterns and woven components of the traditional folk costumes from other parts of Ukraine are just as beautiful—colorful, with complicated motifs—as those from among the Hutsuls, where my mother came from. I was especially intrigued by the "plachta" from the Poltava region. The plachta is a two-panel skirt, joined together with a specific unification stitch. This pattern and style has not been taught for a long time and was almost forgotten. It was difficult to find someone who knew the techniques. Through personal contacts, I gained access to the Lviv Folk Art Academy in order to learn to weave this skirt.

To my surprise, I found out that the looms and other equipment in the Lviv Museum were very old and outdated. This was in 1993, only two years after Ukraine had become independent. The budget of the old Soviet Ukraine had intentionally neglected the Museum: no funds had been appropriated for new equipment or other basic Museum expenses. The electricity was still rationed, so all the work in the Academy shops had to be done during daylight. When I was there, one day, just as we finished threading the loom, it got dark—all the lights in the building were turned off. But we needed more time to finish the job. So I took a mini-flashlight that I carried in my pocketbook, and that is how we finished the project!

Now Ukraine is in the fifteenth year of independence, and things have improved: the equipment has been replaced or updated, and the museum's electricity and heating have been restored.

I have continued to pursue my studies of Ukrainian folk arts. For the past two years I have been traveling to Ukraine looking for someone who knows a special woven belt technique. It seems that no one can understand how to make it. I even went to the College of Textiles here in Philadelphia for help, and they also have no idea how this is done. Recently I was told that in two remote villages in the neighboring Ternopil and Bukovyna regions there are some old weavers who still know and use the technique. My plans now are to go to Ukraine, to take with me a small portable loom and the necessary threads, and then to stay in those villages until I master the technique.

For the past 12 years I have been traveling to Ukraine to conduct research on embroidery, weaving, and beadwork in order to further my knowledge of these folk arts and to better understand my ancestors' rich culture. I have been amazed to see the hidden treasures stored in the vaults of every museum I have visited. At the same time, I have been horrified to see the archaic methods used in the battle with the moths! Many irreplaceable artifacts were destroyed by infestations. In my visits, I have shared what I have learned over the years, and I have forged relationships with others equally committed to the preservation of these traditions.

My art is my passion, and I feel a strong need to learn as much as I can about the millennium-old folk culture of my ancestors so I can pass it on to a younger generation. I am so grateful for all that I have gotten: the knowledge, the relationships with artists. We have become one big family, on two sides of the world, puzzling over this art form that was supposed to be lost.

Vera Nakonechny at a loom. Courtesy of artist. Photos of details of her work: Will Brown.

IRAQ
BIG
MISTAKE
TIME TO
COME HOME

by Debora Kodish

Eric Joselyn: "What you got to say?"

Politically active his whole life, Eric Joselyn is known among an extended community of activists as an invaluable resource. Rarely credited publicly, he is a prolific working artist who has been turning peoples' demands and dreams into eye-catching (and conscience-catching) physical and visual expressions for decades. Without recognizing it, you may well have seen his work displayed street-side: at local demonstrations for immigrants' rights, at antiwar protests, at street theater against racism. Thousands of Chinatown residents and allies fighting to stop the city from putting a stadium in Chinatown wore t-shirts Eric designed. He crafted many of the cardboard bulldozers, puppets, costumes, and signs that local people carried to City Council chambers to protest against the city's use of eminent domain to displace poor and working families from their homes. Aiming to even the odds for social justice movements, his deceptively simple arts and crafts are good tools for popular struggles.

Eric Joselyn photo, and photos of his work, courtesy of the artist

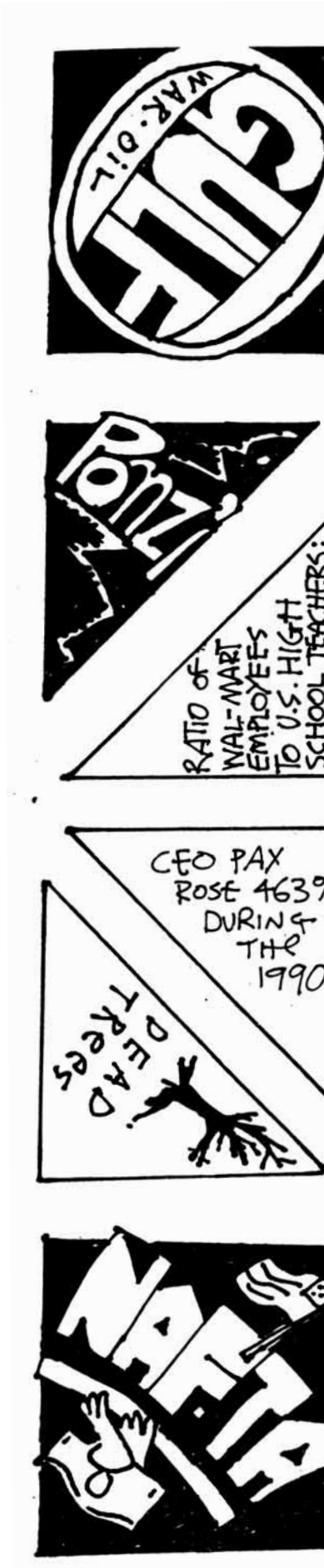
[Continued on page 18 →]

clip, fold & use your own eric joselyn fortune-feller paper toy

Part of the material culture of childhood, these folded paper toys have been used as fortune-telling devices and for other playful purposes for at least 50 years. They are widely reported, and have been described in many variations and by many names, including "fortune-tellers," "salt cellars," "film star oracles," "wiggle-waggles" and "cootie catchers."* Contemporary artists have made use of the form; mathematicians use them to teach basic principles. Eric Joselyn made this one for a "free-trade parade" that was part of the Philadelphia Fringe Festival in September 2006. Suited "capitalists" passed out the fortune-tellers to spectators: a bit of fun to open crowds to the critique.

how to make it:

- **Cut the folded paper off at the -------.**
- **Fold the "Dupont" corner over to meet the "Gulf War Oil" corner, and uncrease.**
- **Fold "Enron" corner to meet "Dupont" and uncrease.**
- **Flip the toy over.**
- **Fold all four corners over so that they meet in the middle. (Four full squares and eight triangles will be showing).**
- **Turn it over. You should be looking at 16 triangles with "fortunes."**
- **Fold each of the corners in to the middle. You should see 8 triangles: "Dead trees," "Toxins," "My S.U.V.", etc.**
- **Crease the square in quarters, through the middle of each flap. (If you flip it over, you will see the 4 squares.)**
- **Back on the side with the 8 triangles, bring the outside points together in the middle.**
- **Pull out the square flaps: "Dupont," "Gulf War," etc.**
- **Place thumb and index finger in each flap to manipulate.**



* For examples, see Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), Mary and Herbert Knapp, *One Potato, Two Potato* (1976), and Simon Bronner, *American Children's Folklore* (1988)

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FREE TRADE

eric joselyn/ *continued from p. 15*

You don't usually find Eric's work in a gallery. The Folklore Project's exhibition this winter is a rare chance to see a sampling of more than 25 years of his efforts all in one place: high-spirited handmade props for demonstrations, stylish do-it-yourself banners, a forest of words on signs, and texts filled with painful reminders of the constant need to fight for justice.

The exhibition catalogues time-honored and newly-minted forms of political expression—banners, placards, t-shirts, buttons, badges, puppets, and toys—each representing some pressing concern of the last two decades. The exhibition is also a compelling inventory of some of the struggles of local communities.

Eric Joselyn's work challenges common notions of art-making in many ways. His work is not about individual creativity for its own sake, or about novelty or reputation. Creative, inventive, and fundamentally about what a principled individual can do, Eric has a clear commitment to standing with others. The words on signs and banners don't just come from this artist alone or represent a singular vision: they come from groups of people mobilizing together. As an artist, Eric is about facilitating community expression on issues that matter. He says, "Putting visual tools into the hands of people working to turn this system over gives me a big dose of my kind of aesthetic pleasure. Traditional community skills and popular cultural traditions have taught me a lot about building a happy and democratic opposition to the greedy, hateful society foisted upon us. I'm offering ideas for tying our art to the ceaseless drive of regular people everywhere to build a better world. I am excited by seeing the things we make put to righteous use towards a righteous end."

Folk arts play an important role in his politics and style. Growing up in a politically progressive midwestern family, exposed to examples of busy people who made beautiful and useful things by hand. His grandmother encouraged his artistic inclinations, and provided many examples of how everyday folk arts, lovingly made, could bring beauty into people' lives, while also sustaining a family. He remembers her quilting, sewing and canning: many-colored jars of fruits and vegetables preserved like exotic specimens in the basement. The Minnesota State Fair, with its annual gathering of the work of peoples' hands—prize vegetables, kids with animals they had raised— is another valued touchstone for him of how ordinary peoples' artistic productions can be publicly celebrated and appreciated. These grassroots contexts for art-making, rather than galleries and formal institutions, were important models for him, as he tried to define his own role as an artist.

It wasn't an obvious road for someone with a clear and developed politics. Eric's talents and inclinations set him on an artistic path, but the conventional role of a school-trained gallery-bound artist just didn't feel right. He studied art at the University of Minnesota, but resisted the push to disconnect from the world, retreat to a studio, or hone a personal vision and skills. He says, "That I almost need to make stuff is a fact. But I just couldn't spend my days in some one artist-one product-one consumer equation. I eschewed the label of 'artist.' I was something else." Eric says that it took time to find a way "to break through such a closed circuit."

He eventually came to see himself as part of a long line of cultural workers: "from naughty balladeers in pre-Revolutionary France, to woodblock cutters and jugglers spouting mass line in turbulent China, to the wives who sewed those gorgeous union local banners with all the gold tassels carried before the 8-hour day was won." And then there were broadside printers and artists, who turned out pointed political

messages on hand-printed sheets. Like all these artists, Eric found a place, shoulder to shoulder with others, helping to shape and broadcast peoples' messages loud and clear. By now, he has serious street credibility as a community-based political artist. As the exhibition makes clear, he has contributed his artistry and political savvy to countless progressive efforts, creating "multiples" (flyers, t-shirts— work that can be handed up or posted in large numbers) and "highly visables" (banners, puppets, and the like). He aims to change the world, to make popular movements "look better" (adding aesthetics and style), and to encourage people to have fun in the process.

These values also infuse his teaching, another way that he "engages with big numbers of others." He has now spent decades working with young people, painting walls, making prints, and teaching in public schools. (He currently is the Art Teacher at the two-year-old Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School, a project of Asian Americans United and the Philadelphia Folklore Project.) As a teacher in and outside of the classroom, he democratizes art-making, making it do-able, fun, and a way for young people and activists alike to exercise power. And of course, nothing is wasted. Eric uses (and re-uses) materials at hand— cardboard, wit and will. There are lessons, and politics to everything.

Twenty-some years after he left Minnesota, Eric has transferred many of the politics, values, and ethics of eclectic folk arts to Philadelphia's gritty streets, and to the communities among whom he has made a home. He continues to produce arts that are accessible, meant to be used, grounded in freely-shared knowledge, essential to sustaining meaningful relationships, aimed at making a better world. In his hands, art continues to advance collective efforts and alternative perspectives. In a saner world, in another time or place, he would have been a village potter, or made things with cloth, he says. Given these times, his approach to art-making is to use native wit, a keen sense of politics, and a storehouse of traditional arts and expressions to amplify people's capacity to speak to one another and to be heard. His work remains human-scaled, democratic, subversive, and quite literally community-based: his head and hands and skills are invested in the capacity, and struggles, of communities to make pressing and necessary changes.

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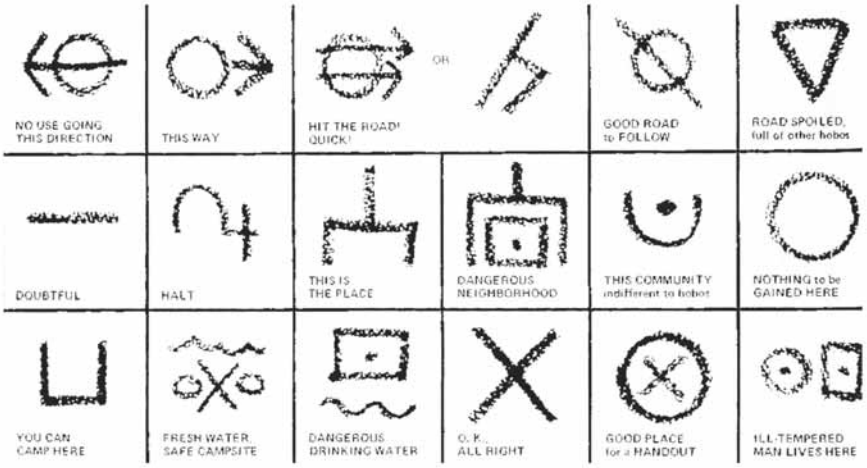

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the 1954 Geneva Convention from interfering with Laos openly, foreign governments aiming to help either the Royal Lao Army or the Pathet Lao carried out secret operations. The town of Padong, on a mountaintop six miles southwest of the Plain of Jars, became the headquarters for the clandestine recruitment and training of Hmong soldiers for the Royal Lao Army under the command of General Vang Pao. Organized and funded by the CIA, the Hmong were trained by American military advisors and by Thai military and special police personnel. Xia Cao Xiong's family and Hmong from over 70 Xieng Khouang villages fled south to Padong. Pang Xiong's stepmother's family worked a farm nearby, and once again Pang Xiong set up shop along the roadside, joining the many other young girls with impromptu coffee stands and soup pots who sold their wares to residents, refugees, military advisers, and Hmong trainees quartered in the town.

Pictures from that time show Pang Xiong as a pretty, petite, and stylish teenager with bright eyes and a wide smile. "Pretty cute," she admits. She surely sparkled, bantering with the young men who hung around as she deftly cooked the chickens they brought to her and wowed them with "Hmong salad," a concoction of cayenne peppers, scallions, cilantro, salt, and limes. Her fluency in Thai, her wit, and her singing talents soon brought her to the notice of a handsome young Thai paratrooper serving the Royal Lao Army as a medic. Charoon Sirirathasuk worked closely with the Hmong as a medical practitioner and weapons trainer. He began to visit Pang Xiong's house with her brothers, bringing gifts and supplies for her business. Soon, he asked to marry her. The match, she was told, would be good for her, and for the Hmong people, too. Charoon's service to the Hmong military and their families earned him respect, and his marriage to a Hmong woman deepened his ties to the Hmong people and their cause. Pang Xiong and Charoon met in January 1960. They were married in March. She was 15.

Pang Xiong's honeymoon in Bangkok ends the second part of her movie. Part 3 opens in Thailand in the mid-1960s. Pang Xiong is living in Sukhothai with Charoon's family. She has given birth to three sons, finished sixth grade, attended Thai Girl Scout courses, and studied tailoring. The war has escalated in Laos, and now Hmong troops are fighting battles as well as monitoring the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the route through eastern Laos used by the North Vietnamese Army to supply its mission in the South.

Charoon was still headquartered in Laos, and Pang Xiong joined him for months at a time, assisting him in the vaccination programs that were part of his military duties. They maintained homes in both countries, and Pang's younger brother lived with them.

The war in Laos did not go well for the Hmong people. Many, many Hmong soldiers died, including five of Pang's brothers. The Hmong were losing territory to the North Vietnamese-backed Pathet Lao, and the Americans were losing the political will to continue a war with little remaining domestic or international support. Promises of an independent country and of continuing aid and support for the Hmong people evaporated. In 1973, a cease-fire was proclaimed, the Americans pulled out, and all Thai civilians working for the government had to leave Laos. World opinion correctly predicted that the forces led by Hmong General Vang Pao would not be able to withstand the Pathet Lao for long. In 1975, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos fell. The Hmong leadership was airlifted out of Laos, while the crowds of Hmong following them were turned back with gunfire. The emergent government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic instituted a policy of repression toward the remaining Royalists, and the Hmong had been their most effective enemies. Many Hmong felt they had no choice but to flee.

Safe in Thailand but sick with worry for her family, Pang Xiong could not get word of their fate. She listened avidly to the daily Hmong broadcast from Chiang Mai, Thailand, and was shocked when she heard her father's voice with a message for her. Like other stranded refugees, he had sent a tape-recording to the radio station from a temporary holding camp. Pang and Charoon traveled across Thailand to see the family members who had arrived from Laos and try to learn the fate of those who had stayed behind. The reunion in the overcrowded, unsanitary, and restrictive environment of the temporary refugee camp was filled with both joy and uncertainty. Lao citizens residing in Thailand, like Pang Xiong, had only one month to decide whether or not to join their families in refugee camps to await resettlement in the United States. Pang had lived in Thailand for 15 years. She had a home, a farm, a successful restaurant business, and a tailoring job. But her family was moving far away to America; one brother had already gone "to Pillapilli, something, Puppiafia." She laughs, remembering the strangeness of the sound of "Philadelphia." What should she do? She tells me in detail, nearly 30 years later, what happened: "I go back to my brother, I say, 'We have to go inside the camp. Because we don't want to stay here anymore. I need my people. I need to see my people. The years I've come to Thailand, too long already.' I cry, I say, 'I need to go. If you don't want to, that's OK. I go.' He says, 'Yes, I go.'"

Now the parents of six young sons, Charoon and Pang Xiong sold their property, their livestock, and their car and registered at Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. They were quickly enlisted as staff. Charoon trained medical assistants in the hospital, and Pang Xiong taught sewing and hygiene to adult women, drawing upon her paj

[Continued on next page →]

ntaub skills, her tailoring experience, and her Thai Scout training. She felt that she was in her element when teaching. She was proud of the success of her students, and she insisted on high standards. Life in the camps, though, was hard. Many people were still suffering, many had lost their families. They didn't know what would happen to them.

In 1979, word came. Pang's brother Chao Xiong had arranged for them to join him in Philadelphia. They packed eight pillows and eight blankets. Two sets of clothes for each person. A box of dishes (do they have pots like these in America?). A box of paj ntaub wall hangings—producing enlarged, simplified adaptations of traditional designs to sell to tourists had become a cottage industry in the camps. Pang also packed her own paj ntaub—the pieces from her mother's hand, her auntie's hand, her grandmother's hand, her own hand. But there was room for little else. They boarded the plane for America.

Part 4 of Pang Xiong's life story finds her in Philadelphia. She was accustomed to succeeding through communicating, and her lack of English left her feeling frightened and frustrated. But a chance encounter with a Thai student led to an invitation to perform traditional Lao and Hmong dances at a Pan-Asian festival. Within three weeks of her arrival in America, Pang Xiong formed and trained a dance troupe that performed at Drexel University, International House in West Philadelphia, and public events sponsored by various church and civic organizations.

Philadelphia was a resettlement destination for thousands of refugees from Southeast Asia in the early 1980s. Some arts organizations, churches, schools, and volunteer agencies turned to the presentation of traditional arts—music, dance, and needlework—to ease the transition for refugees. Pang Xiong's knowledge of Hmong culture, ability to organize performances, and out-going communicative style made her an invaluable resource for ethnic arts programs, and she was frequently asked to perform for local schools and libraries. More opportunities developed as new relationships formed. The instructor in her intensive English program admired the paj ntaub needlework that Pang Xiong embroidered during breaks. She arranged for Pang Xiong to sell paj ntaub at Headhouse Square, a weekend crafts market in the heart of Philadelphia's tourist district. Pang discovered you couldn't just pack up and leave if you wanted to, as vendors did in Thailand, and it took a while to understand how to price the pieces—but she loved the atmosphere, and the income surprised her. (She has returned to Headhouse Square every summer since 1980, and has now been there longer than any other craftsperson.) Pang Xiong was not the only refugee Hmong woman to sell paj ntaub. Craft fairs, museums and galleries across the nation, wherever Hmong resettled after the war, displayed the flower cloth of Hmong women.

Resettled Hmong helped support relatives in refugee camps by selling the paj ntaub sent to them from Thailand. They suggested adaptations that would appeal to American consumers, adjusting sizes, supplementing the traditional palette of bright, contrasting colors with pastels and earth shades. The bulk of refugee camp production went to brokers in Thailand, but tens of thousands of pieces were sent to extensive networks of kin in resettlement communities in the United States, bolstering the stock of needlework made by resettled women. The labor-intensive story cloths, a pictorial form of embroidery that narrated scenes, stories, and experiences of Hmong life, were made almost exclusively in the refugee camps. Pang Xiong often accompanied other Hmong women to crafts fairs and other sales opportunities. But in 1980 occasional cultural arts programs and paj ntaub sales did not pay the rent, and Pang Xiong also pursued other means to make a living.

Like hundreds of thousands of immigrants to the United States, Pang Xiong and her family took advantage of every opportunity to earn income. Within three months of their arrival in Philadelphia, Pang Xiong, Charoon, and their two eldest sons found employment at a popular restaurant, (Friday, Saturday, Sunday), where they introduced touches of Hmong cooking. Pang pursued her life-long desire to be a nurse and completed a nursing assistant program. This work, however, did not bring her the joy and freedom that she experienced as an artist and as a vendor of traditional arts. Barely a year after her arrival in the United States, Pang Xiong performed and demonstrated paj ntaub at the 1980 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. She found the experience both exciting and profitable; her displays and performances sent many to the sales tent to purchase paj ntaub. The two weeks in Washington convinced Pang Xiong that making, selling, and presenting Hmong traditional arts not only produced income, but furthered understanding and appreciation between people. This was exactly what she wanted to do, and what she felt she did best.

Since 1980, Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun has maintained a successful business selling needlework crafted by Hmong hands, taking pieces on consignment, buying directly from other Hmong women, or ordering specific items from paj ntaub makers. She continually explores new ways to present paj ntaub, adapting embroidered borders to jackets and dresses, sewing handbags, Christmas ornaments, and dolls. Pang Xiong has shared selling opportunities with other Hmong women, although few can sustain the grueling hours,

[Continued on p. 24 →]

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discomfort, and uncertainty that accompanies craft fair participation for very long. In the mid-1980s Pang joined other Hmong women contracting with vendors in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to make quilts of contemporary Amish and Mennonite design. She now instructs over a dozen women in quilt-making and oversees production of hundreds of quilts a year.

By the late 1980s, Pang's passion for teaching and learning, not to mention her unerring ability to recognize and act upon opportunities, had made her an eloquent spokesperson for the values and aesthetics of Hmong culture. Journalists, scholars, and other artists still seek her opinions and ask her to share her knowledge. She has received national recognition and prestigious grants. Yet recognition, even on a national level, rarely brings dependable remuneration. Pang Xiong continued to fill gaps in the family income by picking blueberries in New Jersey, cleaning churches, and other forms of seasonal labor and domestic service.

As the years rolled by, Pang and Charoon's sons graduated from high school, then college, and began to marry. Grandchildren were born, and the older generation began to leave life. Within a few short years, Pang Xiong said final good-byes to a brother, her mother and father, and her husband, Charoon. The last time I saw Pang Xiong before this visit in 2006 was the day she buried her husband. She told me then, "I don't know what to do. I don't know what will happen to my life."

If Pang Xiong's movie has a message, I think it must be an inspirational one. Her inner wellspring of exuberant life and dynamic creativity cannot be suppressed. Since our last visit, Pang has made a second happy marriage. The whole family joined together to open Sukhothai Restaurant, named after Charoon's hometown in Thailand. Sukhothai enjoyed a popular run in Center City, only to succumb to the depressed business climate that arose in the aftermath of 9/11. Simultaneously, Pang Xiong completed training programs in medical and legal interpretation, serving her community by providing informed translations in Hmong, Lao, Thai, and English.

And still she bent her creative powers to the creation and promotion of Hmong needlework and its makers. A 1996 Pew Fellowship in the Arts enabled her to spend a year studying the weaving techniques of Green Hmong women, traveling to Hmong communities in China to learn from masters of the art. She shipped a full-sized loom back to Philadelphia.

Pang Xiong retains those early lessons about generosity, self-sacrifice, and devotion to the family. She remains a quick study—swiftly grasping the truth of a situation, swiftly intuiting deeper meanings. She gives Thai language lessons in her kitchen every Saturday, and feeds her students lunch. She continues to both preserve and invigorate the principles of Hmong paj ntaub. Recently, she has been experimenting with combining the cotton print fabrics used to appliqué Amish-style quilts with the geometrically complex designs of Hmong paj ntaub. The flowered prints commonly used to appliqué tulips and doves onto a creamy muslin for the Amish tourist trade seem to deepen and swirl when overlaid with a dizzyingly complex geometric Hmong reverse appliqué layer. The resulting creations pop with an energy that recalls the days when the intricacy and intelligence of Hmong paj ntaub design first burst onto the American art scene.

Pang Xiong's movie will never really end. Scenes of war and love, loss and renewal remain vivid for her. Evaluating her own experience, and those of her people, Pang Xiong says:

"We came to this country very sad, and we try to win something.

You cannot win the war. You cannot win the gun. You cannot win the life.

You say, what do I win?

I do not win my brother's life, he died...they killed him. They threw him in the Mekong River. He died. We do not win their life, I cannot bring them back.

I [can] not win my five brothers' lives.

But I win because my brothers' children are here.

My mother, my father came here, even though they died, but they win, because they already come here.

We win when we can get a house.

We win, we can get a new car.

We win, we can get a new home, we can be an American citizen.

We try to be strong here. We try to be an example people.

We win. My name is in books, articles, so I win that.

People know my name, know Pang Xiong.

You see, I win lots of things.

I win a lot. My children got bachelor's, master's degrees. That means I win.

Many people win in this country the same way with me. Same way.

But they don't know the meaning.

But my meaning's in my head."

A retrospective exhibition of paj ntaub and other needlework from **Pang Xiong Sirirathasuk Sikoun's** workshop will be on display at the Folklore Project: **March - June 2007**

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rings of images. The first one, in the center, consists of a pig (ignorance), rooster (greed and attachment), and a snake (anger). These negative emotions are considered the root of suffering. Together they lead to a cycle of rebirth. The Wheel of Life depicts this cycle through rings representing the realms of gods, demi-gods, human beings, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in hell."

When Losang is working, small bowls of richly colored sand rest on a nearby surface. The color symbolism is complex, but, in general, it is related to the five elements, with white representing water, yellow for earth, red for fire, green for air, and blue for space. In order to create a detail, perhaps a cloud or a particular animal, he begins by concentrating on the overall meaning of the mandala and on the specific image he is about to craft. Back in the 1970s, when Losang was studying at a monastery in a Tibetan exile community in India, his teacher explained that concentration, along with memorization of iconography, helps the artist produce a precise expression of the intended design. Traditionally, sand mandalas were the focus of meditation, and precise imagery is critical when a mandala is to be used for such a purpose. It is still important, says Losang, when the mandala has an aesthetic or educational role.

After sketching the outlines of the design in white on a dark base, Losang fills his chakpo (metal tool) with sand of one color and slowly guides the flow of grains through its tiny hole onto the surface of what will become an extremely complex, sometimes three-dimensional, composition. In Tibet or India, an artist can wipe superfluous grains away with a yak-hair brush. Here, Losang uses a specially shaped piece of wood.

Losang has created mandalas throughout the United States and Canada, most often at museums, galleries, and universities. He also works at schools. In all these settings, he discusses the local context with whomever has invited him, aiming to discern which mandala might be most appropriate for that place at that time. Onlookers not only witness the emergence of specific designs taking shape before them and learn something about a Tibetan Buddhist worldview; their experience also includes being in the presence of a remarkable depth of concentration, focus, and patience.

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

Losang's own journey as a practitioner of this tradition began with an intensive three and a half year training program at Namgyal Monastery in India from 1975 to 1978. This is the same Buddhist monastery at which he had been ordained as a monk in 1969, about a decade after escaping the brutal religious repression that began with China's invasion of Tibet in the 1950s. Buddhism, even though it is not monolithic in its practice in Tibet, has nonetheless been the defining essence of Tibetan civilization. It is estimated that of the half-million monks and nuns in Tibet prior to the invasion, more than half were tortured, murdered, or disrobed against their will by the aggressors. Thousands of monasteries were destroyed. When the Dalai Lama left Tibet in 1959, tens of thousands followed, including Losang's family.

The Dalai Lama based the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India. To this day, more than 100,000 Tibetans live in refugee settlements in India and Nepal. Many have moved on to third countries, including the United States.

Most of the 50 or 60 Tibetans in the Philadelphia area have been here less than ten years. They come together for cultural events, often on Tibetan holidays, and participate in ceremonies and other activities with the larger Tibetan community in New York whenever possible. At these gatherings, dance is a central feature. Losang, in addition to his artistry with sand, is an accomplished ritual and folk dancer. As a monk, he studied and performed sacred dances at temples. He also mastered Tibetan folk dances and music as a high school student at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts. This was the first official institution the Dalai Lama established after his arrival in Dharamsala, a testament to the value placed on expressive culture in Tibetan life.

Losang received a Geshe (doctoral) degree in Buddhist Sutra and Tantra Studies at Namgyal Tantric University in Dharamsala in 1985. He has been a teacher of meditation and Spiritual Director of the Tibetan Buddhist Center of Philadelphia since 1989, still traveling often to conduct meditation retreats around the country. In 1994 Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, awarded him an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity, and a year later the Maine College of Art in Portland gave him an Honorary Doctorate of Art. Hollywood called in 1997: Losang served as religious technical advisor and

[Continued on next page →]

losang samten/ *continued from p. 26*

sand mandala supervisor for Martin Scorsese's film Kundun.

He has been recognized with a 2002 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship in honor of his accomplishments as a sand mandala artist, as well as a Pew Fellowship in the Arts in 2004.

Losang makes annual trips to India, where he continues to learn from the Dalai Lama and other spiritual leaders and artists, studies mandala imagery in caves and old temples, and meditates. Because of travel restrictions and his relatives' lack of access to phones and computers, he cannot communicate with family members who remain in their small village in Tibet. He worries about them and about the future of Tibet and its rich culture. He attempts to better the world through his art and by leading others on meditation retreats, although he left the monkhood in 1994. Mandalas and spirituality are inextricably intertwined. As he explains, "The Buddha himself has been seen as a great artist, as one who has reached into deeper understandings of reality. I retreat and meditate to reach towards better understanding, too, and portray my point of view in my art."

This last quotation is from an interview by the author with Losang Samten published in PFA, the newsletter of the Pew Fellowships in the Arts (fall/winter 2004), p. 6.

Losang will be artist-in-residence at the Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School this winter.

wobbly songs/ *continued from p. 11*

change by members in personal taste, or in reaction to external issues. At times, behind-the-scenes debate on difficult pieces has revealed switches in position on large conceptual matters: job action, sabotage, lifestyle, gender, relations with other left-sectarian groups.

Although the IWW discouraged personality cults within its ranks, songwriter Joe Hill achieved legendary status initially among industrial unionists and subsequently in a larger group of CIO members, urban liberals, and unaffiliated radicals. Hill's life as a Swedish emigrant to the United States, his capacity to pen two dozen new Wobbly songs within a five-year span, his trial for murder and death by firing squad in Salt Lake City (1915), and unresolved questions of guilt or innocence combined to elevate him into the workers' pantheon.

The extensive literature on Joe Hill (by writers such as Ralph Chaplin, Joyce Kornbluh, Franklin Rosemont, Gibbs Smith, Barrie Stavis, and Wallace Stegner) leads readers beyond biography to searching questions on the nature of Wobbly lore and its "fit" as a chip in the mosaic of labor's heritage. IWW poets/composers strove to nurture revolutionary consciousness. Each piece—whether topical, hortatory, elegiac, sardonic, or comic—served to educate, agitate, and emancipate workers. Songs were intended as arrows to penetrate bourgeois (in Wobbly parlance, "scissorbill") mentality, and to anticipate a new social order—the commonwealth of toil.

In everyday practice as Wobblies sang at jungle campfires, in meeting halls, and during free speech rallies, much of their repertoire melted away. Some lyrics proved too taxing to sing; in short, they were unsingable. Others had been set to tunes that lost out in style wars. Still others became irrelevant as the IWW declined. However, a handful entered tradition—a few as folksongs, some as labor-union classics. Not all IWW members have enjoyed sharing material across institutional lines, nor upon hearing treasures performed by rivals: pragmatic craft unionists, reformist allies, left partisans.

Wobblies known for militancy on the job and life-defying bravery on the strike front were powerless to control the trajectory of their songs, or to determine life or death for given pieces. As their material reached large society, Wobblies responded ambivalently—happy that the Union had gone beyond its ranks; dismayed that strangers might distort the IWW's inherent message.

Three books in particular measure the spread of IWW songlore outside the organization's bounds. In 1909, Paul Brissenden, a California student in Economics, became interested in labor. In 1919, the Columbia University Press published his *The IWW: A Study in American Syndicalism* which included thirteen songs. In 1923, the University of Chicago Press issued Nels Anderson's *The Hobo*, an influential study of homeless men. It held four IWW songs.

Carl Sandburg's *The American Songbag* (1927) appealed well beyond campus walls with three Wobbly numbers. Sandburg conferred folksong rank for "The Preacher and the Slave." Under varied titles ("Long Haired Preachers," "Pie in the Sky") Joe Hill's parody of the hymn "Sweet Bye and Bye" moved out of labor's sphere to comment upon moral values in the American polity.

Ironically, a song introduced

[Continued on next page →]

outside the IWW orbit yet memorializing Hill achieved more fame than most pieces in the Wobbly canon. "Joe Hill" opens with "I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night alive as you and me." It has been sung by Joan Baez, Billy Bragg, Joe Glazer, Paul Robeson, Pete Seeger and many others. Alfred Hayes (lyrics) and Earl Robinson (music) offered it initially in 1936 at Camp Unity near New York City. Their gift—forged on a Communist Party Popular Front anvil— has sometimes been erroneously attributed to Hill himself by commentators who allege that he composed it as a salute to fellow workers and a projection of his immortality.

A few words on the troublesome matter of definition may help new readers in their evaluation of Wobbly songs. Most of the items gathered in *The Big Red Songbook* are no longer sung, but remain of interest to historians, sociologists, and a few labor-union partisans. Although the very first booklet held a traditional parody cherished by itinerant workers, "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" (irreverently titled "Hellelujah"), the IWW paid no special attention to folklore theory, or the supposed values inherent in folksong.

In the mid-1930s, some American communists touched by Popular Front ideology embraced folksong. This commitment carried through until the 1970s "folk boom," but it did not hold much appeal to Wobblies. However, the thirty-fourth edition songbook (1973), overturned precedent by including Woody Guthrie's "Union Maid." The thirty-fifth edition (1984), extended the process with Les Rice's "Banks of Marble." These two pieces represent "People's Songs" intrusions in time-tested IWW repertoires.

The subject of "intrusion" has, and continues to be, controversial. During the 1920s and '30s, IWW activists opposed Communist Party policies. However, by the 1970s, with the passing of many old-timers, young Wobblies were less invested in maintaining sectional differences. In this context, "Union Maid" became acceptable to the IWW.

Beyond the merits of enlarging a songbook with "outside" material, labor partisans face a difficult question: pop culture's influence on Wobbly expression (characterized by Franklin Rosemont in his study *Joe Hill*, 2003, as "revolutionary working-class counterculture"). I ask: Should Wobblies have resisted Popular Front formulas and "folksong revival" fare? What are this dilemma's implications for labor unionists in their cultural decisions? How do we navigate between contestational and conciliatory strategies?

Present-day IWW activists divide in assessing their musical heritage. Some assert: "Economic forces outweigh cultural expression; we need only to alter conditions at the point of production; class struggle relegates songlore to a derivative role." Others suggest that IWW songs captured the union's spirit better than its manifestoes, pamphlets, and proceedings. "We should not apologize for our songs; rather let's use them as ambassadors to working people wherever they toil."

Today, Wobbly songs seem suspended between cultural domains. Most are obscure; a few live in tradition. Not one has achieved national popularity associated with Broadway, Nashville, or Hollywood. Nevertheless, labor activists treasure the corpus for internal cheer, oppositional message, and humane promise. Essentially, each Wobbly song that carries into the twenty-first century will affirm the linkage of poetry to cause, as well as music's use in defining individual and social identity.

My sketch above offers some generalizations about Wobbly songs. Here, I turn to a few of the issues faced by the informal committee of friends responsible for *The Big Red Songbook*.

To identify myself: I have worked first as a shipwright and later as a teacher. Although sharing many Wobbly values, I am not an IWW member. In studies over the years, I have probed for the IWW's place in creating and extending labor-lore. My views reflect trade-union experience and academic folklore training.

Included in *The Big Red Songbook* is the essay "John Neuhaus: Wobbly Folklorist" as I penned it nearly half-century ago. Today, it can be read as a memorial to a friend and fellow worker. Also, it is a road marker on a still incomplete journey. Do we feel obligated to continue John's exact path, or are we free to set off in new directions?

John Neuhaus was passionate in his belief that Wobblies and friends should continue to sing all the numbers in the IWW songbooks (issued before his death in 1958). With the centennial behind us, I do not share John's vision, for I believe that most of the inclusions retain value as cultural or historical artifacts, but not as songs in the repertoires of living singers.

In the chronological and alphabetical check lists in the *Big Red Songbook*, we note all songs to date. However, in our main text, we reprint only those items through the thirty-fourth edition. This decision is arbitrary; it will not satisfy all enthusiasts; it raises the puzzling question: What is a Wobbly song? Is it any piece printed in an IWW songbook, or just those that reflect IWW philosophy? Who decides the contours of Wobbly belief?

Almost all Wobbly songs

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have been recorded by interpreters rather than by traditional singers. This dichotomy has raged in "folksong revival" circles. I shall not repeat the tired arguments here. However, I do stress that very few Wobblies made field recordings in traditional style. Does anyone who desires to understand IWW lore not wonder how the songs were performed when first introduced to copper-camp miners, factory-line workers, or their many peers?

Wobblies faced harrowing regional, linguistic, and social barriers among men and women awaiting organization. To cite an instance: when a new little red songbook appeared in an East Texas piney-woods camp or a Louisiana cypress-mill town, did the workers involved sound alike? It defies reason to suggest that individuals of varied descent (Anglo, African, Mexican) in the IWW-affiliated Brotherhood of Timber Workers approached material in a singular voice. By imagining these diverse woods singers in their particular styles, we arrive at a pluralistic view of IWW lore more challenging than the "folksong-revival" flavored items in the present discography.

For many musical genres, loyal fans have produced LP or CD compilations based on ethnographic and historical research. Such an album of Wobbly songs is long overdue. It might recreate the sounds of a century-old Sousa brass band as well as an early ragtime ensemble. What did Richard Brazier experience when he took in a Spokane vaudeville show? Has any Wobbly commented on his exposure to a barrelhouse piano or a parallel off-color ditty? Fred Thompson has described hearing old Chartist hymns in his native Nova Scotia. Where did other unionists become familiar with camp-meeting hymns and gospel favorites? The challenge is great; the task lies before present enthusiasts.

I see no contradiction between the act of preparing a retrospective IWW album and continued effort to compose and circulate new material. Bibliographic and discographic tools will provide useful in this task of reconstruction. Readers will observe that *The Big Red Songbook's* two checklists hold only English-language material. Hence, future fans can expand these lists to include IWW songbooks in various tongues. Wobblies printed Swedish songbooks both in the United States and Sweden. However, our present knowledge of other foreign-language editions is incomplete. Similarly, our discography cries for expansion. These gaps in documentation are especially ironic in that Wobblies were far ahead of rival trade unionists in organizing immigrants regardless of race or speech.

In closing this overview, I am also aware of the end of a personal journey. Like other children of immigrants, I attended a Workman's Circle school in the mid-1920s. There we learned labor songs, including IWW classics. Too young to discern the school's politics, I associated these songs with the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti from the electric chair. In retrospect, it was a noble cause and a memorable introduction to Wobbly music.

Massachusetts executed the two Italian anarchists on August 23, 1927. I have sung, studied and puzzled over IWW material in all the following decades. Much of what is stated in this preface repeats earlier formulations. Some of my views are commonplace; others, controversial. I have already alluded above to the thorny matter of definition for Wobbly songs; this problem remains unresolved. I am convinced that some of *The Big Red Songbook's* pieces proved difficult, if not impossible, to sing at the time of their composition. Others caught on with singers; they circulated widely and were altered in the process.

Scholars fall back on two basic beliefs: a song may enter tradition; folksongs show variation over time and place. Before the popular interest in folksong in the 1970s, IWW members paid little attention to academic issues in defining their music.

Some of these problems in status and meaning are illustrated by "The Dehorn," an irreverent parody set to the tune of "The Red Flag." It opens:

The dehorn's nose is deepest red,
The one bright spot in his empty head,
To get his booze he begs and steals,
Half naked he goes without his meals.

This piece never made it into a little red songbook; did the editors consider it sacrilegious? Upon first hearing Joe Murphey sing a bit of "The Dehorn" (Occidental, CA; 1958), I was intrigued as he related it to an IWW technique in social control. Joe had served on dehorn squads in the Northwest lumber region. These informal committees, in the vernacular, "dehorned the dehorns." To interpret— during a strike, a few tough Wobblies would close or dismantle the saloons and brothels in order to keep workers focused on vital issues. Thus, Joe recalled this song as much more than a humorous ditty, for it represented a disciplined response by the IWW to forces that destroyed workers' seriousness.

With a fragment in mind, I queried John Neuhaus about "The Dehorn." He had learned it from Louis Gracey, a "shovel stiff," treasured it, and taught it to me. Subsequently, I included the text in my *Journal of American Folklore* memorial to

[Continued on naxt page →]

John Neuhaus (reprinted in *The Big Red Songbook*). Songs do not parade straight ahead in unbroken ranks. Rather, they slither about, crawl under hedges, or lie dormant for decades. "The Dehorn" came to life at a time when Wobblies concerned themselves with alcohol as one of the many bourgeois tools designed to weaken a worker's resolve. The song circulated, lodged in a few memories, and seemingly died.

In a sense, "The Dehorn" was reborn after it appeared in the Neuhaus memorial. Joyce Kornbluh doing research for *Rebel Voices* (1964) found that it had been contributed to the *Industrial Worker* (October 11, 1919) by J.B. Perhaps a year later (date unknown), it also appeared in the *California Defense Bulletin* as "The Wino's Nose" by Ed Anderson.

Although I lack information on both J.B. and Ed Anderson, the date 1919 is useful in establishing this song's chronology. The term "dehorn" had been used by cowboys and forest rustlers to describe the act of dehorning young cattle, as well as the cutting off of a branded log's end. The first activity tool away a steer's weapons; the second, assisted in theft. An imaginative Wobbly extended the word "dehorn" to booze which rendered a worker impotent, or robbed him of his spirit.

In the Wobbly lexicon, "dehorn" in various forms became verb and noun, denoting both action and a state of being. It could mean the drink itself, the besotted drunkard, or the effect after drinking. When Prohibition ruled, many persons used denatured or adulterated alcohol. Thus, a canned-heat bum became a hopeless dehorn. James Steven' Northwest woods novel *Jim Turner* (1948) holds several choice usages for this colloquialism.

"The Dehorn" deserved full exploration as it challenges students of language and literature, history and philosophy. For instance: how did the dehorn morph into a wino (as in Ed Anderson's variant)? The late Fred Thompson, who served time in San Quentin as a class-war prisoner, told me that his IWW mates relished the parody, "The Wino's Nose." I conjecture that Wobblies carried the song South from Washington/Oregon lumber camps to California fields. Itinerants who followed the crops (fruit tramps) after a grape harvest would hang around to buy gallon cans of cheap wine. Today, "wino" is widely used while "dehorn" is esoteric.

However we relate "The Dehorn's" adventures, this excursion into a song's story tells us something of Wobbly creativity. It also points to an unusual portion of our volume. Franklin Rosemont has presented a set of "lost" Wobbly songs and poems— not actually lost but rather not included by former editors in the various little red songbooks. He calls attention to years of unstated (often anonymous) editorial decisions about standards of inclusion and exclusion for selections. IWW stalwarts, not given to authority, were genuinely amused that their songbooks gained such magisterial power regarding text and tune.

Ultimately each *Big Red Songbook* reader will judge the wisdom of our selections and opinions. Songs lost or found, sacred or irreverent, touted or neglected, serious or zany, singable or not, are here. Industrial Workers of the World and their friends have been singing for a century. May this comprehensive gathering simultaneously celebrate past battles and chart future goals.

Born in 1917, Archie Green is a union shipwright and carpenter, a pioneering folklorist, and an indefatigable teacher, both in and out of the classroom. He received his Ph.D. in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania—choosing to study at Penn because the head of the Folklore program, MacEdward Leach, supported his interests in labor history and hillbilly music, unconventional subjects for folklore at the time. Archie's many contributions include groundbreaking work on occupational folklore and culture, vernacular music, and in framing up the ground for public sector folklife. This essay is excerpted from his preface to The Big Red Songbook, available this winter from The Charles H. Kerr publishing company. (Details are in the advertising section).

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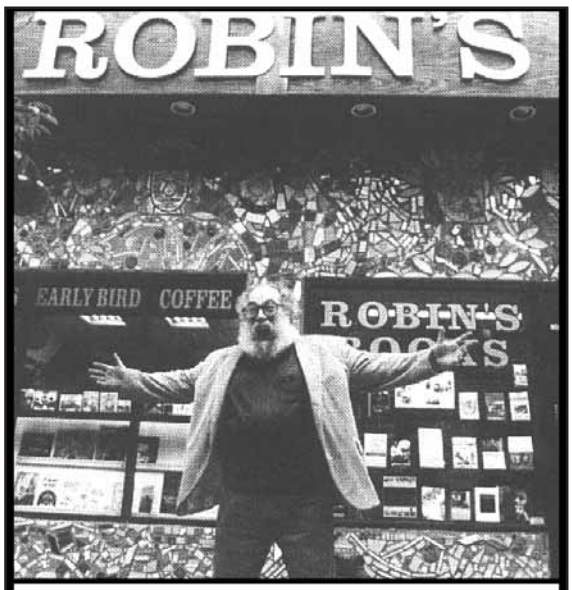

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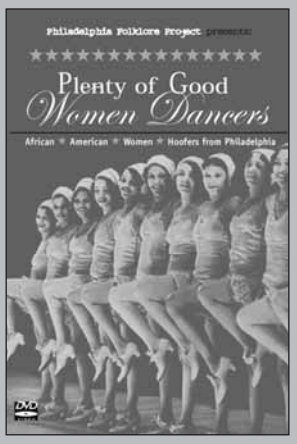

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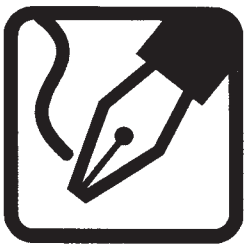

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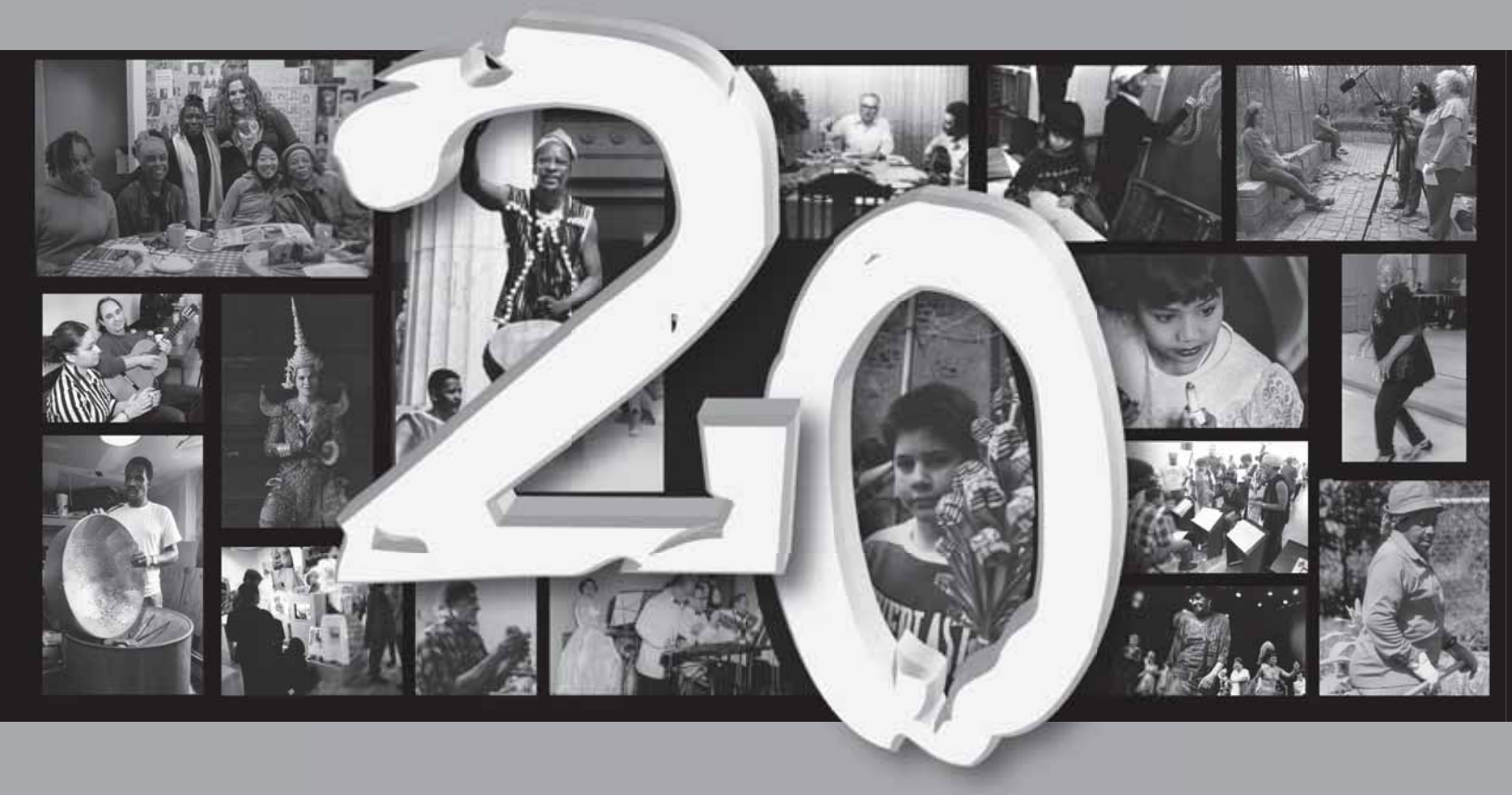

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