

# Missouri Folk Arts Program

**Lisa L. Higgins**  
Director

The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (SCFCH) and its lead partner Missouri State University Libraries announced in October 2021 that *The Ozarks: Faces and Facets of a Region* would be one of two featured themes at the 2023 Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall, along with *Creative Encounters: Living Religions in the US*. That announcement followed months of the two lead partners establishing their relationship, negotiating roles, and identifying resources, including practitioners, advisers, and potential funders. The latter task, especially identifying the dozens of artistic and cultural presenters, continues today in earnest.

Eight months after that official announcement, Missouri State University staff and partners, including Missouri Folk Arts Program (MFAP), visited the 2022 Smithsonian Folklife Festival—a first for most, except MFAP’s director Lisa L. Higgins. This year, SCFCH staff-curated concerts, narrative stages, demonstrations, children’s activities, films, and cooking demonstrations exploring two themes: *United Arab Emirates: Living Landscape/Living Memory* and *Earth Optimism x Folklife: Inspiring Conservation Communities*, a thematic area that brought the sciences and tradition together.

In addition to exploring the festival grounds, discovering curators’ research transformed to content, and meeting SCFCH staff in person, the Ozarks team came together for a special Sunday concert teasing the 2023 Ozarks theme. Old-time musicians from Missouri and bluegrass musicians from Arkansas graced the Folklife Studio stage for *Ode to the Ozarks: Looking Ahead to the 2023 Folklife*



Ozarks Alive blogger and project consultant Kaitlyn McConnell captures the region’s landscape and culture, including this photo of a waterway in Douglas County, Mo.



United Arab Emirates weavers at the 2022 festival discussed and demonstrated their traditions from the weaving booth. Photo by Lisa Higgins.

*Festival* with a special emcee. Barry Bergey shared his deep knowledge of the region gained as Missouri’s first state folklorist in the eighties, followed by three decades in the Folk & Traditional Arts office of the National Endowment for the Arts. Readers can access the full concert with captions and ASL interpretation on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4hwzJcli-w&t=13s>.

The 2023 festival is now less than a year away. An amazing team in Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Illinois, and DC is actively working to bring the traditional arts and lifeways of the Ozarks region—broadly defined—to Washington, DC. Missouri Folk Arts staff is, and has been, thrilled to provide service and advice to our colleagues as they continue to delve into questions about ways to define and represent such a unique region of the U.S. next summer from June 28–July 9, 2023. ■



*Sylamore Special*, a young five-member band from the Arkansas Ozarks, played a hot Bluegrass set from the Folklife Studio stage on June 26, 2022 for in-person and livestream crowds. Photo courtesy of Missouri State University Libraries.



Missouri old-time musicians (Left to Right) Nathan Lee McAlister, David Scrivner, and David Cavins opened the *Ode to the Ozarks* event. The musicians played and contextualized a set of regional dance tunes passed down through the generations. Photo by Lisa L. Higgins.



Lisa L. Higgins and Barry Bergey enjoyed a Missouri folklorist reunion at the festival. Photo by Cristina Diaz-Carrera, Smithsonian Folklife Festival Curator and Production Manager.

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