



Summer Wind '94

by Paula Baker



A thousand multicolored pinwheels glittered on waves of July afternoon heat. Scattered over the lush green grass of the University of Oklahoma's north oval like oversized confetti, the toys turned in a metallic hum, their soft clickety-twang becoming a wind-driven rhythm section for the strings, brasses and percussion. The acclaimed Mariachi Primavera, traditional Hispanic musicians from El Paso, erupted in a stirring fanfare to open SummerWind '94.

University officials welcomed visitors in both English and Spanish to the first of 136 SummerWind events. In all, the second annual OU College of Fine Arts summer arts festival drew nearly 25,000 participants over its 10-day run.

Joining the mariachi players on stage for the opening were fiery dancers from Ballet Folklorico Paso del Norte. Their swirling costumes were mirrored in the SummerWind backdrop, the work of Luz Leszczynski, a 1994 OU graduate in architecture. Leszczynski incorporated traditional Chinese wind ribbons in her design, which won a competition sponsored by the University's College of Archi-

itecture and the College of Fine Arts.

"I came to the festival last year, and it was a wonderful event," Leszczynski says. "I saw all those pinwheels, and it was like being in a fantasy. That led me to the idea for the ribbons, because they illustrate wind and movement."

The Ballet Folklorico's staccato footwork and quick costume changes entertained nearly 400 people that first afternoon, the dancers' brilliant costumes and movement echoed in the jewel-toned SummerWind flags fluttering at the north end of Parrington Oval. Designed and donated by Suzy Canon of Suzy's Creations, the flags were emblazoned with the SummerWind logo, a symbol found on the pre-Columbian artifacts associated with the mounds at Spiro in eastern Oklahoma.

Many in the crowd sported brightly colored SummerWind tee-shirts, sold along with souvenir windsocks, mugs and fans at information/merchandise stands near Holmberg Hall. A red-tented food booth added the smell of charcoal-grilled hot dogs, chicken breasts and pork chops to the festival's sensual appeal. Vendors also sold soft drinks, sandwiches, salads and a special "SummerWind" dessert, a flaky pastry heaped with custard, whipped cream, peaches, blueberries and strawberries.

The Latin beat continued into the first evening of the festival for some 2,200 people who carried their blankets and lawn chairs into the breeze-cooled shade to hear Poncho Sanchez. Arriving by bicycles, in-line skates or on foot from nearby parking lots, many SummerWind visitors soon were dancing to Sanchez's infectious rhythms. Sanchez, a Grammy-award winning conga player and percussionist who brought his Latin Jazz Band from Los Angeles, was the first of several festival headliners.

The pinwheels went home with those attending the opening ceremonies. The SummerWind flags, which flew throughout the festival, were given to donors following the July 10 grand finale. Among the numerous arts supporters throughout Norman, Oklahoma and the Southwest who contributed money, time and material goods to help make SummerWind a success were the State Arts Council of Oklahoma, the Norman Convention and Tourism Bureau, and the Norman Arts and Humanities Council and private sponsors.



Tim Money

SummerWind audiences more than doubled in this its second year, growing from 9,754 in 1993 to 24,279 in 1994. Visitors came from 11 states outside of Oklahoma, from Florida and New York on the East Coast to Washington State on the West Coast.

Dean of Fine Arts David Woods credits former OU president Richard L. Van Horn with the inspiration for SummerWind. "President Van Horn envisioned an opportunity for the University to open its doors to the citizens of the state and the Southwest so they could come into an artistic environment and grow and develop through the beauty of the arts."

Woods researched summer festivals from the Bach celebration in Oregon to events at Wolftrap National Park for the Arts in Virginia. He settled on Chicago's Ravinia Festival as the pro-

For 10 days in July, practitioners of the fine arts take over the University campus to offer a gift of the arts to state residents and summer visitors.

typo for OU's informal arts festival.

Meteorologists in OU's College of Geosciences were consulted for an optimum date. The first two weeks of July were chosen as usually the "driest" period of the year with plenty of wind to cool the shade under the north oval's numerous trees. "Just-in-case" rain locations were scheduled but needed only once.

The College of Fine Arts faculty and staff developed a SummerWind concept that emphasizes family and multicultural events as a "gift of arts" to Oklahomans and out-of-state visitors.

"SummerWind provides the opportunity for faculty to focus on a single aspect of the arts in the summer, unlike the school year," Woods says. "Faculty can choose a specific area or project and submit a proposal. A steering committee reviews the proposals for their suitability as multicultural, multigenerational events."

Faculty developed a variety of summer camps and workshops of varying lengths and costs. OU students and recent graduates gained experience in setting up stages, sound and lighting and in teaching music, dance, theater and art. Youngsters shared the limelight with professionals as their performances and exhibits became an integral part of the SummerWind program.

This year's festival achieved its goal of increasing participation by three- to 10-year-olds by scheduling numerous music and drama events with them in mind. The Cimarron Circuit Opera company, founded by OU professor of music Thomas Carey, performed the classic children's opera "Little Red Riding Hood." The OU School of Music joined CCOC to present "The Pirates of Penzance" in a dinner-theater format with multigenerational appeal.

OU drama students presented two free children's plays, "Revenge of the Space Pandas" and "The Trial of the

Wolf." Improvised on basic plots, dialogue never snapped the same way twice. Adults raised knowing eyebrows when the Wolf threatened to "gobble Red Riding Hood's goodies," but the actors tried to keep their humor closer to "Fairy Tale Theater" than "Saturday Night Live."

Daycare groups and parent/child or grand-

The children participated in workshops on Japanese and Korean culture and watched the "Hula Belles" and "Folklorico Filipino" perform.

Dean Woods, an expert in early childhood music education, drew some 400 participants to his lively presentation of movement theories of Rudolph LaBan.

The visits of numerous children to their Norman grandparents were planned to coincide with SummerWind activities. Six-year-old Matthew Long of Coldwater, Michigan, was only half-way through the festival when he announced he was planning to come again *next* year. Long is the oldest grandson of Charles Gilbert, '58 B.S., '61 M.S., director of the OU School of Geology and Geophysics, and Mary Carol (Leonard) Gilbert, '58 B.M.

Parents, eager to introduce their children to the arts, relaxed. They knew that the restlessness that might make chairs creak in auditoriums could be expunged by a quick somersault or impromptu dance on the grass.

"For the first time, my daughter realized that real people acted in the kinds of stories she sees on television," says Lynette Lobban. Three-year-old Sarah Lobban attended events with her mother, who was SummerWind publicity coordinator. Baby sister Hannah usually came too, often in the arms of father Lance Lobban, an OU associate professor of chemical engineering.

The north oval was deserted on the final Saturday of the festival when Kites for Kids lured 350 children and adults to the OU Intramural Field. Brenda Barnes Wheelock, '88 B.A., recruited helpers to assist youngsters in making and flying their own kites for a 50-cent materials fee. Members of Oklahoma Kites and the American Kitefliers Association demonstrated stunt kite-flying and synchronized flying.

SummerWind also drew older



Tim Money
SummerWind '94 opens with a Latin beat as Mariachi Primavera from El Paso takes center stage on the University of Oklahoma's north oval.



parent/child combinations enjoyed the free outdoor activities. The shade under the trees was filled with youngsters enjoying Native American legends from Mahenwahdose Productions, African tales and drumming from Jahruha Lambeth, cowboy stories from Sky Shivers and a piñata presentation by Jason Fritze of the Foreign Language Institute for Kids.



Tim Money

Young thespians experience the thrill of the limelight.



Gil Jain

SummerWind '94 staffer Greta Saunders, assistant to the dean of fine arts, samples a sinful concoction of pastry, custard, fruit and whipped cream, created especially for hungry festival-goers.



Tim Money

There was no age requirement for would-be performers attending the popular Juggling Workshop, a repeat SummerWind feature.

adults to the campus. OU's Alumni College and ElderHostel scheduled programs concurrent with SummerWind events.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art extended its hours to accommodate SummerWind visitors, with attendance doubling during the festival as viewers enjoyed American Indian art, Mexican folk art and photographs of the American West. The OU Western History Collections unveiled previously unexhibited drawings by the nephew of Sitting Bull, while the Jacobson Foundation scheduled a showing of "Moving Murals of Oklahoma," paintings on teepee covers by contemporary Native American Artists.

Evening entertainment was as eclectic as daytime. The Kairos Quartet from Harrisonburg, Virginia, performed two different programs of string music on the north oval, premiering a quartet written for SummerWind by the Argentinean composer, Garcia Barrero.

The Ambassadors Concert Choir of Oklahoma City performed traditional, gospel and sacred music. On the Fourth of July, the OU Summer Band kept folks tapping and clapping with a program of patriotic music.

The OU School of Drama presented "Charley's Aunt," "The Mousetrap" and "California Suite" during SummerStage '94 repertory theater. SummerStage artistic director Ray Paolino, associate professor of drama, also coordinated a regional community theater festival on campus.

An evening of "alternative music" found an alternative audience. Although fewer OU students attended than anticipated, between 350 and 500 of the north oval fine arts regulars turned out to hear the "Cow Tippers" and "Limbo Cafe."

Continued



Tim Money

When even the belly dancers could not entice an audience into the noon-day sun, festival organizers had to admit that limiting events to mornings and evenings is best in Oklahoma in July.

Super headliner Louise Mandrell created a magic evening for her audience in Lloyd Noble Center—for one audience member in particular. Steven Yell, a drama student from Hooker, caught Mandrell's eye when she left the stage to meet the audience. Invited on stage, Yell took a star turn as comic and country singer. He left with Mandrell's card and her urging that he contact her agent-producer husband about a Nashville audition.

Known on the country circuit as "The First Lady of Entertainment," Mandrell electrified the audience with a show blending country, bluegrass and rock 'n' roll. Six professional dancers and her band accompanied her from Branson, Missouri.

Noon hours were filled with performers from the Norman arts community. The Community Spectrum of the Arts included performances ranging from ballet to poetry reading, belly-dancing to "Little Women." However, the festival organizers were forced to recognize that when it is too hot to attract a crowd to belly-dancing, the noon hour is too hot for anything.



Gil Jain

An estimated 5,000 spectators in all shapes and sizes and arriving by all modes of transportation turned out for the grand finale extravaganza, "Carmina Burana."

Next year's events will be confined to mornings and evenings.

Norman community participation was coordinated by Anna-Mary Suggs, executive director of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, and Esequiel Meza, assistant dean of fine arts. Suggs and Meza's presentation on their work with SummerWind drew accolades at a recent Conference on Arts for Universities and Communities sponsored by the Nathan

Cummings Foundation. Their report is expected to serve as a model for fine arts and community projects nationwide. Meza oversaw SummerWind's cultural diversity, also his area of responsibility for the college.

"Survey respondents strongly stated their appreciation for the multicultural aspects of the festival," says Billi Kaye Smith Meacham, '65 B.A., '86 M.S., who is the college's development officer.



Tim Money

The College of Fine Arts' David Woods abandons his deanly dignity and arms himself with scarves, Slinkys, bean bags and a plush platypus to introduce the joys of early music education to 400 pre-schoolers and their parents.

"The audience mix changed at each event," she explains. "From the surveys returned, it was evident that people not only were attending to celebrate their own ethnic cultures but also to learn about others. Every one of the comments was positive about the overall concept, specific events and success at accomplishing the goal of making this event a truly family affair. More than one respondent noted, 'this is the best thing OU has done in years.'"

Excitement grew during the festival as OU dancers rehearsed for the grand finale, "Carmina Burana." One out-of-towner who called the SummerWind hotline for additional

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orchestra and chorus. The acclaimed vocal soloists for the evening boast OU connections. Jennie Olson earned a master's degree in voice and Kerry Barnett, a doctorate in choral conducting. Charles Klingman is a doctoral student in music.

principal roles in "Carmina Burana" when it premiered in Houston.

Some audience members arrived for the grand finale evening "Parisian-style" with loaves of French bread tucked under their arms for picnic suppers. Others arrived "summer camp-style" with flashlights to read their album liner translations. Advance publicity had described the cantata as a collection of "bawdy songs" in medieval Latin and German. Composer Carl Orff's pulsating rhythms did justice to the medieval student odes to love, gambling and drinking.

A couple of Joe Colleges on the lawn discovered that ballet is not all tutus and toe shoes when they glimpsed the exotic costumes loaned for the event by Ballet Dallas. Stunning in earth, wind and fire tones, the costumes were inspired by Tarot card designs.



Gil Jain

The popular Ambassadors Concert Choir from Oklahoma City drew a crowd to an inspirational outdoor performance of traditional, gospel and sacred music.

information said she had been waiting "all her life" to experience a live performance of "Carmina Burana."

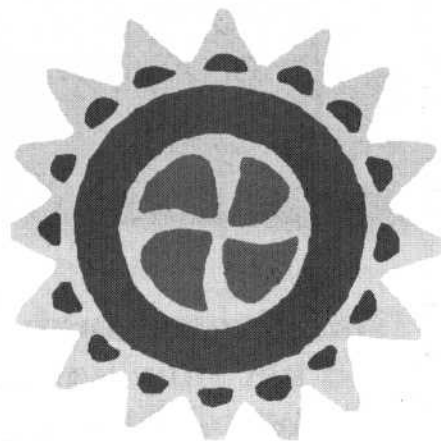
As sunset neared on finale evening, a few drops of rain fell on the crowd estimated at 5,000. While the audience looked skyward and instrumentalists prepared to run for cover, a full rainbow appeared as if to bless the gathering and the festival.

The Oklahoma Festival Ballet and OU Modern Dance Repertory Theater, the University's resident companies, took one stage built at right angles to a stage occupied by the Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra and the Canterbury Choral Society. Dennis Shrock, OU professor of music, conducted the

"'Carmina Burana' was an ideal work to celebrate the arts because it combines so many arts so well," Shrock says. "Many Philharmonic members teach in the OU School of Music and were delighted to be performing in their own backyard."

James Clausen choreographed the work when he was director of the Houston Ballet. He worked with Shrock, OU dancers and guest dancers to put finishing touches on the performance.

The grand finale was organized by Richard Gipson, director of the OU School of Music and timpanist in the Philharmonic, and Mary Margaret Holt, associate dean of fine arts and chair of the dance department. Holt danced



Pre-performance was a time of waving to acquaintances across the oval. Somehow, the appearance of an unexpected canine on the "playing field" added to the crowd ambiance. It was a reminder that dance is also a "No. 1" spectator activity at OU.

The audience sat with rapt attention, responding with thunderous applause for the music and dancing.

"It was an amazing production," wrote Oklahoma City arts reviewer Libby Price. "OU student dancers and guest soloists presented the most exciting dances this reporter has ever seen, at least in Oklahoma, and on a par with Balanchine choreography in New York."

With that kind of success, what can the College of Fine Arts do for an encore?

Come to SummerWind '95, July 4-9, and find out!

