

# Long Island Traditions

## NEWSLETTER

www.longislandtraditions.org

Vol. 9 No. 3 Summer 2002

### Jean Ritchie Receives National Heritage Award

**A**ppalachian ballad singer and Port Washington resident Jean Ritchie has received the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Award. The awards are to recognize the accomplishments of traditional artists whose impact on traditional music and culture are known within their communities. Jean Ritchie, who was recognized in LI Traditions Honoring Traditions program in 1996 is a national treasurer for her preservation of traditional ballads she learned from her family in Viper, Kentucky. Born just before the depression, Jean worked on the family farm as a child, attending school at her father Balis Ritchie's insistence. With her sisters Jean sang songs their father taught them while they picked corn and other crops. Jean recalls that "there was never a dull moment."

Traditional ballads, hymns and spirituals form Jean's repertoire, one that Jean has traced back to England, Scotland and Wales. Her father later taught her to play the dulcimer, a traditional instrument common in the Appalachian region. In 1946 Jean received her bachelors degree in Social Work from the University of Kentucky. Shortly thereafter she moved to New York City, planning to return to Viper. While working at the Henry Street Settlement she met and married photographer George Pickow. At the same time she also met Alan Lomax who was producing concerts featuring traditional musicians. She appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Greenwich Mews Theater and on Oscar Brand's radio show. Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and Doc Watson were among her admirers.

In 1955 Jean and George moved to Port Washington. They have remained here, making frequent trips back to Kentucky. She has continued to perform the songs of her region, in addition to composing original songs that reflect her life's experiences. Jean has served as a panelist to the National Endowment of the Arts, as an advisor and performer at the Newport Folk Festival, and was granted a Fulbright scholarship to document her repertoire of traditional songs. She continues to perform solo along with her sons John and Peter. We congratulate Jean on this long overdue award!

### Theo Torres Brings Peruvian Traditions to Long Island

By Sydney Hutchinson

**P**eruvian musician Teobaldo (Theo) Torres lives in Brentwood but traces his roots to Chota, his parents' hometown in the northern Peruvian state of Cajamarca. In this mountainous area bordering on Ecuador, most people farmed and raised animals on small plots or *terrenos*. Theo's father did the same until the family decided to seek a better life in Lima, Peru's capital.

Theo was born in Rimac, just across the river from Lima. He describes the area as a typical city neighborhood with adobe houses. Torres was a baby when the family again relocated to Lima proper. Their house was always filled with music:

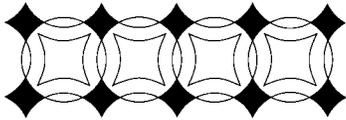
*My mother, although she isn't a musician, was always singing at home. All day long we'd listen to music. As soon as my mom got up she turned on her radio . . . she liked her huaynos, which is the traditional music from my mother's part of the sierra, but she also listened to Mexican music.*

Andean traditional music was seldom performed in the city, since large-scale immigration from rural areas had not yet begun. Instead, Theo absorbed the international styles available in Lima, one of South America's busiest port cities. Cuban *guaracha* (a precursor of today's salsa) and Colombian *cumbia* were particularly popu-



Theo Torres and his group "Vientos del Sur"

see Theo Torres on page 2



## Long Island Traditions Inc.

Dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Long Island's living cultural heritage.

**Executive Director:** Nancy Solomon

**Staff Ethnomusicologist:** Sydney Hutchinson

**Board of Directors:** Dorothy Jacobs, Mirna Cortez-Obers, Robert Pachas, Addie Quinn & Wayne Wink

**Advisory Board:** Paul Bentel, John Eilertsen, Jean Ritchie & Dave Opatow

**Newsletter Designer:** Barbara Koelbel Bange

LI Traditions is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization registered with the NY State Board of Charities.

For more information call: (516) 767-8803, fax: (516) 767-8805, write to us at: 382 Main St., Port Washington, NY 11050, E-mail: litrad@i-2000.com or visit us on the web at: www.longislandtraditions.org

Copyright 2002 by LI Traditions. Permission to reproduce any article or portions thereof must be requested in writing.



## Theo Torres continued from page 1

lar, along with limitless varieties of Caribbean, South American and European music that came through the port. The young Torres also heard Lima's own traditional music: *vals* (waltz) and polka played on Spanish acoustic guitars and the box-shaped *cajón* drum.

Theo learned to play percussion by listening to these *grupos criollos* as well as to popular recordings on the radio - in particular, those of Cuban groups like La Sonora Matancera and Celia Cruz. He was also influenced by an Afro-Peruvian man in his neighborhood that was a virtuoso on timbales, the drums Tito Puente made famous: "*He would sing and play, and he had a Cuban style.*" This musician later became his brother-in-law.

When Theo was fifteen years old, he and a few friends decided to start their own cumbia group. But getting the instruments was difficult in a country where most families don't earn much more than \$200 a month.

*We only played in the barrio, on the corner when a jaranita (dance) would form, and at the beginning we only had maybe one drum and a güiro (scraper). It was mostly noise, I'll tell you! I played a drum and the others played güiro, cowbell, and sung. Because getting a guitar was not within our reach.*

A neighbor who was playing with a more established group would loan Theo his timbales, but not the chromed metal timbales we see today. Instead, these were made of plywood with a glossy plastic coating. Still they enabled the group to begin playing for money. They called themselves *Los Palmer's de Buenaventura* after a nearby street in their neighborhood, La Palma, and began renting guitars and amplifiers with a portion of the 10 *soles* (about \$3) each musician earned per performance.

Theo's career took a new turn when, "*the boy who was singing had been drinking one day and couldn't sing. I said, 'I'll sing!' And there began my career of playing timbales and singing.*" He went to work with a number of different groups in Lima as a singer and percussionist, learning a variety of Latin American musical styles along the way to satisfy his audience's diverse tastes:

*A group in Peru has to play everything. It can't play just one musical genre, because if you go to a party in Peru, you play salsa and guaracha and at the end one has to play a huayno. If you don't, they won't let you leave! My thing was cumbia, guaracha and all that, but I also had to sing waltz, bolero and huayno - to end the party with a huayno, it was like a tradition. . . . So I have always, always sung a little of everything.*

As the economic situation in Peru worsened, Theo decide to emigrate. In 1984 he flew to Mexico and from there made the difficult border crossing on foot, eventually coming to Long Island. In spite of his college education Theo had to hold menial jobs to make ends meet. He coped by composing songs about the immigration experience and by forming an Andean music group, *Llactaruna*. It was difficult to find an audience for traditional music played on *zampoña* pipes, *quena* flute, *bombo* drum and mandolin, since many Peruvians in this country are more interested in trendy music like merengue or rock than in their own traditions. The disheartening situation led Theo to experiment with combining indigenous and popular music:

*I used to argue a lot with my own countrymen, because many people here - they didn't want to hear huayno; they didn't want to hear Peruvian music. . . . [But] I kept writing, and many of the songs I wrote had that same kind of melancholy or indigenous melody. I never lost my roots. I tried to sell myself as an artist capable of playing other genres but inside*

## Become a Member Subscribe to the Newsletter!

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_

ST: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

\$20 Individuals

\$30 Organizations

**Please make your check payable to:**  
Long Island Traditions

**Mail to:**  
Long Island Traditions  
382 Main Street  
Port Washington, NY 11050

*I didn't feel right. Even now, I still don't feel fully realized as a Peruvian artist with my own music.*

Torres was more successful playing for international audiences, even participating in a United Nations-sponsored cultural exchange with the Ukraine, and he also formed a cumbia group popular with Latino immigrants on Long Island. But he still hopes "above all that we Peruvians can rise a little further and make our music be value." Torres' group *Vientos del Sur* is active in local clubs and in school programs sponsored by LI Traditions. By educating both South and North Americans about his country's rich musical heritage, he helps Peruvians to take pride in their traditions. LI Traditions will recognize Theo for his efforts at this year's Honoring Traditions program on October 27. ■

## West Meadow Beach Tour

On Sunday, September 29th Long Island Traditions will sponsor its annual West Meadow Beach tour. The tour visits approximately 6 cottages built in the 1920 - 30s by local residents of Stony Brook and neighboring communities so that residents could escape the flu epidemic that threatened thousands of east coast residents.

The cottages retain many of their original design features including open floor plans, cobblestone fireplaces, partitioned walls and exposed framing. This year's 1-mile walking tour will include some new sites as well as old favorites. The cottages are scheduled to be torn down



Photo by Martha Cooper, 1996.  
**The Magadini cottage will be among those featured on the West Meadow Beach tour.**

in 2004 under state law. Trips are at 10:30am and 1pm. Tickets are \$15/person and \$25/couple. To order send coupon from enclosed flyer and call for reservations. As always we expect the trip to fill up quickly. For more information call LI Traditions at 516-767-8803. ■

## NEA Arts Learning Grant

Long Island Traditions has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to develop a social studies curriculum for the Dodd Middle School on architecture. The project will focus on the 7th grade classes so that students can learn about the traditional architecture of Native Americans on Long Island and New York State, European settlers and how industrialization affected domestic life and architecture, and African American architecture in both slavery and freedom. Participating teachers will be using primary source documents such as maps and photographs, examine sites on Long Island through field trips, and through staff development workshops led by director Nancy Solomon and expert consultants including design educator Julie Maurer, preservation educator Kathleen Kane and foodways historian Alice Ross. The 2-year project will result in student activities and lessons that explore the rich traditions of Long Island's architecture, and a curriculum guide for educators. ■

## Maritime Folklife Festival October 6th

On Sunday, October 6, 2002 Long Island Traditions will present its 6th annual Maritime Folklife Festival at the Long Island Maritime Museum. "Celebrate the Bay's" goal is to educate residents on the contemporary and historic traditions of commercial and recreational fishermen, the factors affecting these traditions and their future on Long Island. Performing at the festival will be renowned folksinger Oscar Brand & John Pickow, along with Strike the Bell's Stuart Markus and Judith Zweiman.

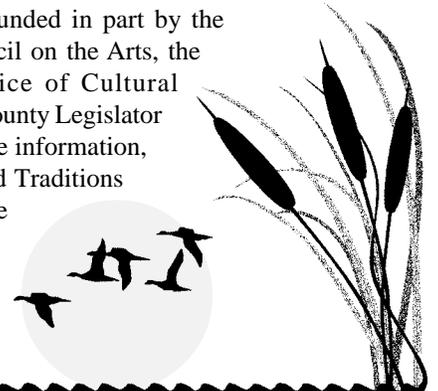
The participants come from various parts of Long Island. Participating baymen include John Remsen Jr. of Freeport, the 4th generation of his family to work on the bay, who will show how he catches killies and other bait fish, using handmade killie traps he learned to make from his grandfather. Joining Remsen will be fisherman Bill Hamilton of East Patchogue, who is vice president of the Brookhaven Baymen's Association and a pound trap fisherman.

Cory Weyant, a Freeport bayman, will demonstrate fish smoking in his homemade smoker. Baywoman Flo Sharkey of Patchogue will demonstrate clam shucking and harvesting, skills she learned from her father. Bob Kaler of East Patchogue will demonstrate crabbing and eeling. Lowell Ockers of West Sayville will show how pound traps and nets are designed and constructed using traditional methods he learned from his father and grandfather.

Reggie Jones, the longest working lifeguard at Jones Beach, will tell stories of rescues, training exercises, entrance exams, and pay scales during his 50-year career. Jones will display historic items including wooden rental chairs. Clamshell artist & metal worker Harry Saarinen of Amityville recreates scenes of Great South Bay using skimmer clams and chowder clams as his canvas. Saarinen designs and forges steel fish including sharks and flounders. Peter Ames of Little Neck, along with his son Pete Ames Jr., will show how to make fishing rods. Decoy carver Larry Udell of Center Moriches will share his experiences as a duck hunter and guide, skills he learned from his grandfather.

There will also be screenings of Glenn Gebhard's documentary "Baymen" produced with Long Island Traditions in 2000. Admission to the festival is \$4 but members of the museum and Long Island Traditions are free. The festival will take place at the LI Maritime Museum at 86 West Avenue, West Sayville, NY. Hours are 11 a.m. - 5p.m.

The program is funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts, the Suffolk County Office of Cultural Affairs, and Suffolk County Legislator Ginny Fields. For more information, please call Long Island Traditions at (516) 767-8803 or the LI Maritime Museum at (631) HISTORY.



# EVENTS OF INTEREST

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you have a Long Island concert or program that focuses on some aspect of traditional culture, drop us a line and we'll put it in our "Events of Interest" column. The deadline is the 1st of October, January and April.

- July 26-28** 24th Annual Thunderbird American Indian Pow-Wow. Queens Farm Museum, Little Neck Parkway, Little Neck. Admission is \$7/adult and \$3/child age 12 and under. New York City's oldest and largest Pow Wow will feature three days of intertribal Native American dance competitions to which the public is invited. More than 40 Indian Nations are represented at this spectacular event held in the apple orchard on the farm grounds. A large selection of quality Native American art, crafts, jewelry and food is available. For more information call (718) 347-FARM.
- August 24 - 25** LI Maritime Museum Seafood Festival. Admission is \$4. 10am - 5pm. 86 West Avenue, West Sayville. Call 631-854-4974 for more information.
- August 31 - September 2** Shinnecock Annual Pow Wow, Shinnecock Reservation, Southampton. 56th annual event features traditional food, crafts, dancing and storytelling by the Thunderbird Sisters and dancers and other Native American performers. Admission is \$5. Located on West Gate Road, Southampton, just south of Route 27a. Hours are 11am - 6pm.
- September 22** Oscar Brand concert, 2pm. Bellmore Public Library, 2288 Bedford Ave., Bellmore. Call (516) 785-2990 for more information.
- September 28** Oscar Brand concert. 7pm, Syosset Public Library, 225 South Oyster Bay Road, Syosset. Phone: 516-921-7161
- September 29** West Meadow Beach cottage tour, sponsored by Long Island Traditions. Tickets are \$15/person and \$25/couple. See accompanying article inside.
- October 6** Maritime Folklife Festival. LI Maritime Museum, 86 West Avenue, West Sayville. 11am - 5pm, admission \$4. Call 516-767-8803 or 631-HISTORY for details. See feature article inside.

 Printed on recycled paper.

---

Long Island Traditions  
382 Main Street  
Port Washington, NY 11050