

FROM JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY TO SPANISH GUITARS: THE LIBRARY IS A PERFECT PLACE FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE

by Flo Burdine

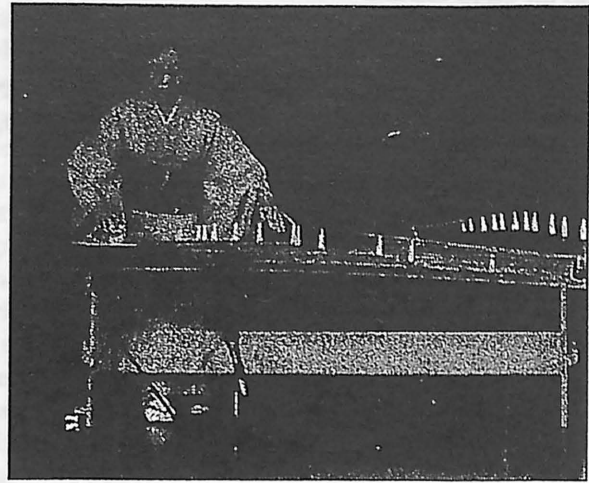
In a central Indiana town skirted by industry and agriculture, there is a fascinating place ripe with opportunities for cultural exchange. Frankfort, Indiana has become a melting pot of cultures that has grown to include Japanese business executives and their families, immigrant Hispanic farm and factory employees, Anglo farmers, businessmen and blue-collar factory workers. The Frankfort Community Public Library, nestled in the heart of Frankfort, has become a gathering place for all people to meet. The library has become the cultural center of the community.

As a way to celebrate this diversity, every other year the Friends of the Frankfort Community Public Library (FCPL) celebrate their Annual Meeting and Volunteer Appreciation Reception with a Japanese Festival sponsored by local businesses with Japanese management. Initially the Japanese businessmen approached Library Director Bill Caddell and asked him if their businesses and the library could cosponsor a festival where Japanese employees could share their culture with the community. The Japanese businesses were willing to pay the expenses of food, entertainment, and publicity. Japanese financial support has been a constant for every festival.

The rest, as they say, is history. Begun in 1990, the Japanese Festival has evolved into a celebration complete with an art exhibition, tea ceremony, bonsai demonstrations, origami, calligraphy, and cooking classes. Japanese refreshments, including sushi, tempura shrimp, and red bean paste desserts are served. Japanese musical entertainment completes the festival. The public has been enchanted by performances of Taiko drummers, Minyo dancers, shakuhachi flute and koto string musicians.

The art exhibition has included work shipped directly from Hokkaido, Japan where Bill Caddell has a friend who is a woodblock artist. The exhibit has also included Japanese artwork on loan from Purdue University, the Japanese Consulate in Chicago, and private Japanese art collectors.

The tea ceremony emphasizes harmony, purity and simplicity; reflecting all that is esteemed most beautiful



Takako Bassett playing the koto (a Japanese stringed-instrument) at Japanese Festival in June 2005.

in the arts of Japan. A Japanese tea ceremony specialist has performed the traditional tea ceremony each year in the boardroom of the library. This space is transformed into a tranquil oasis where participants can view the traditional ceremony of preparing tea for a special guest using authentic Japanese pottery, artwork, dress, and tea. At the close of the ceremony, the audience is treated to tea and Japanese sweets. Children and adults come to the festival to experience the sights, sounds, and tastes of the Far East and to become better acquainted with their new friends from Japan.

Frankfort also has a growing Hispanic population. To highlight the cultural arts heritage of Spanish-speaking people, the Friends collaborated with other Clinton County agencies in organizing and co-hosting Frankfort's first Hispanic Cultural Arts Festival in 2004. This festival was funded in part by a grant from the Clinton County Community Foundation and through several fundraisers.

The Hispanic Cultural Arts Festival showcased authentic artwork from Spanish-speaking countries. Art was borrowed from private collectors, individual artists, other libraries, and Purdue University. Hispanic elementary and high school students also displayed their works of art in the library's Anna and Harlan Hubbard

Gallery. Mexican refreshments were served. Hispanic musicians played Latin guitar music and sang in the gallery. It was a wonderful opportunity to work with the Hispanic community and feature the art of their culture.

Both festivals and exhibits are free and open to the public. The purpose of a cultural exchange is to learn more about another culture, meet new people and understand how art is reflected and used in their lives. When multiple cultures live in the same community, it makes sense to come together at the library, a common ground for all to expand their horizons.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Flo Burdine (fburdine@accs.net) is the Arts Director at Frankfort Community Public Library. 208 West Clinton, Frankfort, IN 46041.



Young lady creating her calavera sculpture in a children's art class from the Hispanic Cultural Arts Festival, September 2004, Frankfort Library.