

wasn't ever really a *service*. Instead, it was like a *concert*. No one gave thanks for God's Grace; no one asked the Lord to bless the service. And that's not what we're about. When we sing, we sing for God's glory! Not just for a performance."

A prayer? As I reflected on the gospel programs that I had attended, I realized that *every one* had opened with a prayer.

"But this," I thought to myself, "was different. This was a folklife program." Even as I thought this, however, I realized the arrogance of my assumptions. I knew the structure of gospel programs, but I had never really thought about their logic. Consequently, I had presumed that *my* logic—a logic of secular presentation that deftly separated performance from faith—would suffice. I had thus pulled together the artifacts of faith (church, deacon, and singers) and set them within a frame of my own construction. And I had expected the "concert" to "work."

It probably did for some. But it didn't for the Heavenly Angels. And it likely didn't work for other singers who simply refrained from voicing their concerns—perhaps in deference to our friendship and/or my authority as a folklorist and presenter. After that conversation with Sister Johnson, the program didn't work for me either.

The lesson is simple. Presentation without consultation and collaboration often yields misrepresentation and alienation. If I had asked the performers about program structure, if I had invited their input during the program's conceptualization, then I would not have made this mistake. And if I had not been so sure of myself—so certain that I knew the rules for "proper" programming—I would have thought to ask. Thanks to the Heavenly Angels, I know better now.

Traditions and Transitions in Acoma Pottery

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Known also as "Sky City," Acoma is one of the more famous, if remote, of the New Mexico pueblos. It is renowned for its distinctive pottery. The origin of the Acoma people is disputed among archaeologists who commonly trace them, coincidentally via their pottery, variously to the Mesa Verde and Mimbres cultures, both of which produced black-on-white bichrome pottery.

During the early part of this century, largely through the impetus of the Indian Arts Fund and the Fred Harvey Corporation, each pueblo was designated as having its own unique style of pottery. Acoma pottery was categorized as a distinctive and intricate black-and-orange-on-white polychrome style. Through the years this pottery has evolved to become more and more intricate and dazzling, but it has still remained true to the established style.

Recently there has been a tremendous amount of innovation in Acoma pottery. Some potters began re-incorporating Mimbres designs and motifs into the Acoma style. Others began working with black-on-white, much as they had been making before Fred Harvey. A greenware (or slip cast) pottery was developed, much to the dismay of merchants and collectors bent on maintaining a pure form of coiled Acoma pottery.

Now two new types of Acoma pottery have recently emerged. A distinctive blue-on-orange style, striking and different, yet still incorporating traditional Acoma designs and motifs, and a black-on-gray marbled pottery that is made by draping horse hair over the pots before firing to create an effect that resembles turned and polished stone. Because of the lack of electricity and the difficulty of pit firing on the mesa, many potters take their pots to town to fire them in electric kilns. With the exception of the adoption of greenware and the use of acrylic paints, all of these potters still employ local materials and traditional coiled methods of fabricating their pots.

What drives the modern phenomenon of Acoma pottery is the steady market for the art. Over a quarter million tourists take the bus up to Sky City annually. There is serious competition for their money—hence the development of these eye-catching styles. Most tourists are ignorant of the established “authentic” Acoma tradition, and they buy what appeals to them.

As a public sector folklorist whose job it is to help maintain and perpetuate traditions, the Acomans present an interesting dilemma: which of these Acoma pottery forms are traditional under my program’s strict definition? All of them? Only some? None?

Acoma pots are all commodified art forms in some fashion or another. Pottery developed as a major trade item of the pueblos centuries before the first Santa Fe trainload of tourists. The Indian Arts Fund, the Fred Harvey Corporation, and countless others have influenced the marketing of the art. Traditional pueblo pottery has been so commodified that commodified pueblo pottery is now considered to be traditional. Why should those of us in public sector folklore try to stop it from evolving now?

There is not any culturally significant difference between the traditional and contemporary Acoma potters themselves. They live in the same village, go to the same kiva, dance together at ceremonies, marry each other, and pass on to their offspring the same oral histories, cultural mores, and traditional art forms that they learned from their elders. Why should one pottery style be considered more traditional than another? Perhaps we should allow the people of Acoma to define their own traditions. After all, the Acoma potter is just doing the same thing she always has done: make pots. And like her forebears, she is leaving her own personal stamp on them. When people gaze on her pottery years from now, they will see the world through the eyes of today’s Acoman as she carries on the tradition of her ancestors, albeit influenced by the constantly evolving and ever changing world around her.