

Texans explore roots at festival

By WALTER SMITH
Co-editor

IF THE BLINDING PACE OF THE technocratic world has got you down, then put your microwave dinner back into your frost-free refrigerator and relenquish the remote control to your VCR. Now escape into the simplicity of Texas' cultural past at the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio this weekend.

The annual festival, sponsored by The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, was organized 14 years ago to expose the public to the diverse ethnic, cultural and folk history of the state. An expected crowd of 100,000 will have visited the four-day festival when the gates close this Sunday.

With so many people, parking could pose a hectic problem, especially because of limited parking areas in downtown San Antonio. But Charlene Blohm, a spokesman for the festival, says that visitors can park their cars at the major shopping malls around San Antonio and take a \$1 bus ride to the festival grounds at the HemisFair Plaza.

About 6,000 participants, representing about 30 cultures, will display their crafts, music, dance and ways of life. The festival is divided into several zones, each hosting different cultures and activities.

"Almost any skill imaginable that was necessary at the beginning of settling Texas is represented," says John McGiffert, acting executive director of the Institute of Texan Cultures. Continuous entertainment is scheduled for each of the ten stages scattered around the festival, but impromptu activities and shows are liable to pop up just about anywhere.

ONCE THERE, VISITORS will notice that the ambience of the different cultures isn't the only thing filling the air. Just the mere aroma of the many culinary delights might launch you on a gastronomical quest to try some of each culture's cuisine. Foods like Belgian waffles, Irish stew, apple strudel and brod og palegg (a Norwegian open-face sandwich) will give you a taste of Europe, while khal-bee (broiled short rib), egg rolls, chech chean (a Cambodian fried banana) and yakitori will let you sample the Oriental food fare. More traditional staples, like popcorn, peanut brittle, onion rings and lemonade, will be available for the less adventurous eaters.

Food coupons, instead of U.S. currency, are used to purchase the reasonably priced food dishes. Each coupon is worth twenty cents and

the most expensive item, Cajun Shrimp Gumbo, costs only 12 coupons (\$2.40). Most foods are priced between 6 and 10 coupons.

Food plays a significant part of cultures, but so do the festival activities and diversions. The festival has an operating smokehouse where you can learn how the early settlers preserved meat before the invention

of the refrigerator. You can lend a hand to the bakers as they knead the dough for loaves of bread or help pluck a goose. You can also watch or help out with chores like spinning and

weaving, sheep shearing or house building. While many of us take the roof over our heads and the clothes on our backs for granted, the early pioneers of Texas had to make both from scratch. Jo Ann Andera, festival director says that it is important to keep practicing these kinds of activities.

"Some things just can't be written in a book," she says. "They have to be passed down."

Texas settlers worked hard, but when they were through with their work, they played even harder. Music and dancing played a large role in pioneer Texas and the same holds true for the festival. The rhythms, harmonies and movements of the different cultures will be highlighted at the booths and stages across the festival grounds.

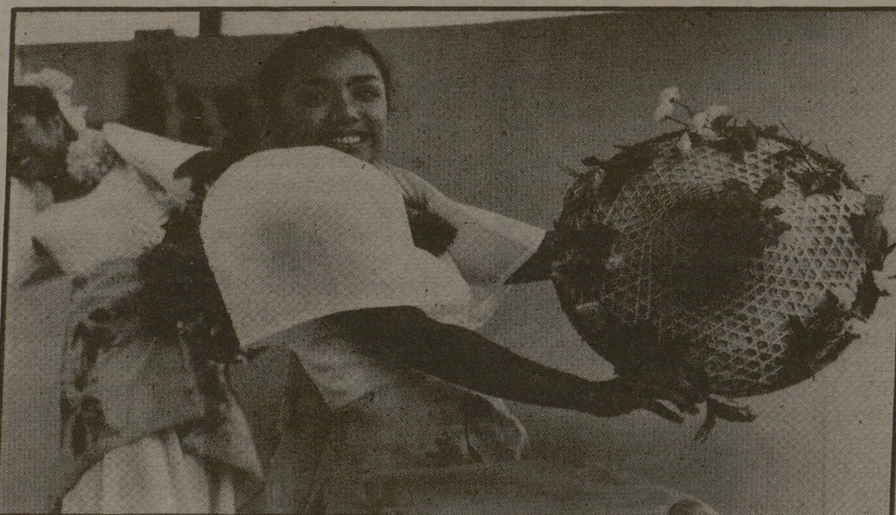
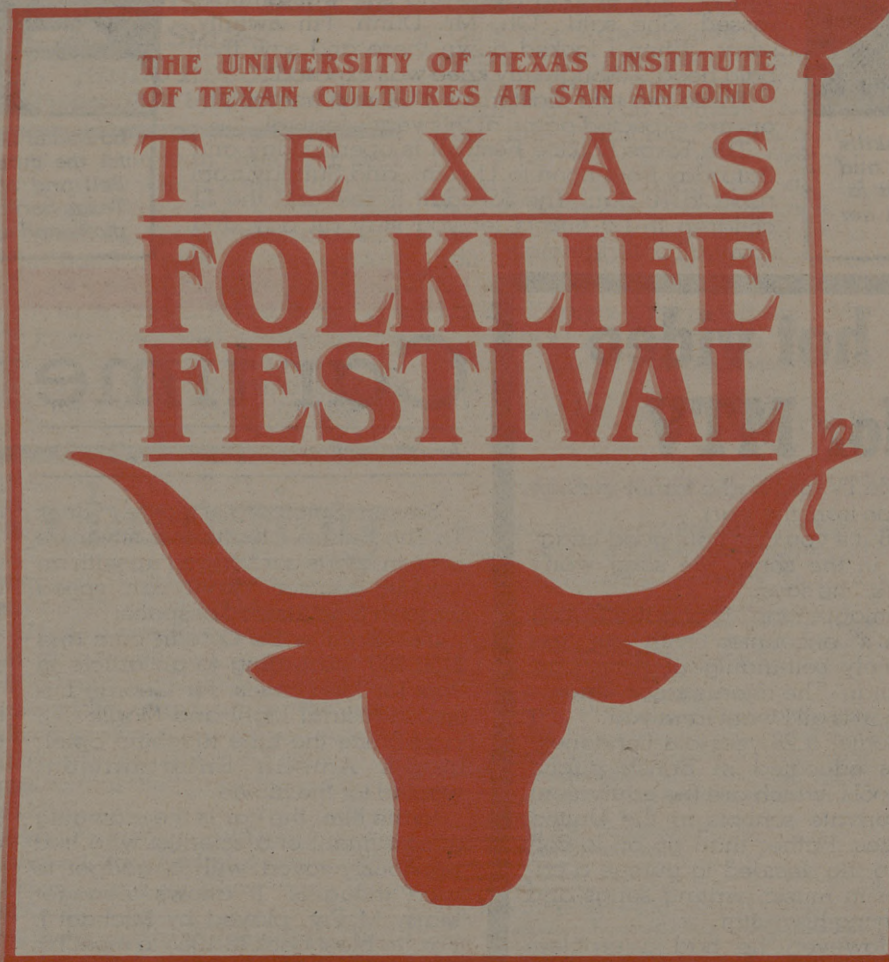
DANCERS WITH CULTURAL roots in lands as diverse as Lebanon, Ireland, Greece and the Philippines will perform in their native colorful garb. About 100 musicians will bring a world-wide selection of music to the festival—including swing, country and western, bluegrass, gospel and jazz.

Various folk games, including Belgian pole climbing, horseshoe pitching and bocce, helped to entertain both adults and children, and will be demonstrated at the festival. The youngsters in the crowd can ride a horse-drawn wagon to the farmyard, which is really a petting zoo. Frontier Playland will show them the joys of whittling, kite making and other pioneer childrens' pastimes. But frontier children played only after their chores (watch them quilt and make candles) and schooling (the festival has a one-room school house, complete with a bell and master).

If you don't want to re-live the frontier days yourself, then you can sit in on a session of master storytelling by some of the older participants. Ed Bell of Luling, better known as "one of the biggest liars on the Texas coast," entertained some of last year's festival visitors with a yarn about a guy who caught a huge fish:

"They had to quit fishing and come in because they wasn't no room for anybody to fish after they laid that fish on the deck. So they went on into port, and when they got there, why he says, 'Well, I've got to have this fish weighed. People'll never believe if I don't have it weighed on some public scales.' (But) they couldn't even find any scales. The public scale wouldn't even start to weigh him. And he was cussing and raising Cain; he said, 'Man, I've just got to get evidence

see FEST on page 2.



Filipino folk dances are just one of the activities at the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio. Here, Karen Jaceldo of the Philippine Dance Ensemble celebrates the rites of courtship. The four-day festival ends Sunday.