



West Virginia Fiddle & Banjo Player John Morris Among the 2020 NEA National Heritage Fellows, the Nation's Highest Honor in the Folk and Traditional Arts

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Charleston—The West Virginia Folklife Program, a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council, is thrilled to announce that old-time musician John Morris of Ivydale, WV, is one of nine 2020 National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellows, the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. These lifetime honor awards of \$25,000 are given in recognition of both artistic excellence and efforts to sustain cultural traditions for future generations.

An acclaimed fiddler, banjo player, guitarist, songwriter, and life-long resident of Clay County, West Virginia, [John Morris](#) is the living carrier of the old-time fiddle and banjo tradition particular to his rural home county and the surrounding area. West Virginia state folklorist Emily Hilliard, who nominated Morris for the award said, "John has dedicated his life to sustaining, promoting, and supporting the musical tradition of his Clay County community through the founding and hosting of community-based festivals, his labor and environmental activism, regular performances, and his ongoing commitment to teaching younger practitioners. His playing is infused with all the sounds of Clay County—its environment, its history, and its people." Read more about Morris in the [linked](#) and attached bio. More information and photos are posted at wvfolklife.org.

John Morris is West Virginia's first National Heritage Fellow in 20 years, the last being Appalachian weaver [B. Dorothy Thompson](#) in 2000, following Trinidadian Steel Pan builder and performer [Elliott "Ellie" Mannede's](#) 1999 award, and fiddler [Melvin Wine's](#) in 1991.

The other 2020 National Heritage Fellows are: soul singer-songwriter [William Bell](#) from Atlanta, GA; Armenian Folk and Liturgical Singer [Onnik Dinkjian](#) from Fort Lee, NJ; West African Diasporic Dancers [Zakarya and Naomi Diouf](#) from Oakland, CA; Oneida Nation of Wisconsin Iroquois Raised Beadworker [Karen Ann Hoffman](#) from Stevens Point, WI; Traditional Religious Dancers [Los Matachines de la Santa Cruz de la Ladrillera](#) from Laredo, TX; Nueva Canción Singer and Songwriter [Suní Paz](#) from Henderson, NV; Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe Birchbark Canoe Builder [Wayne Valliere](#) from Waaswaaganing (Lac du Flambeau, WI); and Radio Producer and Radio Network [Hugo N. Morales](#) from Fresno, CA.

The chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts Mary Anne Carter says, "Each year the Heritage Fellowships highlight the distinct living traditions of communities around our nation, as well as how our

fellows instill a sense of pride, beauty, and cultural continuity through their art. The National Endowment for the Arts is pleased to recognize these outstanding artists with a National Heritage Fellowship.”

The annual celebration of the new class of National Heritage Fellows will take place virtually this year, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More information about this event, including the date, will be available at a later time.

About the National Heritage Fellowships

The National Heritage Fellowships are the nation’s highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. Including the 2020 class, the Arts Endowment has awarded 449 National Heritage Fellowships, recognizing artists working in more than 200 distinct art forms, including bluesman B.B. King, Cajun fiddler and composer Michael Doucet, sweetgrass basketweaver Mary Jackson, cowboy poet Wally McRae, Kathak dancer and choreographer Chitresh Das, and gospel and soul singer Mavis Staples. More information about the National Heritage Fellows is available on the Arts Endowment’s [website](#).

Fellowship recipients are nominated by the public, often by members of their own communities, and then judged by a panel of experts in the folk and traditional arts. The panel’s recommendations are reviewed by the National Council on the Arts, which sends its recommendations to the Arts Endowment chairman, who makes the final decision. **The deadline to submit a nomination for the 2021 class of National Heritage Fellows is July 31, 2020.** Visit the National Endowment for the Arts [website](#) for more information and to submit a nomination.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit [arts.gov](#) to learn more.

The West Virginia Folklife Program is a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council and is dedicated to the documentation, preservation, presentation, and support of West Virginia’s vibrant cultural heritage and living traditions. For more information on the West Virginia Folklife Program, visit [wvfolklife.org](#) and <http://wvhumanities.org/programs/west-virginia-folklife-program/> or contact Emily Hilliard at hilliard@wvhumanities.org or (304)346-8500.

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The West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit institution, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. With the support of the NEH, the State of West Virginia, and contributions from the private sector, the Council’s mission is to support a vigorous program in the humanities statewide in West Virginia.