



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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*“Ellis Island will  
bring laughter to your  
lips, a tear to your eye,  
joy to your heart and  
have you dancing in the  
aisles. Come! Enjoy!”*

-From Ellis Island Old  
World Folk Band  
([www.musikers.com](http://www.musikers.com))

One of my goals for the last year or so has been to have a storytelling-related program at the Albany Library. I applied for - and received - an Alameda County Library Foundation grant for a multicultural storytelling and music festival, which included an afternoon workshop on storytelling.

The storytelling workshop, taught by the talented storyteller Liz Mangual, was small but successful. Participants of all ages learned to tell simple stories and gave each other feedback as they practiced.

The festival was five hours long and during that time the audience grew and shrank, as people came and went. There were some who spent the day, others who came in the morning and left, and still others who stood in the doorway at the end. Partly that is the nature of a festival like this, with a line up of different groups - people come for the ones they particularly want to hear. But I wonder if it isn't also an aspect of a library program, since there is

no admission charge and there are no tickets.

I was pleased with the day, the responsiveness of the audience and the professionalism of the performers. Jaliya's "Guardians of the Word" played West African music and told stories and drew in children and adults from the audience to participate. They were a large presence - a big sound, with drums and rattles, and a strong belief in the importance of their work.

Ohlone storyteller Alex Ramirez was a complete contrast. His quiet and low-key presentation was like sitting in a neighbor's kitchen and listening to a story over a cup of tea. The contrast was so great that I found myself worrying it was too simple, too low-tech for the audience. And yet, his presence was solid and memorable and I can still see him clearly in my mind, as he reached out to us, not performing so much as communicating his style and thoughts and ways of looking at the world.

The next two groups were

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music groups. Ellis Island Old World Folk Band used their joyous and exuberant Klezmer music to introduce the audience to many styles and songs, highlighting the different musicians and their instruments. At one point, audience members joined in, happily dancing hand in hand in a circle and then in a long line around the room as the music beat around them.

The final act was Duo Amaranto, made up of Rafael Manriquez and Ingrid Rubis. Using guitars, as well as traditional Latin American instruments, like the charango, cuatro and zampona, they sang, played and moved their audience. The combination of their voices was incredible – there were points when I felt like crying because it was so beautiful. And I loved getting to sing along with the chorus of the

lovely "Cielito Lindo."

After the festival, I thought about why we – as librarians – take on a project like that. It isn't easy because there are so many details and, for me anyway, so much

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ignorance about local performers. I knew I wanted to give the public something valuable

and memorable; I wanted them to come away with insight into a culture unlike their own. I wanted the children to be exposed to live storytellers and live music, because there is so much entertainment these days that isn't live. And I wanted everyone who stopped by for a moment or who sat themselves down for the day to understand the ability of the public library to enhance their lives. I hope I succeeded.