

Annual Tucson Meet Yourself Folklife Festival "Re-frames" Itself for the Times

Written by Tyler Hollis

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The 47th Annual [Tucson Meet Yourself](#) (TMY) Folklife Festival looks a little different this year, given COVID-19. But innovation and adaptation are mainstays of shifting traditions and culture. Instead of a three-day single weekend event, TMY 2020 happens **throughout the whole month of October**, with dozens of online events and a handful of safely distanced in-person events. Upholding the spirit of festivals past, all programs highlight the uniqueness of the TMY experience and long-lasting relationships with community tradition holders.

Organized by the Southwest Folklife Alliance, this year's TMY includes food-to-go, pre-recorded performances, a folk arts marketplace, and intimate online conversations and demonstrations. The festival kicks off with an organized oldie and lowrider car cruise with The Dukes Car Club. Three weekends of food-to-go allow purchases from favorite vendors representing cuisines from Poland, Cuba, Vietnam, Egypt, among others, as well as O'odham frybread and red chile. Dance and musical performances showcasing the many distinct cultures of the world that now call Tucson and Pima County home—from Bulgarian folk songs to Tango guitar, Flamenco percussion, Old Western swing, Japanese drumming, Yaqui violins, and Apache ceremonial dances—are shared on-screen at food pick-ups and online.

The event is "not TMY as we know it," says Festival Program Director Maribel Alvarez. But remains true to its mission and offers new ways to safely connect with the cultural expressions of over 50 folk artists, dancers, musicians, and food producers representing nearly 30 countries and regions, she says.

"We will miss the social chemistry born out of density in the civic center of Tucson, the social metabolism that happens when cultures bump into each other and 'meet.' But it is still an affirmation of a sense of place for dozens of ethnic heritage artists and enclaves that make up Tucson. We are here and we are your neighbor," says Alvarez, who is also Associate Dean of Community Engagement at the University of Arizona's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

The 2020 TMY will include **six (6) program tracks**:

- **Cruise for Healing**, Saturday, October 3, 2020, 5 pm

Location: The route starts and ends at Rodeo Park, 5001 S Nogales Highway

Led by the Dukes Car Club, this organized 19-mile cruise around Tucson celebrates the chromatic shine and legacy lowrider cars. Organized cruises are a common communal ritual to mark special occasions—times of transitions like weddings, quinceaneras, and funerals—but also to draw attention to times of change and upheaval. Community members are encouraged to join in or watch along the route with signs of encouragement.

- **"Tucson Eat Yourself," pop-up food-to-go stands.** Saturdays & Sundays for three weekends on October, 11 am – 5 pm

Locations:

- Oct. 10 & 11: Mercado San Agustin, 125 South Avenida del Convento, Tucson, AZ 85745
- Oct. 17 & 18: Café Santa Rosa, 2615 S 6th Ave, Tucson, AZ 85713
- Oct. 24 & 25: St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, 1145 E Fort Lowell Rd, Tucson, AZ 85719

Food-to-go from selected beloved TMY food vendors at 3 Tucson locations. Study the menu first then show up to order, pay, and take home. TMY performers share cultural expressions in music and dance on large LED screens in special performances filmed especially for 2020. Masks required & no dining areas available.

- **Lit Up: Traditional Artists on Public Walls, Fridays in October, Dusk - 10 pm**

Locations: TBD

Video projections of traditional dancers and manual artists doing what they do best--moving and making. The precise and sinuous movements of Japanese traditional dancers, the athletic leaps and twirls of Polish folk dancing, the steady delicate hand of a Henna artist, and more writ-large on Tucson walls.

- **TMY Virtual:** Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays in October, various times

Location: Online, via TMY Facebook, and YouTube channels

Curated online conversations and demonstrations celebrating and exploring folk arts, foodways, and performing arts. Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yaqui people, Japanese dance and drumming forms, capoeira, Celtic traditions, local sites of food production, and more. Favorite performers return with pre-recorded performances, among them: Odaiko Sonora, Tucson's own taiko drumming group; the dynamic Polish dance troupe, Lajkonik; Syrian master violin Fadi Iskandar; Old-time Appalachian musician, Dan Levenson; and Tohono O'odham Waila from Gertie N the T.O. Boyz.

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- **Folk Arts Online Marketplace;** October 1-31, 2020.

Location: Online

This pilot marketplace features the work of 8 folk artists sharing works of material culture distinctive to the southwest. Support their livelihood in these uncertain economic times. Artists receive 100% of the sales revenue.

- **Drive-in Concert:** Friday, October 30, 6:30-8pm & 8:30-10pm

Location: 1055 W. Grant Rd.

Renowned Pascua Yaqui performer **Gabriel Ayala** closes the 2020 festival with an on-screen drive-in concert, with an opening act from **Yellow Bird Indian Dancers**. Suggested donation: \$10

- View the concert from your car at safe distances from other cars.
- Snacks available for purchase from roving vendors.
- Audiences are required to wear masks when not inside their cars.

All formats of TMY programs have been modeled after well-tested practices locally and nationally with demonstrable successful COVID safety protocols.

More info: www.TucsonMeetYourself.org