



SCOTT KIRBY

COMPOSER • PIANIST • VISUAL ARTIST

MAIN STREET SOUVENIRS IN SEARCH OF THE AMERICAN HEARTLAND Sample Chapters

Chapter Two: *Gatherings*

[Kirby plays *Carousel for Leah-Marie*, lights dim and screen shows archival images of all sorts of small town gatherings, some nostalgic, others modern. When music finishes, lights come up on Kirby and images with scenes from parks, and then archival shots of John Philip Sousa and his band.]

“No gathering spot provides a more nostalgic nucleus of the American small town than does the bandstand - host to a kaleidoscopic array of activities, from mischief to romance, impromptu serenades, teenagers carving their initials, preachers, poets, speeches by the Daughters of the American Revolution. And of course - musicians.

When Sousa’s band arrived in town, word would already have leapt from ear to ear like burning embers of a prairie fire, and a crowd would be assembled. Hucksters and salesmen, purveyors of ancient medicinal cures, organ grinders, hot dog pushers, and everything in the line of hilarity made its way to the park, as families spread their blankets, trading stories...and sandwiches. Between 1892 and 1931, John Philip Sousa and his band performed 15,623 concerts, thundering his marches into the very brick and mortar of Main Streets from coast to coast.”

[Image freezes on a photo of “Sousa: the March King,” while Kirby performs *El Capitan*.]



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Chapter Four: *Ragtime: America's Music*

[Screen darkens.]

"On the streets of other towns in the Midwest, a different music was emerging, one destined to be America's first nationally-popular style. Sedalia, Missouri - a crossroads and a crucible - was home to one of the true innovators in American music. Scott Joplin was his name. And the new sound he was crafting became known as ragtime."

[Kirby plays *Easy Winners*. Screen shows Joplin. During the following narrative, images of Joplin, other composers, and scenes from Sedalia, Missouri.]

"It was said that when Joplin walked down the street that others would gather around him, walking alongside - young composers, eager students, admirers, acquaintances - until the procession swelled to something more like a parade than an afternoon stroll. Besides being a composer, Joplin's highest aspiration was to be a teacher - not an 'entertainer' - and his quiet magnetism reflected a more modest and small town demeanor than most of his big city rivals. But in 1899, he would change the face of American music forever with a composition that penetrated saloons and salons across the country: *The Maple Leaf Rag*."

[Kirby plays the *Maple Leaf Rag*. Screen shows the sheet music cover. Screen goes dark as narration begins.]

"Joplin eventually left the heartland and moved to New York, where he wrote some of his most important works. He died in a mental hospital in 1917 at the age of 49, insane and alone, virtually forgotten and nearly broke. One of our great musical geniuses was buried in a grave that remained unmarked for nearly half a century. His life was marked by catastrophe and hardship, discrimination and disappointment. But his music, always hopeful, embodied the full spectrum of human emotion - the greatest gift from a truly generous artistic spirit."

[Screen remains dark. Kirby plays *Solace: A Mexican Serenade*.]



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Chapter Ten: *Echoes from the Schoolyard*

[Images of photography, lonely open spaces on the high plains appear during this narrative.]

“In a city, most noises assault us from only a few meters distant. But on the high plains, sounds float to us from far away, as if from a dream, or rumble in from a distant valley, like an invisible herd of bison roaring its way to the Canadian border. My father taught me to count the seconds between the lightning and the thunder, and it filled me with wonder to think that this ever-so-present reverberation actually came from a few seconds ago, a kind of ghost reaching out to me from the past. And now when I’m on the plains, I perceive all sounds this way - as if originating in the mysterious world of before. Perhaps this perception becomes all the more poignant because of the nostalgic nature and isolated surroundings of these sounds: a train whistle, children playing in a far-off field, a crop duster buzzing like a tiny insect in the distance, or a dinner bell... a church bell... a school bell...”

[Stage darkens. Kirby plays *Echoes from the Schoolyard* and images of art, photography and video show on screen.]