TELLING HISTORY
ONE TOUR STOP AT A TIME

Telling history one tour stop at a time...

When Mike Paris isn’t playing keyboard for the band O.A.R., he’s busy following his passions for exploring historic places and performing original songs in a project he calls TuneTrek. He came through Syracuse for a stop on O.A.R.’s fall tour and we met up at the Skä-noñh Center, a former mission that’s being transformed into a Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) heritage center. Paris recorded a music video in a longhouse chapel set on a hill above Onondaga Lake on a windy, frigid day.

“TuneTrek was born out of my love for travel and exploration and adventure,” he explains. “The feeling of seeing something new for the first time—...I love that. I live for that. Obviously, there’s my love for music. I was looking for a way to combine those two things with history and architecture. I drew inspiration from Les Secord, Survivorman, and Live from Daryll’s House. I like aspects of both of those shows.”

Paris’s songwriting has been the driving force for the whole project. He says: “It’s sort of a subversive way for me to get the songs out there. It’s also a way for me to work that multimedia music that I’ve always loved—video and pictures.”

So when O.A.R. sets its tour schedule, Paris gets to work researching historic databases for unique places to visit along the way. “I just start compiling a list of each city and then I go back and read more, look at pictures, and start reaching out to people and getting more information. There’s sort of a gut instinct about which one I feel I’m more excited about,” he says.

So far he’s filmed more than 30 TuneTrek videos all across the country. He’s visited castles, haunted houses, museums, scenic vistas, factories, mines, and more. He selects a tune to record based on the feel of the locale. “I try to think about where I am going and what song seems to support the feel of it lyrically,” he says. “When I get to the space, invariably, sometimes I feel different and something else happens.”

At the Skä-noñh Center’s chapel he chose a song called “Resistance.” “I live my life amongst the most resistance. I live my life amongst the free...” he sings.

“It is kind of a battle the elements feel. We are up here, at a mission, a fort. It’s an open tempo and I really don’t want to do a ballad in the cold chapel.”

Today the technique involves holding the guitar horizontally while thumbing chords with his left hand and pokings, flicking, plucking, and knocking out a rhythm with the other hand. “Those moves made music out of ears and brooms...That kind of gave me the confidence to pursue something different.”

He says, adding that the wood, stone works well in rhythmic stomping.

His hope is to eventually have live visits to each site and be able to compose an original tune during the visits, and one day held to create a television show based on the premise.

As Paris explains on his TuneTrek website, “Every song has its place... and every place has a story.”