



TELLING HISTORY ONE TOUR STOP AT A TIME

BY CHERIE YURCO

Photo: Joe Scalfaro

When MikelParis 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 Stroud, *Survivorman*, and *Live from Daryl'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 muscle that I've always loved—videos 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 potential list for 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 inns, museums, scenic vistas, factories, zoos, 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 among the most resistance; I live my life amongst the free ...," he sings.

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

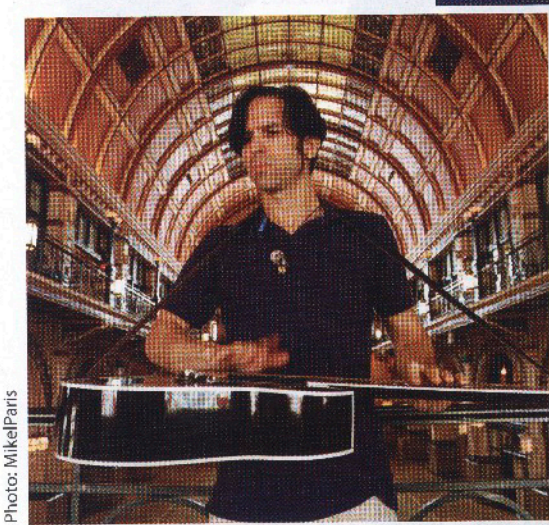


Photo: MikelParis

he says, adding that the wood floor works well for rhythmic stomping.

His hope is to eventually have longer visits to each site, and be able to compose an original tune during the visits, and one day he'd like 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."

GUITAR DRUMMING

Rather than carrying a keyboard around for his TuneTrek videos MikelParis incorporates his unique guitar style—guitar drumming—to accompany himself. He started to develop the technique shortly after college while hanging out with a friend. His friend played chords, while Paris drummed on the guitar body and strings with juggling sticks.

"There was something really exciting and percussive about the sound," he recalls. Later, while working with the show *Stomp*, Paris developed the style further. "Those guys made music out of cans and brooms. That kind of gave me the confidence to pursue something different."

Today, the technique involves holding the guitar horizontally while thumbing chords with his left hand and poking, flicking, plucking, and knocking out a rhythm with the other hand on the open-tuned guitar's body and strings.

"It's something I've been developing for a while; it's kind of become second nature to me," he says. "Being a piano player this position has always been comfortable for me. I look at it as a drum, but other times it's a piano, a bass, and a guitar."

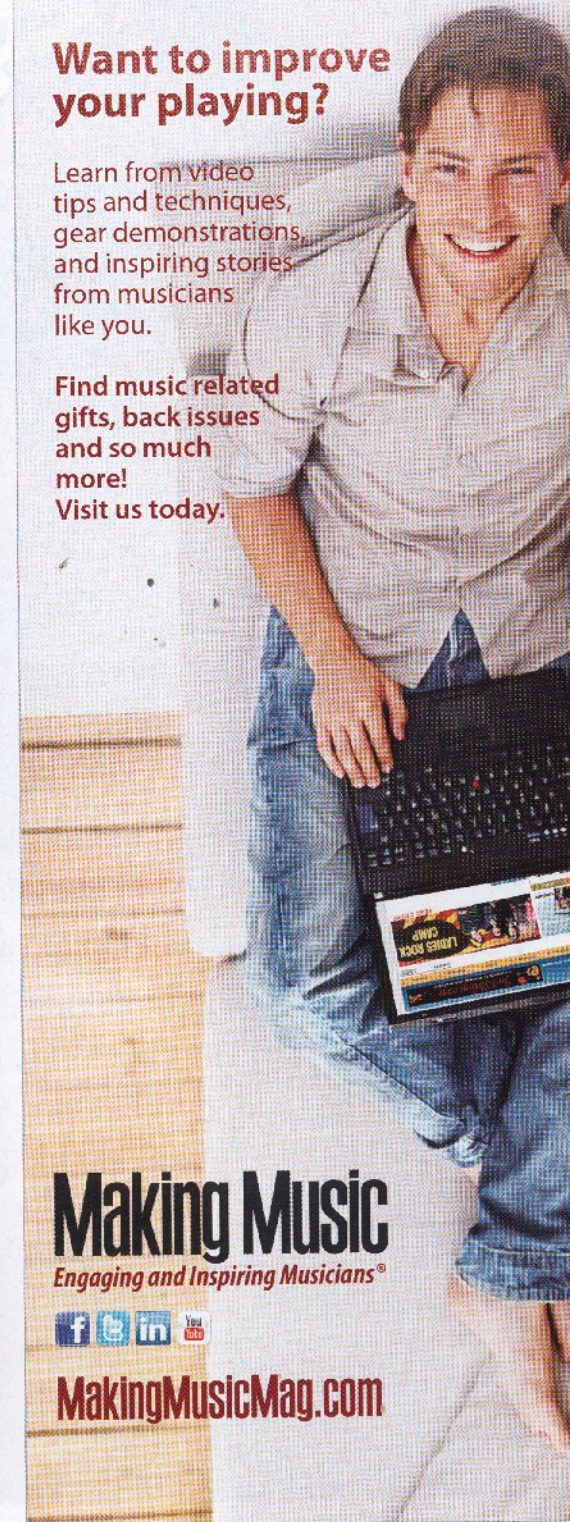
For a demonstration of Paris's unique playing style and links to his TuneTrek videos and go to: www.MakingMusicMag.com/MikelParis.

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