



# River of Song: A Musical Journey Down the Mississippi

*Elijah Wald, John Junkerman, Theo Pelletier*

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**River of Song: A Musical Journey Down the Mississippi** Elijah Wald, John Junkerman, Theo Pelletier  
A companion to the major Smithsonian Institution series for public television and radio, *River of Song* explores the breadth and depth of American music at the close of the twentieth century--through narrative, photography, and the words of the musicians themselves.

Over the course of five years, recording and interviewing more than five hundred musicians in the communities where they live and perform, John Junkerman, Elijah Wald, and the *River of Song* team surveyed the length of the Mississippi River and found along its muddy banks an America where music is not merely a carefully packaged commodity but an exhilaratingly diverse and thriving part of the culture. Near the icy headwaters in Minnesota, Ojibwe drummers perform at a powwow, and the power trio Babes in Toyland serve up their brand of riot-grrrl punk. In Iowa, songwriter John Hartford navigates the river. In Moline, Illinois, a Mexican band blends traditional rhythms with Latino rap; in Memphis, Rufus Thomas, Ann Peebles, and the Memphis Horns carry on the Southern fusion; in New Orleans, Henry Butler radiates the 88s, while the Soul Rebels carry the brass band swinging into the twenty-first century. There is folk music here, and basement-band rock; newly transplanted Laotian melodies and the music of last century's French settlers; zydeco and Cajun music, country, gospel, blues, and soul. *River of Song* captures, often in the artists' own words, what the music means to them: its place as a part of tradition, but also as a living, glorious fact in their world.

Complemented by a gallery of vibrant images, this extraordinary journey brings us the many voices that flow together even now to make the joyful noise of the best American music--the streams that join to make one great river of song.

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