FOX RIVER RAGTIME FESTIVAL

August 22-23, 2026

Listen to America's first popular music – classic and modern ragtime performed by world-class musicians throughout the day on historic trolley cars and on the museum grounds.





Fox River Trolley Museum

365 S LAFOX ST SOUTH ELGIN, IL 60177

Letter from the Director



Welcome to the first-ever Fox River Ragtime Festival! We are thrilled that you chose to come out to the Fox River Trolley Museum today to hear great music, and we are excited to share all that the festival and the trolley museum has to offer! You are now within the scenic Fox River Valley, which is one of most scenic and historic locations in the Chicagoland area. Once a valuable traveling, fishing, and hunting corridor for Native Americans, the Fox River Valley area is now a popular destination for music, history, nature, boating, fishing, hiking, biking, and so much more. We hope that you spend some time today enjoying our festival, trolley museum, and this beautiful geographic area!

The trolley mainline that the museum is operating its historic trolley cars over today itself is entrenched in the history of the Fox River Valley. This railroad line was built as part of an interurban trolley system that ran from Aurora north to Elgin along the Fox River. In both Aurora and Elgin, passengers on the smaller "Fox River" interurban could transfer to the high-speed interurban railroad that ran into downtown Chicago. This high-speed interurban would later become known as the Chicago Aurora and Elgin Railroad, and this railroad was later abandoned in the 1950s with some equipment from the railroad ending up at the Fox River Trolley Museum and the former railroad track being immortalized as the famed Illinois Prairie Path.

The museum's current mainline, which is one of the oldest continuously operating stretches of track in the state of Illinois, is about two miles in length and runs from "Castlemuir" in South Elgin south along the Fox River to Blackhawk Station inside of the Jon J. Duerr Forest Preserve. Blackhawk, which is the southern terminus of your trolley ride today, is home to many historical sights and scenic natural landmarks including: a grave of two unknown soldiers who died of Chorora in 1832 while serving in the Blackhawk War, the river bend of the Fox River, and a small waterfall. As a special event for the ragtime festival, musicians will be riding a trolley car and providing world-class live music to the historic trolley ride.

Chicagoland's ragtime and early jazz heritage runs deep through the entire history and culture of the region. The first known piece of music published with the name "rag" in the title was "Mississippi Rag," which was written by William Krell, a Chicagoan. During the 1893 World's Fair, which was held in Chicago, Scott Joplin himself performed on a cornet on the outskirts of the fair within the city. Further, Chicago became a very large hub for Early Jazz or Hot Jazz music, with the Southside of the city forming a very unique style of playing. Popular songs such as "Royal Garden Blues," which was written about a very large dancing club on the south side of Chicago, immortalized the city in music history. With Chicago's notorious history with mobsters and prohibition came much opportunity for jazz music around the city, as early jazz was popularly the music of choice in "speakeasies." Today, performers such as Paul Asaro preserve this early jazz legacy at concert halls, jazz clubs, and restaurants around the city.

Here at the trolley museum, we also have many things to do around the festival this weekend - Bee sure to check them all out! We have tours of the museum and our collection of historic trolleys, interurban cars, locomotives, and freight equipment, hand car rides, velocipede (rail bikes) rides on Sunday only, trolley rides down our historic railroad, live music in both the car barn and Chicago Transit Authority 4451, food trucks, and more!

I am so thrilled that you came out to the Fox River Ragtime Festival this weekend, and I hope that you join us next year! Please follow our YouTube Channel, Facebook, Website, or Instagram for more important details such as the dates, next years' performers, and more! It has been so amazing to put on this festival this year and merge my two passions-trains and ragtime piano-into one event! I want to thank each and every one of you for coming out to experience this great music and these great performers, and thank you for supporting the advancement of ragtime and early jazz music in the Chicagoland area! Please share your experience here at the festival with your family and friends in person and online, and feel free to email me at Anderson@frtm.org with any suggestions for next year or just general feedback! I also want to thank the performers, the Fox River Trolley Museum volunteers, the FRTM Board of Directors, Eric Zabelny, Ted Lemen, Bill McNally, and the Scott Joplin International Ragtime Foundation for their immense help in preparation for this event.
With all of that said, thank you for coming out to the festival, and let's enjoy some great music!

Anderson Pries,
Founder and Director

Festival Artists



Paul Asaro is recognized internationally as one of the leading exponents of the Harlem Stride piano style as well as ragtime and the classic jazz of Jelly Roll Morton. He has appeared regularly in Chicago with the "Fat Babies" jazz band and with the "Chicago Cellar Boys" since 2010. Previously, Paul toured for twelve years with the legendary Leon Redbone, recorded with Loudon Wainwright III on his 2010 Grammy winning "Charlie Poole Project," appeared onscreen with Vince Giordano's band in HBO's series "Boardwalk Empire," and appeared as a soloist at jazz and ragtime festivals nationwide. Previous to that, he performed off Broadway and for the national tour of Vernel Bagneris and Morten Gunnar Larsen's Obie award winning musical "Jelly Roll! The Music And The Man." Paul currently performs weekly with the jazz band "The Chicago Cellar Boys" at the long-established Chicago club The Green Mill and also performs weekly at the Honky Tonk BBQ in the Pilsen neighborhood. Paul is also co-leader along with Gina DeGregorio of a swing oriented dance band, "Paul Asaro & His Rhythm."



Nathan Beasley has been recognized as one of the top performers of ragtime music. Born and raised in rural Southern Illinois, ragtime was a discovery at an early age. At the age of 17, Nathan became the junior champion of the World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest. Since then, he went on to work full time in the railroad industry, and he looks forward to bringing two passions together at the 2026 Fox River Ragtime Festival.

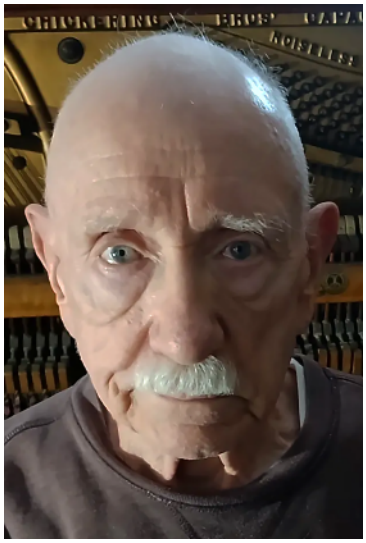


Sue Keller is one of the world's top ragtime players. She graduated from DePauw University in 1974 with a degree in theatre and music.

Sue was the Music Director for the prestigious Scott Joplin International Ragtime Festival for seven years. During that time, she was able to introduce many pianists to that festival. She also sat on the board of the World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest, as president and vice president, judge, and performer. She still judges that contest.

Last fall, Sue produced her ragtime musical, "Wabash Avenue After Dark" in Chatham, MA. The show is dedicated to the memory and music of "Ragtime Bob" Darch. Bob's family has granted Sue the rights to everything, including the title tune, and four Lamb rags, Jersey, Walper, House, Beehive, and Alaskan. Although it was originally planned to be a one-act, audience response was tremendous and she is currently writing a second act.

It was a perfect storm that has brought **Ted Lemen** to the first annual Fox River Ragtime Festival. As a young man, his father sang with a family octet at church, and later with various barbershop quartets and choruses, eventually taking up tenor banjo. His mother played violin in the high school orchestra and was always a great singer around the piano. The house was filled with music, specially when aunts who knew how to play came over on holidays and found themselves crippled by the spinet keyboard with a few less than 88 keys. The piano had been purchased for his sister's lessons, but she wasn't interested, so Ted taught himself two fingers at a time starting with barbershop classics and hymns. His interest in trains began with a cousin and an uncle who worked for the railroad and the piano-playing aunt rode the Rock Island to a from work. First though, his dad bought an American Flyer train one Christmas and it ran in a circle under the tree. His dad also took him on a New Years day roundtrip from Chicago to Milwaukee on the speedy North Shore Line electric interurban just days before it ended service. His aunt took him on his first steam engine excursion from Chicago to Galesburg in the late 1950s, his first experience with high-speed steam engines. Years later as a college student, Ted launched a campaign to save that same popular Burlington Railroad steam excursion program in February 1966, as its end had been announced in Fall 1965. While the campaign failed, it had attracted lots of interest from those who wanted to see some steam engines continue to run. So, the group then bought a little steam locomotive in Indiana and brought it to Illinois, starting what became the Monticello Railway Museum, which opened to the public in 1972. To increase ridership, Ted started the World Championship Old-time Piano Playing Contest & Festival in 1975, now in its 52nd year and taking place in Oxford, MS. He has emceed every year and has also won the New Rag Contest for composers twice. Now, gratefully, a second rail-located Ragtime event for Northern Illinois aficionados will take place under the leadership of one of our Junior Division contestants, Anderson Pries, a dedicated electric railfan.





Sammy G started playing ragtime in high school when he helped rebuild player pianos with a friend. Because of this, he was exposed to the great stride masters like Fats Waller and J. Lawrence Cook, to name a few. Sammy plays other styles of music as well, and is a piano tuner and technician.

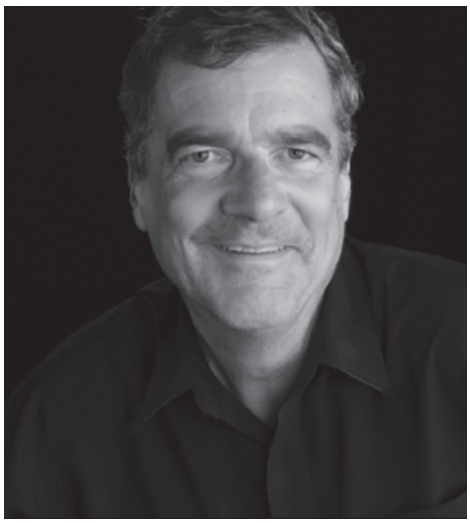


Faye Ballard first became interested in ragtime after hearing a piano player named Les Cripe playing at a Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Decatur, IL. Les was kind enough to take her under his wing and helped teach her the first rag she learned: "Maple Leaf Rag" by Scott Joplin.

Faye has been a part of the World Old-Time Piano Playing Championship since age 10 either as a contestant or as Contest Coordinator. One of her best experiences was winning first place in the Senior Division of the contest in 2024.



Anderson Pries is a skilled ragtime and jazz pianist hailing from Homewood, IL. He is a 16-year-old rising junior at Homewood Flossmoor High School, a south suburb of Chicago, IL. He has performed alongside many renowned musicians including Grammy-Award-Winning artists including: alto saxophonist Christopher McBride, tenor saxophonist Chip McNeill, tenor saxophonist Mickey Smith Jr, as well as ragtime stars Brian Holland, Paul Orsi, Dan Levinson, Andy Schumm, and the Chicago Cellar Boys. He has also performed in many major venues and events including the 50th anniversary of the World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest and Festival in 2024, The Illinois Association of School Boards Convention in 2024, Flossmoor's Centennial Celebration in 2024, The Illinois Music Educators' Conference in 2025, The Scott Joplin International Ragtime Festival 2025, Chicago's Honky Tonk BBQ, and the University of Illinois' Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. He was also the 2026 awardee of the prestigious "Ragtime Kid" award from the Scott Joplin International Ragtime Foundation of Sedalia, Missouri. He is currently the pianist for Homewood Flossmoor High School's varsity Viking Jazz Band and other featured groups.



Hailing from Chicago, 'home of the blues'. Great jazz, blues and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra gave **Tim Barton** an immersion in beautiful live music. Barton's music can be found on a myriad of shows, including Call Me Kat (Fox), Younger and The Originals (the CW), Bored to Death on CSI, and various other programs on the BBC and HBO. Tim performs Fringe Festivals around the world, combining concert repertoire, jazz, blues and ragtime in his outstanding solo program "Rhapsody in Chicago Blues".



Leo Roth is a second year piano performance and German student at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. He studies piano with Dr. Susan Smith and pipe organ with Dr. Jaebon Hwang. He plays piano in L&C chamber music ensembles, sings in the college Community Chorale, and loves playing the world's only circular pipe organ, a 1971 Cassavant found in Lewis and Clark's Agnes Flanagan Chapel.

Leo has always had a deep passion for many types of music and was first introduced to the ragtime community at age eleven when he, intending to learn all he could about where Scott Joplin wrote and composed ragtime, visited the KATY Depot in Sedalia, MO, the Cradle of Ragtime. In 2021 (at age fourteen), Leo was named the Scott Joplin International Ragtime Foundation's inaugural Ragtime Kid. This opportunity allowed him to perform and give a symposium on Theron C. Bennett, a ragtime composer, pianist, and publisher from Pierce City, MO, in 2022. Leo has returned to the Joplin Festival as a performer ever since. He is also a passionate collector of ragtime era sheet music and piano rolls. He is excited to spread the joy of ragtime music and its history in Chicagoland at the inaugural Fox River Ragtime Festival!

Jovanni LaPorte is a Chicago-area Jazz, Ragtime, Blues, and Swing pianist who is thrilled to be performing at his first music festival. Jovanni has always been an old soul, a trait reflected in his lifelong passion for history, transportation, and music. From a young age, he was fascinated by historical events like the sinking of the R.M.S. Titanic, the American Civil War, and the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. His early musical influences spanned from standard Classical composers like Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Liszt, and Wagner to early-to-mid 20th-century popular music icons like John Philip Sousa, Scott Joplin, Benny Goodman, and Glenn Miller.

This diverse foundation naturally led Jovanni to discover 1920s and 1930s Hot Jazz. His love for the genre began developing in middle school through the music of Tuba Skinny, the Firehouse Five Plus Two, and traditional ragtime.

During his senior year of high school, his interest peaked when he discovered Vince Giordano & The Nighthawks. After reaching out to Giordano, Jovanni was advised to contact Andy Schumm, a prominent figure in the Chicago jazz scene.

For the past six years, Jovanni has had the privilege of studying under the world-renowned and exceptionally talented Andy Schumm. Andy has mentored Jovanni in everything from solo piano playing and arranging to band leading and management. Jovanni has also gained valuable firsthand experience subbing on tuba for Andy's band, The Chicago Cellar Boys.

Currently, Jovanni is refining his piano style by studying the recordings and transcriptions of legends such as Scott Joplin, James Scott, Joseph Lamb, Jelly Roll Morton, Eubie Blake, James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Little Brother Montgomery, Cow Cow Davenport and Jimmy Yancey. In addition to his solo work, Jovanni is collaborating with Frank Gualtieri, Peter Ho, Dave Bock, and Andy Schumm to organize new classic jazz bands in the Chicago-Milwaukee area. Most notably, they are revamping the West End Jazz Band—a group that, ironically, heavily influenced Andy Schumm during his own musical development.

Looking ahead, Jovanni is training to become a piano technician. His ultimate dream is to dedicate his life to servicing antique pianos, directing a 7- to 8-piece Chicago-style classic jazz band, performing at Old Jazz, Blues, & Ragtime festivals, and creating educational resources to help teach, preserve, and expose this music to future generations.



Philip Acklin attended grade and high school in Decatur IL, where he participated in the band playing trumpet. Upon a visit with his parents to the Whistle Stop Diner in Blue Mound IL, he was exposed to Ragtime, traditional jazz, and Tin Pan Alley standards. He went to work at the diner, which included performances by piano artists or champs like Sue Keller, Brian Holland, Richard Zimmerman, Faye Ballard and the late Marty Sammon. During two breaks for the artists, Philip and diner owner Ted Lemen entertained the audience with a sing-along set and Philip's bones playing. Ted and Philip continue to work together on shows for nursing homes and senior's groups.





Andy Schumm is a Chicago-based early jazz musician who currently leads the world-renowned Chicago Cellar Boys. He is considered an authority on the music of Bix Beiderbecke, a leading expert on hot jazz cornet, and has appeared at the Bix Jazz Festival in Davenport for nearly twenty consecutive years. He received the Bix Lives Award from the Bix Beiderbecke Museum and Archives in 2024. In addition to cornet, Andy also plays piano, clarinet, saxophone, banjo, and drums, and is a well-regarded arranger and composer..



Ryan Neubauer first fell in love with early jazz when he heard Clarence Williams' version of "Cakewalkin' Babies". A teenage student of Josh Duffee at the time, Ryan was inspired to embark on a 20+ year love affair with hot jazz behind the drums that led him to Austin Texas. For a decade and a half, he played in every which dance hall and saloon across Texas and much of the southwest leading him to ultimately team up with two time grammy nominated Colin Hancock in Turtle Bay Records' hottest band The Joymakers. Ryan, looking for a break from the unrelenting Texas heat, landed in Chicago a year ago and hit the ground running. You can catch Ryan performing with 'The Bucktown Stompers' in Chicago and with 'Jon Mroz' Troubadours of Rhythm' across Wisconsin.

THE BUCKTOWN STOMPERS

Drawing influences from Jimmy Blythe, Johnny Dodds, and Jasper Taylor, The Bucktown Stompers are a jazz trio celebrating the music played in the southside of Chicago during the 1920's and 30's. The group features **Andy Schumm** (clarinet) and **Paul Asaro** (piano) from Chicago Cellar Boys, and recent Windy City transplant, by way of Austin Texas and Davenport Iowa, **Ryan Neubauer** (washboard).

Event Activities

Historic Trolley Rides

Experience the thrill of riding early-20th century electric interurban and trolley cars over a two-mile stretch of historic interurban mainline dating back to 1896! Whether you choose to ride the trolley just for fun or a park-and-ride shuttle between the parking lots for this festival, our restored historic trolleys are sure to wow.

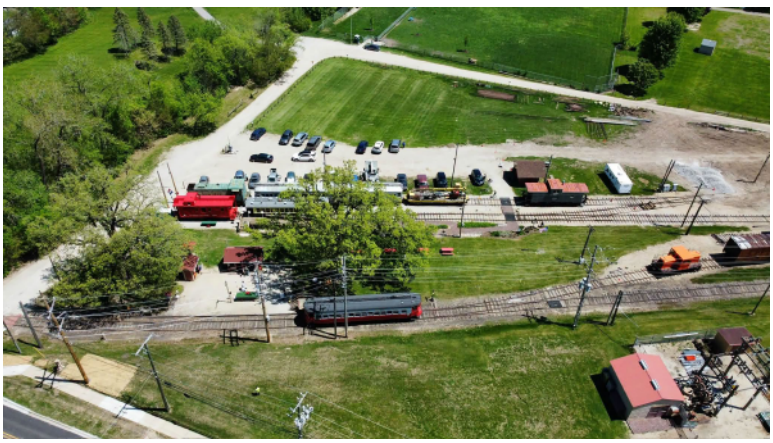




Live Ragtime Music

Listen to America's first popular music – classic and modern ragtime – performed by world-class musicians throughout the day on historic trolley cars and on the museum grounds. Scroll down to check out the list of 2026 featured performers!





Museum Tours & Historical R.R. Equipment

Equipment and trains, hands-on restoration, hand car rides, and unforgettable rides along tracks from 1896

FOX RIVER RAGTIME FESTIVAL

Schedule of Events

Saturday

Set Start Time	Car Barn Stage	CTA 4451 Stage
11:00 (AM)	Opening Ceremony	N/A
11:30	Anderson Pries & Guests	N/A
12:00 (PM)	Sue Keller	Ted Lemen & Philip Acklin
12:30	Faye Ballard	Ted Lemen & Philip Acklin
1:00	Tim Barton	Anderson Pries
1:30	Ted Lemen & Philip Acklin	Anderson Pries
2:00	Sammy G	Nathan Beasley
2:30	Paul Asaro	Nathan Beasley
3:00	Paul Asaro	Sue Keller
3:30	Nathan Beasley	Sue Keller
4:00	Nathan Beasley	N/A
4:30	Anderson Pries & All Performers	N/A

Sunday

Set Start Time	Car Barn Stage	CTA 4451 Stage
11:00 (AM)	Anderson Pries & Guests	N/A
11:30	Nathan Beasley	N/A
12:00 (PM)	Leo Roth	Jovanni LaPorte
12:30	Faye Ballard	Jovanni LaPorte
1:00	Tim Barton	Bucktown Stompers
1:30	Sammy G	Bucktown Stompers
2:00	Ted Lemen & Philip Acklin	Bucktown Stompers
2:30	Sue Keller	Bucktown Stompers
3:00	Nathan Beasley	Jovanni LaPorte & Special Guest Ethan Leinwand
3:30	Paul Asaro	Jovanni LaPorte & Special Guest Ethan Leinwand
4:00	Paul Asaro	N/A
4:30	Closing Ceremony	N/A

Trolley Schedule



Car 4451



Car 316

Car 4451 and Car 316 will run at 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, and 3:00 with additional unscheduled trains between them or at 11:00 or 4:00 if needed.
Car 4451 will feature music onboard from 12:00 to 4:00 and Car 316 will run regularly.

Acknowledegements

Organizations

Individuals

FRTM Board of Directors
Ben Rohling
Eric Zabelny
Ted Lemen
Pries Family
Bill McNally
David Peterson
Festival Volunteers and Performers