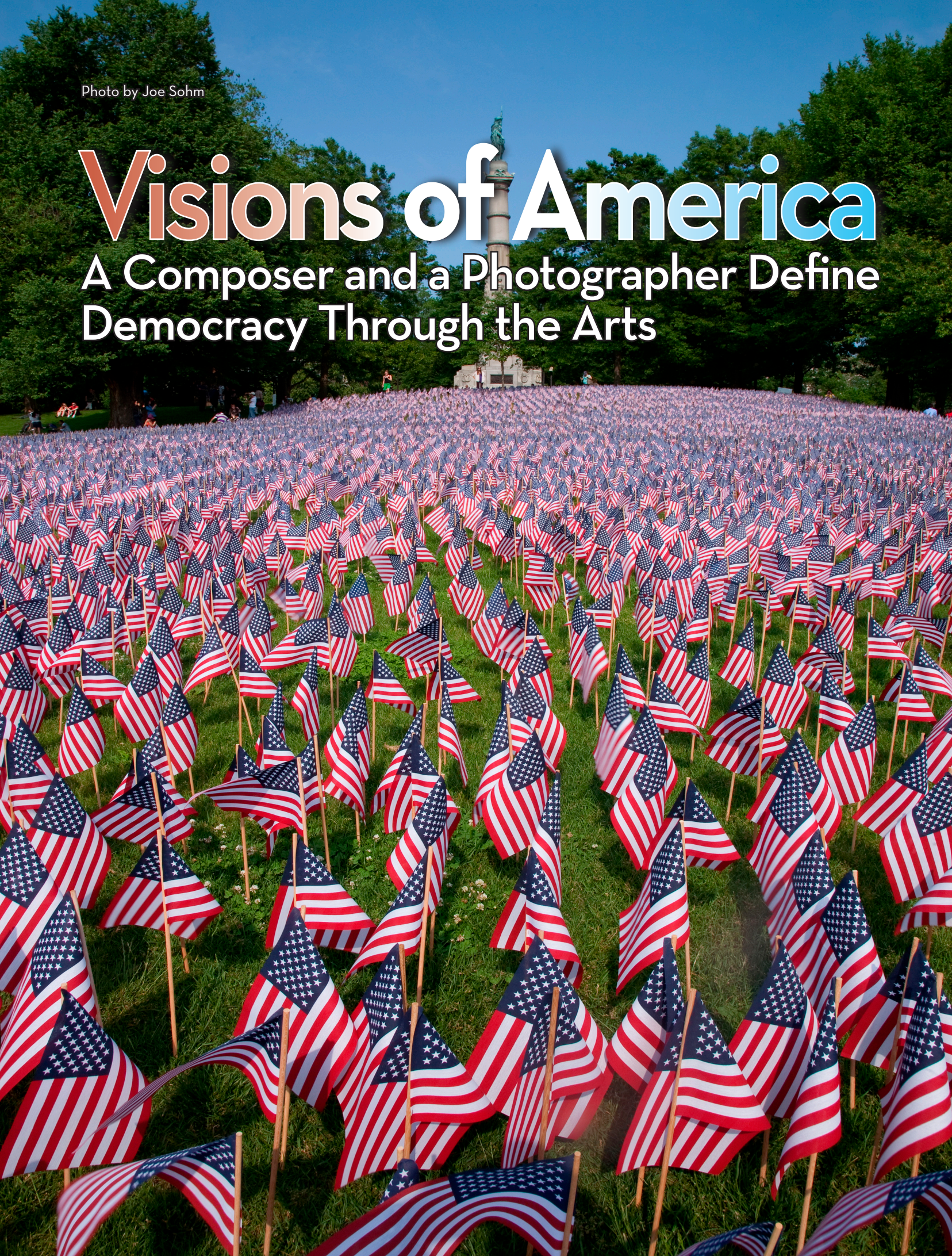


Photo by Joe Sohm

Visions of America

A Composer and a Photographer Define Democracy Through the Arts



By Logan Hall

*How does one capture democracy?
Could it be portrayed in a single photo or in the subtle
notation of a musical piece?*

Locals Joe Sohm and Roger Kellaway have been busy perfecting the combination of American-themed imagery and music over the last decade. The results of their dedication have culminated in a photo symphony titled “Visions of America,” which truly provides a one-of-a-kind look into the heart of the USA.

Since their first show in 2009, the pair have been fine tuning their constantly evolving production and have

recruited some big names to help out — including acting legend, Clint Eastwood.

The birth of “Visions” was humble enough, however.

“It all began as a dinner conversation at our house,” said Sohm. “Roger expressed interest to write an original score to be performed by a 65 piece orchestra. Now it’s gone from an idea at the dinner table to a full symphony concert.”

The two artists work together like a well-oiled machine with



Photo by Logan Hall

Grammy winning composer Roger Kellaway, left, and renowned photographer Joe Sohm with the tools of their trade in Kellaway's studio in Ojai.

WHAT: VISIONS OF AMERICA, performed by the New West Symphony

WHEN: JANUARY 25-27

WHERE:

• OXNARD PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, 800 Hobson Way, Oxnard
• THOUSAND OAKS CIVIC ARTS PLAZA,

2100 East Thousand Oaks Boulevard

• SANTA MONICA'S BARNUM HALL
601 Pico Boulevard, (Santa Monica High School)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

newwestsymphony.org. (805) 497-5800



Photo by Joe Sohm from wildflower fields in the Carrizo Plain

Sohm's photos complementing Kellaway's jazz-centered music and vice versa. Scenes of towering buildings, smiling faces and colorful sunsets dance across a screen 40 feet wide and 20 feet tall while orchestral music weaves its way through the air. It all comes together creating a visceral, multidimensional tale of the melting pot that is our great nation.

In one segment of the show, a bluesy jazz piano number, begins accompanied by the soulful vocals of Steven Tyrell. On screen the camera sweeps across an urban sprawl of buildings, cars and American citizens, captured in a single moment by Sohm's watchful eye. Another scene shows photos panning across mesas in Utah and rock formations in Arizona while the orchestra seamlessly follows every shot.

Their project didn't happen overnight though. Many years of hard work in their separate fields brought the two men where they are now.

"I've traveled more than a million miles in total and photographed every state in the union," said Sohm. "Democracy is an idea so big that it has expressed itself in 50 states over the course of 200 years. We're interpreting this big idea of democracy and translating it into images and musical notes."

Kellaway, a Grammy Award winning musician and composer, has written hundreds of musical pieces that have been featured in blockbuster movies and performed by world renowned orchestras. He too found that VOA was a project that he could really sink his teeth into.

"This is one of the most challenging symphonic projects I've ever had," said Kellaway. "I've scored an awful lot of films, so putting music to photographs is nothing new, but putting music to the photographs that were specifically about democracy was a challenging process that became very inspiring."

Kellaway wasn't alone in facing challenges during the creation of "Visions."

When photographing democracy

in America, Sohm ran into numerous situations that would test the patience of the most skilled neurosurgeon. Among the tougher photo shoots he's had, he says that shooting in the nation's capital and photographing the politicians that run the USA top the list. The man has photographed each U.S. president from Ronald Reagan through Barack Obama, braving the crowds and ultra-tight security that is joined at the hip with the head of state.

"The last time I was photographing Obama," reminisced Sohm, "his campaign had put up a giant American flag on his left side. The sun was coming through the flag creating a soft silhouette of Obama at the podium. After driving hundreds of miles across country to get the shot, I was five feet short of the spot I needed to be after some intern said I couldn't get any closer."

The situation was frustrating for him, but Sohm did what he had to do.

"I finally pushed her aside and crossed over the line just a couple of feet," he said. "Frankly, you have to own the situation. I got the shot and that's the hallmark."

The hard work of both Sohm and Kellaway has definitely paid off. VOA has attracted the attention of some pretty heavy hitters that have contributed to the project.

In particular, the narration for the show was recorded by none other than Clint Eastwood. Some might argue that you can't get much more American than the voice of Dirty Harry.

Thanks to an old friendship and a very compelling project, Eastwood agreed to take his part in the making of "Visions."

"We're friends," said Kellaway about Eastwood. "We've known each other for probably about 30 years. It turns out he's a jazz fan and I'm a Dirty Harry fan so — there it is. I called him and told him about the project and he said it sounded like something he should be involved in. We were quite happy about that."

Sohm echoed Kellaway's thoughts on



Photo by Joe Sohm

Top: The result of Sohm's brush with the intern while photographing President Barack Obama. At left, Sohm snaps away on his Canon 5D MarkII camera near his home in in Ojai.

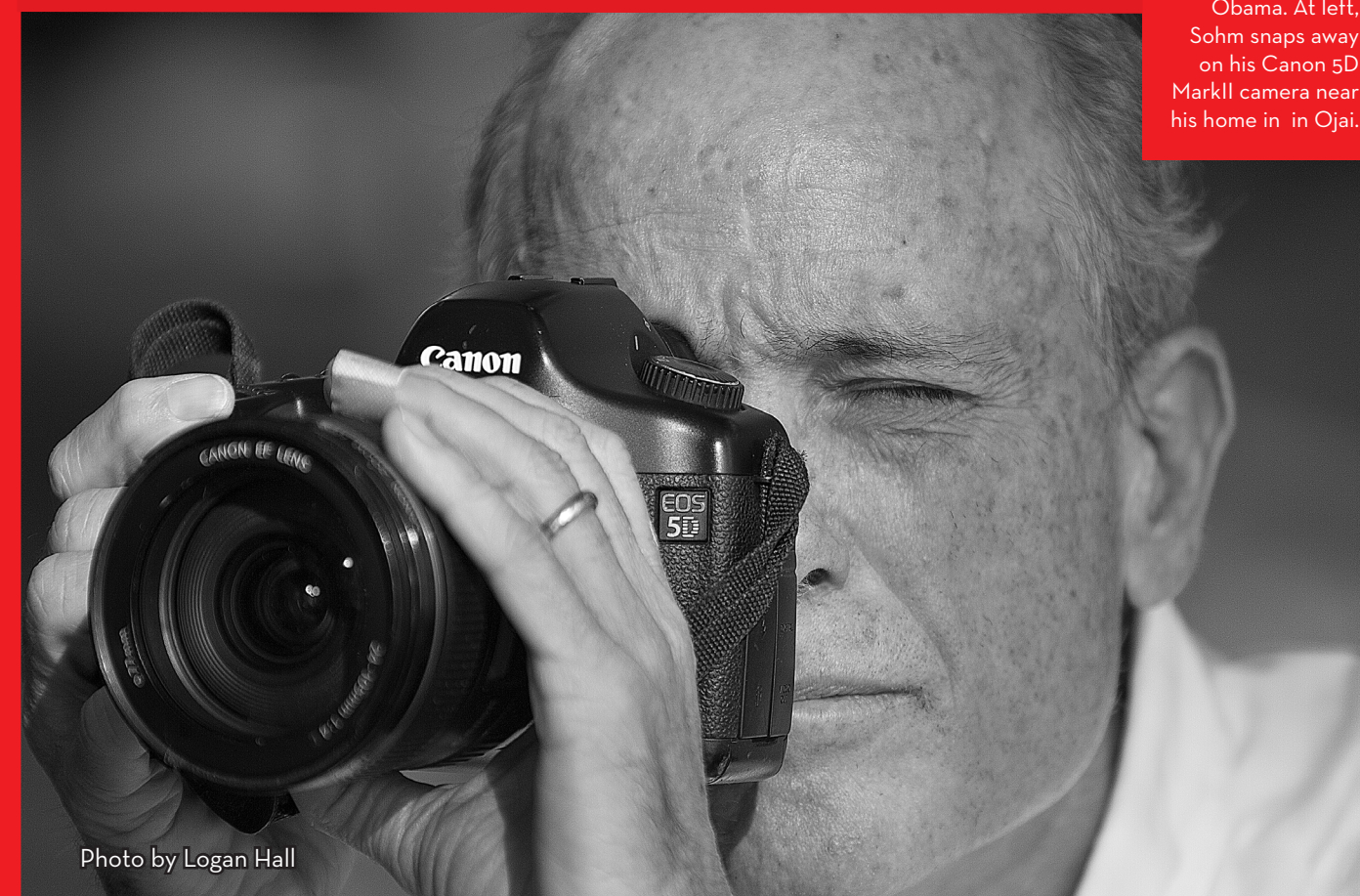


Photo by Logan Hall

Eastwood's contribution to the project. "He is such a professional," said Sohm. "He recorded his part in an hour and 20 minutes and that was pretty much it. He asks about it from time to time saying, 'How's our project going?' We are really lucky to have him and everyone involved, be part of this."

Eastwood isn't the only big name involved with "Visions." The project boasts song lyrics by Oscar winners Alan and Marilyn Bergman that are performed by vocalists Tyrell and Judith Hill.

Many others have also contributed to the show. It has been performed by the Philadelphia Pops and the Boston Pops Orchestras to an estimated 30,000 people.

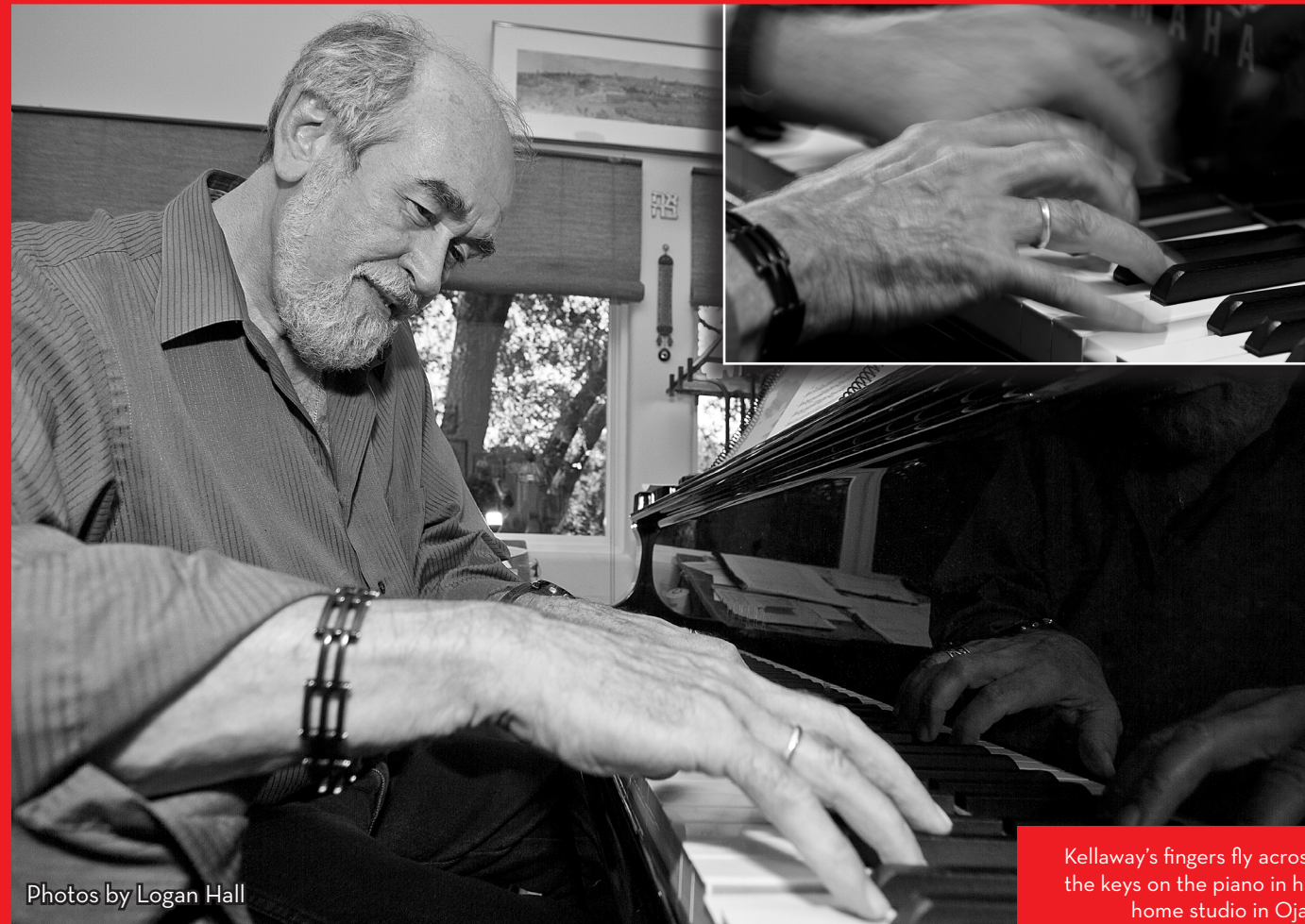
Recently, Sohm and Kellaway have teamed up with Ventura County's own New West Symphony Orchestra for a presentation of "Visions" that will be held locally in January. After bringing up-and-coming conductor Marcelo Lehninger on board, the NWSO will perform Kellaway's original score to Sohm's visceral Tour of America.

"For decades," said Sohm, "I had dreamed that one day we could do a photo symphony of America. Seeing it culminate in real concerts that more than 30,000 people have seen is just such a thrill."

Along with writing original music to accompany Sohm's photos, Kellaway also plays the piano during the shows. He believes his role in the production of "Visions" has been a life-changing experience.

"I'm so grateful to have worked with Joe and the Bergmans on this project," said Kellaway. "It was great to work with that caliber of professionals on a subject like democracy. I really learned a lot more about being an American and being proud of that."

"Visions of America" will show January 25 through 27 at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center, Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza and Santa Monica's Barnum Hall respectively. Log on to visionsofamerica.com for more information. ☺

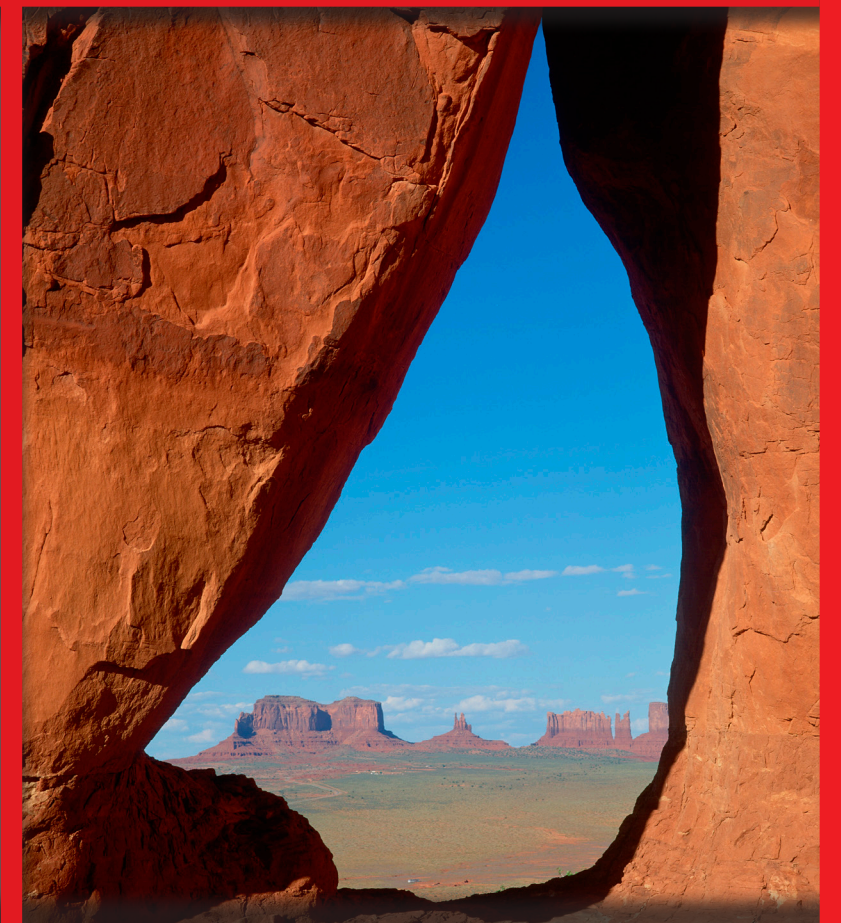


Photos by Logan Hall

Kellaway's fingers fly across the keys on the piano in his home studio in Ojai



Subjects that Sohm has shot over the years include Times Square in New York City, top, Los Angeles skyline, left, Monument Valley in Utah, right, and the Capitol building in Washington DC.



Photos by Joe Sohm