



# Mississippi River Festival, The (Images of America)

*Amanda Bahr-Evola, Stephen Kerber*

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In 1969, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville initiated a remarkable performing arts series called the Mississippi River Festival. Over 12 summer seasons, between 1969 and 1980, the festival presented 353 events showcasing performers in a variety of musical genres, including classical, chamber, vocal, ragtime, blues, folk, bluegrass, barbershop, country, and rock, as well as dance and theater. During those years, more than one million visitors flocked to the spacious Gyo Obata-designed campus in the countryside near St. Louis. The Mississippi River Festival began as a partnership promoting regional cooperation in the realm of the performing arts. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville invited the St. Louis Symphony to establish residence on campus and to offer a summer season. To host the symphony, the university created an outdoor concert venue within a natural amphitheater by installing a large circus tent, a stage and acoustic shell, and a sophisticated sound system. To appeal to the widest possible audience, the university included contemporary popular musicians in the series. The audacity of the undertaking, the charm of the venue, the popularity of the artists, the excellence of the performances, and the nostalgic memory of warm summer evenings have combined to endow the festival with legendary status among those who attended.

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