

Center Stage

Tucked away in hundreds of small Iowa towns are pre-1920s opera houses constructed by the state's early settlers. While most of the venues are a short drive from major cities such as Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City and Waterloo, Iowa musician Sam Knutson says people often overlook these historic buildings.

"When these were built, anyone could see live entertainment," he explains. "There are fewer now, but they are just as viable. Today, anybody within an evening's drive by car can see a show, and the theaters themselves are worth the experience."

Knutson founded **THE IOWA OPERA HOUSE PROJECT** to bring music back to these

history-rich structures. With top Iowa folk performers, he stages shows that attract new audiences and raise money for restorations. More than a dozen theaters have participated this year, and several more are signed on for upcoming shows.

"The opera houses are ornate. The sound is incredible," Knutson says. "It's the kind of live music experience you can't have anywhere else."

The Iowa Opera House Project next travels to Cresco (Nov. 2), Corning (Dec. 8) and Pella (Jan. 12, 2013), followed by spring concerts in Albia, Ainsworth, Toledo, Iowa City and other communities.

www.theiowaoperahouseproject.org —RENEE BRINCKS

IOWA

