

Kalimba in Golden Gate Park.

Spring of 1987, on one of my lovely days exploring San Francisco. This time I was on foot, aiming for Haight-Ashbury Music, to buy a kalimba, which is an African thumb piano consisting of metal prongs attached to a gourd that resonates when the keys - or metal prongs - are struck by your thumbs, in a limited yet tuneful way.

On that fine late morning, I marched to the upper Haight, and picked out the largest one of the music stores selection.

I looked at them on a recent visit, and found these to be quite affordable, probably under or around \$30 (?)

and I'd become intrigued by them from hearing played by Steve Tibbetts to good, exotic effect. One of my favorite music artists of the 80's, regularly playing through my stereo.

I bought my new kalimba with no hesitation, and headed west to the park to play my new instrument!

I started plucking its keys as soon as I entered the park. I discovered that by sliding the keys to different positions, changes the tuning by changing their lengths. I played with this a few times before settling on a good harmonic arrangement, playing as I walked among the fantastic foliage!

It sounds rich under the bridges, and I must have started that in the "stalactite tunnel" near the end of Haight Street, then proceeded to the tunnel just beyond the gigantic primordial ferns, that felt very exotic to play the kalimba amongst as I wended my way on the path through them.

Near the Conservatory is a large tunnel where it resounded best, so I jammed in there for a good stretch, passersby easily hearing it echoing outward from this natural sound chamber!

(its a bridge tunnel that I found is popular for all manner of musicians to play within, from chamber music of cellos, to didgeridoo's, drums, flutes, to electric guitars)

I loved it! And I never heard another kalimba there in years ahead, after I moved in this fantasy area.

Such a perfectly beautiful day! I emerged from the dark, chilly tunnel to play the kalimba while walking the rest of JFK way, all the way to the ocean! Passing redwoods, roses and rhododendrons, statues, the Pavilion of museums, several impressively twisted cypress branches, waterfalls, portals of the past, meadows, lakes, bison, fields and forests, while polyrhythmically plucking harmonic sounds from this simple yet satisfying African musical instrument, all the way to the windmill at the end of the park. Where around the bend the great expanse hits me as if approaching a larger than life deity of a kind - - the mighty Pacific Ocean. Restlessly pulsing waves of big big inconceivably big ocean waters. I'm entranced. Color this Midwestern kid enchanted. This is the zone.

The kalimba gets played on the beach, even if the sound dissolves under the sound of waves crashing.

I wander over to the Sutro Baths ruins, a big favorite section of the city, and enjoy playing in the rock tunnel beneath the cliff. The waves crashing sound huge bass throughout the chamber, as dulled within the tunnel itself. Saline air. Endless waves. I get out up on the cliff to catch the magnificent ocean sunset. The sun appears in mutating forms when seen through distant cloud banks.

Twilight's afterglow, I walk to the bus stop on the edge of Sutro Heights Park. I am feeling so lucky to be there, and with a nice new kalimba!

A great day. One of many!

- Dean Gustafson, January 2022

* I gave that kalimba to good friend smilin' surfer Joe Meuhleck, who always dug it hanging off of my shelving unit for years.