

A person is shown from the chest down, playing an acoustic guitar. They are wearing a white t-shirt with a black and white graphic, blue jeans, and a gold chain with a cross pendant. The guitar is a Martin D-28. A semi-transparent teal overlay covers the right side of the image, featuring the title 'Sam The Music Man' in large white text and the names 'Cianna, Ruben, Joey' in smaller white text below it. There are also some orange and teal circular graphic elements in the bottom left corner.

# Sam The Music Man

Cianna, Ruben, Joey

# Exposition

It's the year 2052. The continued defunding of arts and music in schools, combined with the devaluation of music due the price wars of streaming music services like Spotify have caused a downward spiral of people learning to play instruments and a general devaluing music and musicians. Computer programs started increasingly replacing real instruments causing instrument manufacturers and repair shops to go out of business. But the real death knell came with the invention of the app called Synth-E. Synth-E was released in 2028 and by 2052, all of the world's music was created and distributed through this app. The Synth-E corporation had a monopoly on music. The app was devastatingly simple. All a user had to do was start singing, or humming or banging a beat into the app and Synth-E's AI created a beautiful song. The user could edit the song simply by yelling commands and the algorithm and AI would automatically update the music.

"Synth-E, add some violins."

"Synth-E, make my vocals sound like Alicia Keys."

"Synth-E, make it faster."

"Synth-E, make the lyrics more meaningful."

"Synth-E, add some Michael Jackson."

"Synth-E, lower Michael Jackson by 50% and add some Mozart mixed with 2% Beyonce."

"Synth-E, add something like, dum-dee-doo-dee-dumdum."

It was so easy, that anyone without talent or musical ability could make beautiful songs, and everybody did. Synth-E also allowed everyone to share their songs flooding the market with original music at the same time devaluing music. Everyone thought they were amazing musicians, even though they had no talent and didn't know anything about music. The dwindling number of real musicians, who'd spent a lifetime mastering their instruments, complained and asked. "This isn't even real music. Who's the musician, you or the app?" But after a few years nobody even cared. Anyone could make music with Synth-E and musicians were just another thing replaced by AI.

Sam is 24 years old and lives in Detroit. He comes from a family of musicians. He remembers sitting in his grandparents living room listening to their old CDs and records of the Motown classics. He works in social media marketing for a huge company that sells selfie filters for Instagram. He hates it. He thinks he loves music, but he doesn't like using the Synth-E. There's something in those old Motown records that's missing in the Synth-E music, but he seems to be the only one that thinks so. All of his coworkers, along with everyone else, makes music with Synth-E. His most prized possession is an old guitar from his grandfather, now in disrepair because there were no longer any repair shops. A few times a week, he'll go to his secluded spot in the park and spend a few hours plucking at his old beat up guitar. He's not very good, there's really nowhere to learn, and his guitar is in rough shape so it doesn't quite sound right, but those few hours of Sam getting lost in his music are when he feels the most like himself.

# Inciting Incident

It's a Saturday in late spring. A perfect day to be outside in the park. Years ago the park would've been full, but as usual it's empty. Most people are inside hooked up to their virtual reality. Sam arrives at his secluded spot in the park, but when he gets there, on the rock where he usually sits is an old wooden box. He picks it up and inspects it closely and sees that there's a small handle. He winds the handle a bit and the box opens up and comes to life playing music. He'd heard about these old music boxes before but had never seen one, but that thought quickly passed because he was enraptured by the music. It was a simple tune but it's like nothing he'd ever heard. He picks up his guitar and starts strumming along with the music box. He closes his eyes and in his mind the entire park comes alive with the music and for a moment he is lost. As the song ends he opens his eyes and is shocked by a small figure standing about 15 feet away holding an instrument. He had been playing along with Sam and the music box the whole time. The figure turns around and quickly walks away. Sam is stunned for a second as if he's coming out a dream, but then gathers himself and starts running after the stranger. "Hey wait up, he yells." but the stranger keeps moving faster and Sam is struggling to keep up. Sam chases the stranger weaving through the crowded streets. The neighborhood gets rougher and rougher until he sees the stranger duck into an old antique shop. Sam arrives a few steps behind and enters the shop as the stranger goes behind the counter and through a curtain to the back of the store. Nobody else is in the store. Sam hesitates for a second and passes through the curtain into a dark empty room. As his eyes adjust he sees a dark stairway downward and hears a very faint song. He's not sure why but after a few moments of hesitation he starts down the stairs descending into a dark hallway. With each step down the hallway the music gets a little bit louder. Sam turns the corner and finds himself in an old bar and he sees four musicians playing the music that had drawn him down the hallway, including the stranger in the park. The room was an old steampunk bar, with what seemed like handmade instruments all around. The band seems not to notice and keeps playing a melody that mesmerizes Sam. Without saying a word or even fully realizing it, Sam starts strumming his guitar and playing along with the rest of the musicians. In this moment, Sam feels more alive than he's ever felt before. As the music ends, Sam is stunned as if slowly waking from an amazing dream. The four musicians slowly look up and smile at Sam. The stranger in the park gets up and says "Hey Sam, my name is Beats. Welcome to the Speakeasy Band."

# Rising Action

Over the next few weeks and months, Sam spends almost all his free time at the Speakeasy playing with the Band. There's Beats, who plays all things percussion and who used to play on the streets drumming on overturned buckets. Lin was part of the last graduating class from the famed Julliard School of Music in New York, before it went out of business and was sold to Synth-E and converted into the corporate headquarters. She could play any string instruments. Strativarious was the mad scientist of the group. He could play a little bit of everything but like his namesake, the famed violin maker, Strativarious was a genius at making and repairing instruments. He was able to fix Sam's beloved guitar and had it sounding better than Sam had ever heard it. Last was Horns, the old man of the group. Horns was one of the last professional musicians. He had inherited the Speakeasy from his father, which in its heyday was a beautiful jazz club, but the days of people going out to see live music were long gone. Those that didn't go out of business were bought by Synth-E along with all the instrument shops, dance clubs and streaming services. Most were closed down. Under the tutelage of Horns and the other musicians, along with his newly repaired guitar and through hours of practice sessions Sam's playing improved dramatically. He was convinced that their music was somehow different from anything Synth-E could produce, if they could just get people to listen. The band however didn't agree. They had been ridiculed and ostracized their whole lives for playing real instruments. "Why waste your time learning to play at Julliard?" Lin's friends had told her. "Look how much better my Synth-E track is." They were just happy they found a few other people that they could play and talk music with. But Sam believes in their music. He begins secretly recording their sessions and releasing them on YouTube. When the band finds out they are furious and ashamed. They feel like Sam had violated their trust by releasing the music without their permission. Until they see how many views they're getting. Using Sam's background in social media marketing they begin to build a small following on the internet, playing music, giving lessons and showing people how to build and repair old instruments and doing jam sessions on zoom with other musicians. Even Lin, the most timid of the group, begins giving violin lessons online. These become the groups most popular videos and Lin is becoming a bit of an internet celebrity. Over time they start to connect with and build a small community of small musicians. Sam has never been happier.

# Turning Point

At the Synth-E security offices at Julliard in NYC a team, internally known as the Music Police, keeps track of any trends dealing with music that may be bubbling up. Corporations in America are given almost free reign to protect their monopolies and Synth-E has used its corporate power very aggressively to stamp out anything they see as competition in producing or delivering music. They start noticing a bit of a buzz being created by a small group of musicians in Detroit. At first it was just a YouTube video here and there but now it was getting to the point where they were gaining notice by the general public. The Music Police had become very proficient at putting an end to these things. In the early years they'd play nice, and just lightly bully them into selling, but they found it easier to just go fast and hard. Synth-E knew the band was based out of a small bar in a poor neighborhood in Detroit, so the first step was to buy the building. Then came the fun part.

It was late at night and the band was practicing. Suddenly the door was kicked in and a group of men in dark tactical gear stormed through. "You are illegal squatters in this building owned by a subsidiary of the Synth-E Crop! Leave now or you'll be forcefully evicted!" The band was stunned. "Stop resisting!" the Music Police yelled. The members of the band were roughly thrown out on the street as the Music Police smashed all the instruments and computer equipment. Sam was laid out on the sidewalk watching the carnage. "You are being served a notice of copyright violation. This is a cease and desist notice, instructing you not to release anymore music."



# Falling Action

Months after the raid on the Speakeasy, Sam's life has gone back to the way things were before. It sucked. His first instinct was to fight back. He showed the notices to his friend who was a lawyer and found out that while technically what Synth-E did was illegal, there really wasn't anything they could do about it. The days of being able to take legal actions against big corporations were long gone. If they did decide to take action, Synth-E would probably just give "campaign contributions" to whoever needed it to make things go their way. Sam took to the internet to rally his followers to the injustice, but his accounts were hacked and then eventually shut off. Just for good measure Synth-E somehow arranged for him to get evicted from his apartment. They let Sam keep his job with a not so subtle warning that they could make his job and the jobs of all his family go too if he made anymore trouble. Synth-E probably knew he hated the job anyway but he needed it. He was worse off than he was before. He should've just been happy playing with the band. He didn't even have his guitar. Slowly, the full colored memories of those jam sessions started fading to the grey life he was stuck in.

One day after another in a long monotonous string of long days at work, Sam came home. As he walked to his kitchen table he saw a small music box. He opened the box and as the simple melody streamed into the room, for a small moment his world came back into full color again. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to get lost in the music. When the song ended and Sam opened his eyes he noticed something etched inside the lid. It looked like an address. Sam hesitated for a second but then grabbed his coat and took an Uber to the address. He walked into an empty warehouse and was astonished to see Lin, Beats and Strativarius there. It'd been the first time he'd seen them in awhile. Without the music, seeing them had been too painful. "We're getting the band together for one more show!" Lin exclaimed.

# Falling Action

They had been spending the last few months secretly reconnecting with their online followers on MySpace. Since nobody ever used MySpace, they were able to avoid the Music Police. Fellow musicians told stories about how they'd also been victims of the Music Police and Synth-E's aggressive and monopolistic tactics and the group had turned into a movement. Lin was one of the leaders and she had a plan. Synth-E was doing a press conference in front of the old Motown Records offices in a few months to release Synth-E 5.0. It was a huge event that was going to be streamed live. The movement planned to crash the event and throw a music festival in the streets in protest of Synth-E. Sam was astonished. He was so proud of Lin and how far she'd come from the shy violinist he had first met at the Speakeasy. But he said "I'm sorry I can't do it. I just... can't" And he slowly turned around and walked out the door leaving Lin Strativarius and Beets stunned.

Weeks later, Sam was sitting in his room bored, thumbing through his TikTok feed. The internet had been taken over by news and speculation about the big Synth-E announcement tomorrow. Slowly the faint sound of a horn playing a smooth jazz melody came through his window. He looked outside and was surprised to see Old Man Horns playing. Sam excitedly invited him up. Horns gives Sam a large box, which Sam opens up to find his guitar which Strativarius had repaired. After a quick jam session to test out the guitar Horns gets to the real reason why he's there. To convince Sam to come to the music festival tomorrow at the Synth-E announcement, but Sam refused. He had too much to lose. "Alright Sam. I understand." Horns said slowly. "But sometimes <insert wise Morgan Freeman like words that change Sam's perspective>." Horns walks out, leaving Sam holding his newly repaired guitar.



The next morning Sam is in the park. The music box is playing and Sam is strumming along with his guitar. He's lost in the music and it's creating vivid memories of his jam sessions in the Speakeasy. Sam calls an Uber and goes to the protest. When he gets out he sees a large stage in front of the Motown house where the Synth-E executives will talk with a large screen and two huge speakers. On the street a crowd has started gathering along with a large bank of cameras. In the back, across the street almost being ignored is the Speakeasy band and only three or four other musicians. This was Lin's big protest movement? The executives take the stage and start their big announcement. Defiantly the musicians start playing and to the surprise of the group Sam joins them. This gives them a new energy and a few people in the crowd start turning around to see what the music is. The Music Police take notice of the band and start to head towards them, but seemingly out of nowhere more musicians show up and join the band's playing. They were initially intimidated and scared, but now inspired by the playing of the Speakeasy band, Lin's protest movement was showing up. The growing number of musicians was overwhelming the Music Police and the Synth-E music playing from the stage. The Synth-E executives are furious. They start shouting commands at the Synth-E.

"Synth-E, play louder!"

"Synth-E, make it faster!"

"Synth-E, make a better song!"

"Synth-E, make it sound like that but better!"

A battle of the bands ensues with the growing group of musicians reacting to the changes of the Synth-E music as the Synth-E executives yell louder and more frantically. The music gets louder, faster and more complex as the musicians try to outplay the Synth-E. The crowd is in a fever pitch, enthralled by the music. Suddenly you could hear small breaks in the Synth-E music, like an old CD player skipping and then the Synth-E music stutters and dies, leaving the blue screen of death on the large screen on stage. Synth-E had crashed. The musicians cheered.

For two week after, what had started as a protest movement had turned into a festival to celebrate live music. As the live stream of the Synth-E battle made its way across the globe, musicians traveled from all over the world with their homemade instruments to Detroit. As you walked up and down the streets small stages were set up and you could hear all types of music. The stage where the Synth-E presentation had taken place, was taken over as the main stage. By the end of the festival, thousands of musicians watched the grand finale of the Speakeasy band playing on the main stage.

After the Detroit Music Festival, the music industry is changed forever. People still use the Synth-E but there is a renewed appreciation for instruments. Their monopoly on the entire music industry starts to deteriorate. The Speakeasy Band became known as the band that outplayed Synth-E but they are always quick to point out they couldn't have done it without the support of all the musicians. Nevertheless their fame and internet views skyrocket. They are able to get back the Speakeasy and renovate it. It becomes a hub for live music as well as a music school and a repair shop. Sam and the Speakeasy band spend the rest of their days teaching and playing live music and live happily ever after.



**THANKS!**