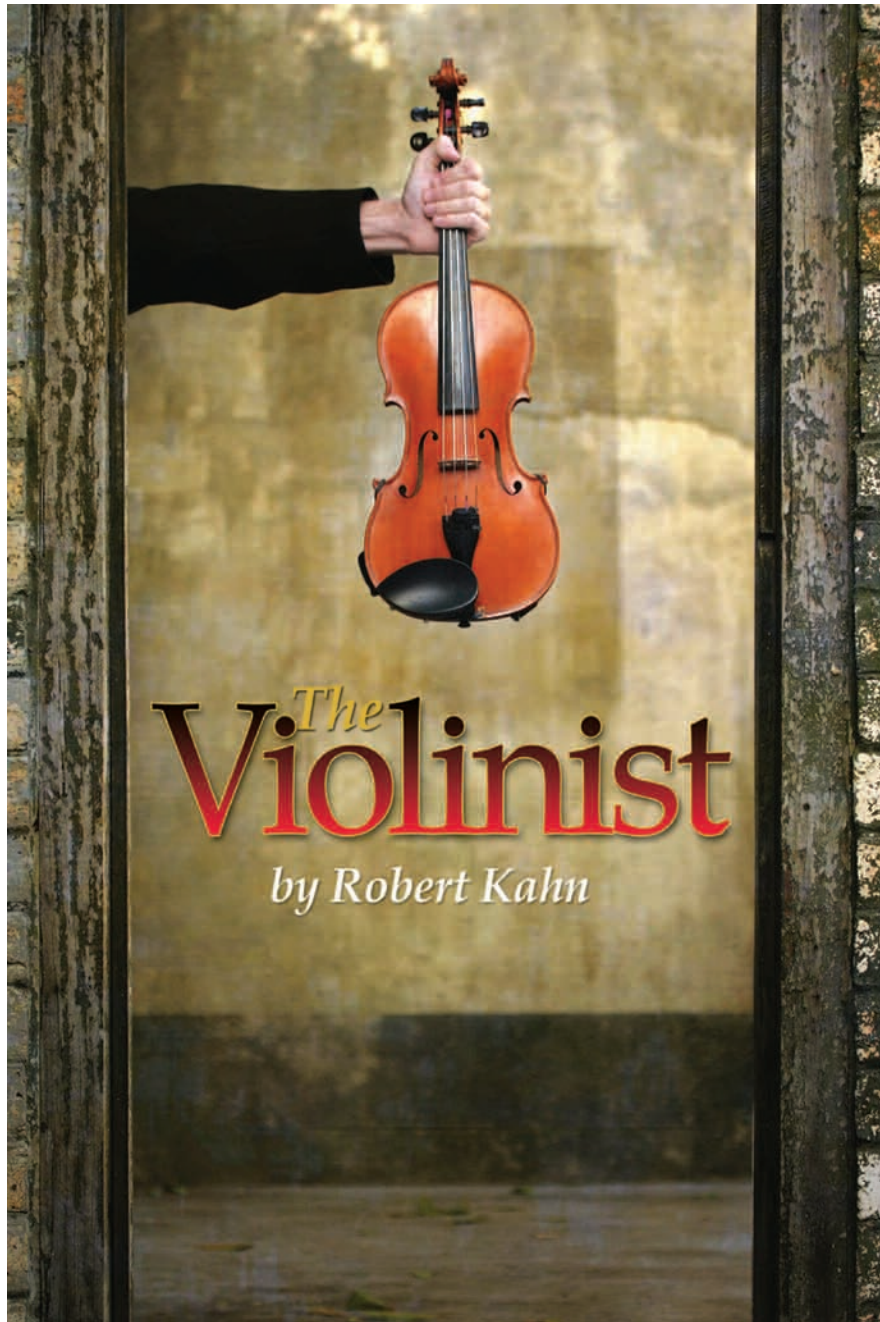
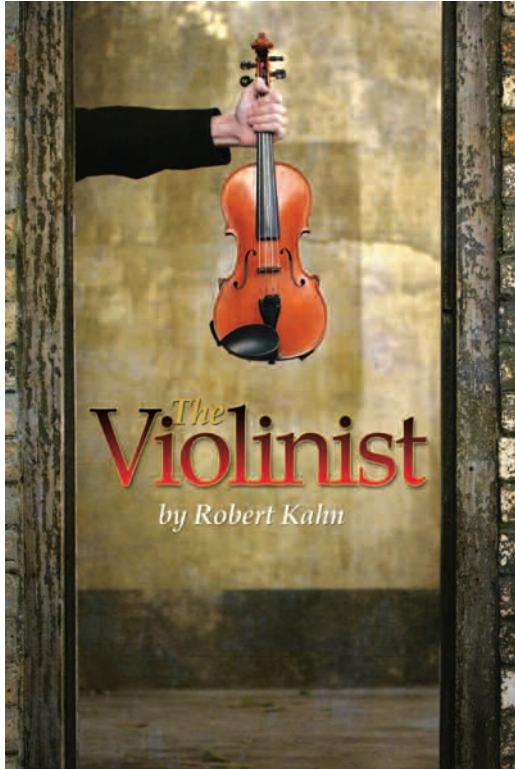


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About River City Publishing

Like the nearby Alabama River that flows through the heart of the South, literature sustains us, transports us outside of ourselves, and brings us home. River City Publishing, a literary press located in Montgomery, Alabama, is dedicated to discovering the books that do just that.

Carolyn Newman
Publisher

Praise for Other People's Blood

“A vivid, shocking, and upsetting book about the treatment of immigrants along the southern border of our nation. Robert Kahn knows the border perhaps better than any journalist now writing, and this firsthand knowledge is what lends the narrative its gripping power.”

—Jonathan Kozol



A Synopsis

I had a happy childhood. My mom was sort of a prostitute and my dad was put in prison for trying to kill me when I was three. That's not why I was happy, of course; I was happy because I was born that way . . .

So begins the tale of *The Violinist*—a semi-autistic composer who, after long struggle, finds sudden celebrity from his new form of music: counter-tonality. But even as his reputation and popularity grow, he is plagued by doubts—why should people listen? Why should he continue playing? As his doubts overtake him and the costs of refusing to perform the classical war horses mount, he finds he is losing everything—his work, his love, his fellow musicians to AIDS—and his only solace becomes a secret stolen property, hoarded and treasured since childhood. Music isn't the problem for the Violinist; the problem is lack of love, or too much of it; too much work, or none at all; the problem is how to live—though via his music he was able to touch many, many other lives and provide for strangers the very thing he most lacked. Robert Kahn turns in a virtuoso performance in this gripping character study of a man struggling to keep faith and hope in a world he barely understands.



Q & A

The Violinist relates the life of a modern composer/virtuoso who does not fit, or want to fit, into the star system of classical music, which requires recycling the great pieces of the 18th and 19th centuries. As he deals with the problems that beset his generation—losses from Vietnam, drugs, the AIDS epidemic—he invents, or discovers, a style of composing he calls “countertone,” which apparently involves 12-tone composition along with classical tonality.

Robert S. Kahn answers a few questions about his book, and what influenced him.

For those readers who would not otherwise have knowledge of how music is structured, explain “countertone.” Is it wholly your invention or does it have roots in modern music?

It's based in real life. Most musicians, including me, reject the term “atonality,” though we know what it means, or is supposed to mean: music consciously written to avoid establishing a tonal center. Arnold Schoenberg's method of composing with twelve tones is the best known. But what any serious composer wants to do is to expand the expressive possibilities of music. Writers have used terms such as “polytonality” to show, or claim, that music can be based upon more than one tonal center. Some writers call it stacked chords, or just complex chords. Counterpoint, of course, predated the establishment of Classical tonality, which requires a tempered tuning system that makes modulation to all twelve, or twenty-four, major and minor keys possible. Counterpoint describes music's linear motion. My character's discovery, countertone, invokes both those approaches, without getting too specific about it.

Music is rhythm and thus has a mathematical structure. The unnamed narrator of *The Violinist* has a curious mental tic whereby he rearranges words into anagrams and assigns them a point value. Explain how this ties in to your overall narrative theme.

If I wanted to explain it, I would not have written a novel. I would have written something else. (Sorry, I just don't like explaining myself.) The violinist has personal problems, and some of them are manifested in peculiar ways. That sort of thing happens to all of us. We create more problems for ourselves by the way we handle, or fail to handle, our other problems. I'm not going to explain why this happens to the violinist. I don't even know why I handle my own problems the ways I do.



What modern composer do you most admire?

The greatest composer of the 20th century was Bela Bartok, but you wouldn't know it to look at concert schedules or by reading musical criticism. Part of the reason for this is that Bartok did not devise, or champion, a "system" that critics could wave like flags at the public, or at one another. Bartok's music was based on human gestures, on the human body, on ancient scales that do not quite fit into the system that became Classical Western tonality. But he heard this music in his mind and managed to write it on paper, and others have managed to play it. Bartok was relentlessly honest and lacked the ability to assume a persona or to promote himself, bogus "talents" which have become necessary in the art world today—all arts. He suffered for it too. He was rescued from utter despair in his final years, when he was dying of leukemia, by a handful of musicians who realized what a tremendous talent he was.

Is the narrator of *The Violinist* based on Bartok (or anyone else, for that matter?)

My character is not based on Bartok, but he has something of his inabilities. He too would have been ruined by utter despair had he not been rescued by a few people who recognized his talent. Actually, a much bigger influence on my book was Vincent Van Gogh, and his life. Vincent's paintings play a much bigger part in the book than may be apparent from the few times they appear. The original title for the book, *Potatoes*, was based, in part, on Vincent's work. The publisher changed it—it isn't a very good title for a book, is it?

Are any of the events in the book true?

Everything in the book is true, except the characters never existed, and so what happened to them, obviously, never happened. But everything else is true.





About the Author

Robert Kahn has worked as a musician, schoolteacher, legal worker in U.S. immigration prisons, track coach, freelance writer, and newspaper reporter and editor. He studied the saxophone with Joe Allard at the Manhattan School of Music, from which he received a master's degree in performance in 1976. He is the author of the nonfiction book, *Other People's Blood: U.S. Immigration Prisons in the Reagan Decade*, and *An Honest Thief*, a novella and stories. He is news editor for *Courthouse News Service*.



Contact Information

River City Publishing
1719 Mulberry Street
Montgomery, AL 36106
Telephone: (334) 265-6753
Toll Free: (877) 408-7078
Fax: (334) 265-8880
www.rivercitypublishing.com

Publisher:
Carolyn Newman
carolyn@rivercitypublishing.com

Editor:
Jim Gilbert
jgilbert@rivercitypublishing.com

Publicist:
April Jones
publicity@rivercitypublishing.com

Photos and media information are available to download from our Web site
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River City Publishing
1719 Mulberry Street
Montgomery, AL 36106