

Robert Earl Keen

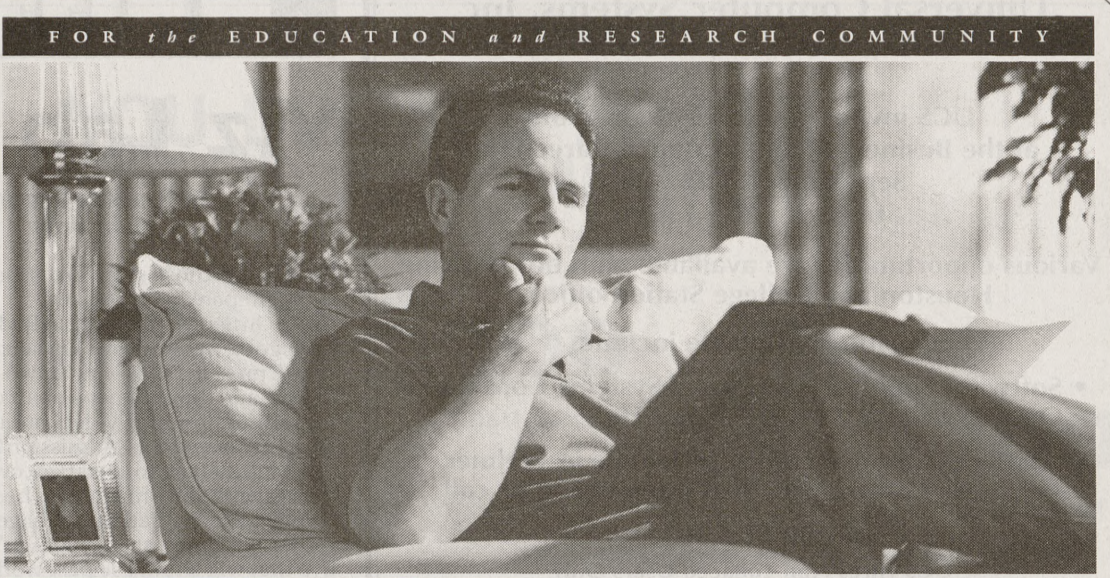
Country performer kicks off the semester with annual concert

By BRANDI BALLARD
Staff writer

The road goes on forever—at least it seems to at Robert Earl Keen's fifth annual Aggie Kickoff, to be held tonight at Wolf Pen Creek Amphitheater. This time he is kicking off more than the Texas A&M football season. He will be promoting his latest album *Picnic*. "I wanted a different sound for this album, so we went to Athens, Georgia, for two months," Keen said. He said he feels this is his best album yet. It is more serious than some of his past albums, but he is fully aware of that. "I've done fun," Keen said. "I wanted serious this time." A Texas native, and a former A&M student, Keen said he always enjoys playing in College Station. "The crowds here are the most enthusiastic that I play for," Keen said. He also said he feels he is somewhat cosmically connected to Aggies. "The people at A&M are driven," Keen said. "They want to succeed and have a good time doing it." He began attending A&M in 1974 with dreams of someday earning a degree in Animal Science. "I was a big fan of the rodeo," Keen said. "I thought I wanted to go to the ag field because it had a good broad base curriculum." Keen's high school did not have a Future Farmers of America program, but his best friend's and now

fiddle player in his band, Brian Duckworth, did. He went with him to A&M for horse shows and agricultural events. He said he got comfortable with A&M, and that is what drove him to come here. "That and the fact that A&M had lots of pigs," Keen said. "I like pigs. U.T. didn't have any pigs. A&M did, so I said, 'Hey! I'll go there.'" He lived with Duckworth directly across the street from the Presbyterian Church at 305 Church Street. "The house was torn down 10 years ago," Keen said. "I think it's a parking lot now." Contrary to rumors, his good friend, Lyle Lovett, was not his college roommate. Lovett lived a block down the street behind the Presbyterian Church. They met in 1976 and became friends. "Lyle was a journalism major and I was by that time an English major," Keen said. "We were your basic college kids who hung out together twenty-four hours a day." While he was at school, he mostly hung out around his house or went to the Dixie Chicken, where Duckworth worked. There were not any fraternity houses then, but he said his house could have been one. People were there all the time. "I'd come back from class and there would be three people sitting on my porch that I didn't know," Keen said. "I'd introduce myself and we'd spend the rest of the day playing the guitar."

During finals week, Keen would go to Bryan and rent cheap motel rooms to study. "My house was a great place to be and a really lousy place to study," Keen said. He said the surface of Bryan College Station looks the same, but there is a lot more activity. It always has the same feel to him, though. "I always feel like I'm coming home," Keen said. Keen grew up in Houston. He always listened to country music. He was a big fan of pre-pigtailed Willie Nelson and Marty Robbins' three piece suit. "There was really no one person I that I followed or tried to be like," Keen said. Keen said he is currently listening to a Marty Robbins album that he has heard a million times. He also listens to Fred Eagle Smith, a singer-songwriter from Canada. Keen has been married 11 years and has a three year old daughter. "In fact, our anniversary is the day after my concert in College Station," Keen said. They live in Bandera, Texas, where they have resided for the past 10 years. Keen said he wants everybody to come out to the show Friday night. "Besides my front porch, College Station is my favorite place to play," Keen said. After all, "the party never ends," here.



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