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Comin' Home

Robert Earl Keen returns to Texas A&M for live performance

BY SCOTT HARRIS
 The Battalion

Friday night Robert Earl Keen will be returning to the one place that might love him the most — the place he once called home, and gave him his college degree. Friday night he will be returning to Texas A&M.

Keen said that although he did graduate from A&M, the whole ordeal was quite confusing.

"I'm the Class of '78; I graduated in 1980, but I stopped taking classes in 1979," Keen said. "I needed one point higher on my GPA to graduate, so I enrolled in classes for the spring of 1980. But then I talked to one of my [professors], and he boosted my grade to give me the extra point, so I dropped all of my classes and just hung out. I goofed for the semester, played in a bluegrass band and graduated in the spring."

Although Keen finally got his degree in English, he said concentrating on school was not the easiest thing for him.

"We lived in this house, that's a parking lot now, right behind the Chicken," he said. "It was like a bus station. First off, it was so close to school that people would just let themselves in. I would come home, and there would be four or five people there I didn't know. I couldn't get anything done there."

Keen said the nature of A&M has changed since he was in school. When he was here, A&M was predominantly composed of men and the Corps of Cadets, and there was no Greek system. Although things have changed, Keen said he always enjoys returning to College Station.

"I always like coming back; it's like a trip down memory lane," Keen said. "I have some friends that still live here, but it's weird because after a few years, I'll come back and I think I'll see a bunch of my old friends, but I won't because they are all gone."

Keen said when he first started playing music, he never envisioned the success he would attain.

"I just wanted to write songs and play," Keen said. "Personally, I never felt like I was cut out for it. Don't get me wrong, I put a lot of effort into playing, but I never had the goal to be onstage."

Keen's success is not limited to College Station, or even Texas, for that matter. He said his popularity has extended out of Texas and across the entire nation.

"We have a huge demographic," Keen said. "In the southeast, we have a giant following with the college students — I mean all the way to Florida. In the west, it's mostly older people, it's astounding. We'll go to places we haven't played in five years, and the show will be packed. I don't know how it happened, but I'm glad it did."

Keen is a musician first and foremost, but he said storytelling plays a major part in all his live shows.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTIST

"I started playing in coffee houses, alone, so I talked about the songs," Keen said. "People would listen, now it is getting harder and harder to tell stories because the audiences are so big. There is finesse and nuance in telling a story. If I pause in a story for emphasis and someone yells out, 'Five Pound Bass,' it kind of ruins the story."

Keen said he has certain songs he only plays during his shows which are not on any of his records, which he uses as rewards for his devoted fans.

"I don't feel like I have to record everything I write," Keen said. "I like to throw some songs out during my shows for people who have seen me play a number of times."

Keen said that even though he enjoys his success outside of the state, he saves something special for his fans in Texas.

"We play longer shows in Texas," Keen said. "That way we can touch on every album, so we can play something for everybody because some people come to the shows just to hear one or two songs. The longer shows let us open it up a bit."

Keen said he understands that some people just want to hear certain songs, but that there are certain rules about playing them.

"I understand people want to hear 'The Road Goes on Forever,' 'The Road Goes on Forever,' 'The Road Goes on Forever,' but I refuse to play 'The Road Goes on Forever' if you can't wear jeans. Basically, if you come to a show on Easter and Labor Day and you want to hear a song, it ain't gonna happen."

Even though he has certain songs he plays almost all of his shows, Keen said he changes his set list for each performance.

"I perform like I would like to hear someone perform," he said. "I like to try something new each time."

"I like to play new stuff and change lists because people will get bored if I keep playing the same way."

Robert Earl Keen will be playing at the Pen Creek Amphitheater Friday night at College Station. Jack Ingram will be opening doors open at 8 p.m.

2001

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CHEM 101 MAWK	7-10 PM	CH1,2 Exam#1 Review	CH3,4 Exam#1 Review			CH5 Exam#1 Review				
CHEM 101 CORWAY	10PM-12AM	Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B							
PHYS 201	6-8 PM						CH 5	CH 6	CH 7	
CHEM 101 PECK	8-10 PM						Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B	Exam#1 Review C	
BICH 410	2-4 PM			2-4 PM	2-4 PM	7-10 PM	2-4 PM		2-4 PM	
BICH 411	6-8 PM	CH 18,19	CH 19			Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B			
CHEM 102	4-6 PM						CH 17A	CH 17B		
CHEM 101	6-8 PM						CH 6	CH 7,8		
CHEM 227	8-10 PM						CH 6	Test JS		
CHEM 228	8-10 PM	CH 19	CH 19						CH 20	CH 20
MATH 141	8-10 PM								CH 3,4	CH 4
MATH 150	8-10 PM						Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B	Exam#1 Review C	Exam#1 Review D
MATH 151	10PM-12AM						Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B	Exam#1 Review C	Exam#1 Review D
MATH 152	10PM-12AM	CH 8.1-3	CH 8.4,8.8-9				Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B	Exam#1 Review C	Exam#1 Review C
PHYS 208	10PM-12AM				CH 25	CH 26				
GENE 301	10PM-12AM						Exam#1 Review A	Exam#1 Review B	Exam#1 Review C	Exam#1 Review D