

Robert Earl Keen: The road goes on forever and the party never ends, or so it seems

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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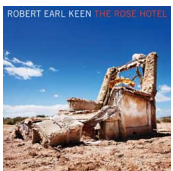
Texas troubador Robert Earl Keen is living the lines from his most popular song, “The Road Goes On Forever (And The Party Never Ends),” – and he’s in the doghouse for it.

“This trip is really, really long,” Keen said in a phone interview from his bus somewhere between Texas and Mississippi. “When I’m home, I do everything with my wife and kids. When I’m gone, it all falls on my wife’s shoulders.”

Keen’s doghouse tour ends at Linden’s Music City Texas on Saturday, Nov. 20, where he’s played several times.

“The Road Goes on Forever,” from the album No. 2 Live Diner, has become somewhat of an anthem for the partying set, sung in pastures and fraternity houses all over the country. At live shows, fans join in the revelry, whooping, hollering and singing along.

Keen grew up in Houston and went to college at Texas A&M, where he had the good fortune to be the neighbor of Lyle Lovett. The two spent a lot of time picking and grinning on the front porch of Keen’s rented house on Church Street.



When he was just starting out, Keen had the opportunity to tour with Guy Clark and the late Townes Van Zandt.

“I did about 18 months with Guy and Townes,” Keen said. “I caught the last great period of Townes Van Zandt.”

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In addition to his spectacular songwriting skills, Keen's sense of humor keeps fans coming back for more.

When asked if he thought the Linden audience was knowledgeable about his music, Keen quickly replied, "I don't know. I didn't give 'em a pop quiz."

In "The Front Porch Song," another signature tune, Keen tells Texas Aggie jokes and shares some really funny stories about his landlord, the late Jock Boyett.

When he's not on the road or in the studio, Keen likes to listen to blues and bluegrass.

"I really like the blues," he said. "I don't know why, but it fits with me. And I like bluegrass a lot."

He also likes a touch of classical music.

"I have been listening to a violinist named Julia Fisher," he said. "It's just her playing by herself and it's so beautiful. I can't imagine somebody being able to play like that."

Keen's been a working musician since the early 1980s. He and his band have been together for over 15 years, and he credits them for helping him stay consistent.

"I think consistency is important," Keen explained. "The recession has hit musicians really hard ... and consistency has helped us because our fans know what they're going to get at one of our shows," Keen explained. "There's not much experimentation about going to see a Robert Earl Keen show."

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The Linden audience is in for a treat, as Keen plans to add “Merry Christmas From the Family” to the set list.

You’d be hard pressed to find a holiday anthem more twisted than Keen’s tale of champagne punch, homemade egg nog and trips to the Quick Pack store for “more ice and an extension chord.”

Going to a REK show this time of year would be a sad affair without it.

“I keep threatening every year ... ” Keen joked. “To go on stage, tune my guitar for an hour and then just sing that song. I don’t think anyone would be unhappy.”

Do not be fooled by his cool comic exterior. Robert Earl Keen is a Texas original who works hard at his craft and gives audiences a rollickin’ good time. His ever-expanding number of fans wouldn’t have it any other way.

Tickets to Keen’s Nov. 20 show in Linden are \$50.
For more information, call 903-756-9934 or log on to:
www.musiccityexas.org

This is the eleventh part in “A Songwriter’s Sojourn,” a series featuring songwriters from Texas – or with close ties to Texas – who stayed true to their craft, lived up to their gifts and left their mark on the world of music.