

On The Road

For October 2011

“Take this waltz, it’s been dying for years,” is a line by Leonard Cohen who was translating or reflecting Lorca, the Spanish poet. The “duende” present in the music I love goes back to the gypsy spirit that Lorca loved in Granada, goes back to the moment I interviewed Leonard Cohen in Austin, and goes back to the discovery of Leonard while I was working in Canada in 1968. I also discovered Buffy St. Marie that year in college at TCU. Dylan appeared on my horizon, and I started my musical journey that led to an oral history project in Texas music and the Texas Heritage Music Foundation. The road does go on forever with a party that never ends.

All you Keen aficionados know that! Robert Earl Keen spoke this year at the Schreiner convocation in August. I had interviewed him several times for my book on Texas songwriters (UT Press, 2001). I had showcased him at a coffeehouse at Schreiner way back in the day when he had an LP and a cassette. I did and do love “No Kinda Dancer.” Still. His talk was brilliant and can be heard on the Schreiner website.

So my new Texas music class, using my collection of interviews with songwriters, responded to their reading by writing a 500-word essay on some reaction to Robert Earl Keen. Then I asked them to reduce that response to 250 words. First, a piece by **Emily Bissell**:

“The interview with Robert Earl Keen covered his career. Keen got his start in a restaurant after college. It impressed me that Keen learned how to play the guitar while in college. He spoke of how his mother had high expectations with regard to education and how she was caring. She never “crushed” any dreams.

What caught my attention was his remembrance, “In a Shel Silverstein sort of way, there was this kid who heard there was a rainbow on the other side of the mountain...and there was the turtle and the frog. They said, “We have heard about it, too. But we don’t know anybody who’s been there.”” That resonated with me. I love Shel Silverstein. So, this story hooked me. I was impressed with how diligently he devotes his time to creating, presenting, and improving music. “My goals now are to become a better writer.” With no self-doubt as an artist, he has a confidence that I envy.

Robert Earl Keen touches his audience through lyrics that recall personal, and often private, experiences. “Merry Christmas from the Family” reminded me of when I visit my goofy and embarrassing relatives. The variety in his music has such broad appeal. He has devotion, pride, and love for the Texas A&M University community. He had no trouble telling people things about himself or difficulties facing him. Mr. Keen’s dedication to his work reveals his passion for his music. After reading this, I will listen for -- and listen to his music. “

Grace DuPriest had this response:

“Prior to this class, I had never heard of Robert Earl Keen. I’m a fan of all music so I took a liking to him pretty quickly. His music reminds me so much of my grandfather and his philosophical ways. While reading the interview in the text, I felt a connection. I was able to relate and learn from him. Though I don’t know him on a personal level, I feel inspired by him and his words.

One part of the interview that I found rather intriguing was the story Robert Earl Keen told. His use of metaphors allows his audience to learn from his experiences. The rainbow he speaks of in his story has

great symbolism. He is in search for something great, and like many quests, he is met with several challenges and obstacles. I think that everyone is able to relate to this simply because everyone is met with obstacles in life, but how you face them truly defines you.

Keen continuously challenges himself to do new things, and to explore what has yet been explored. He is a humble man who is not afraid to do things that he temporarily may not enjoy in order to reach success. He has managed to stay a humble man never allowing the publicity to get to him. His stories are inspirational and reach out to ordinary people; it's just their job to find that array of colors."

And for the magic completion of three, the following essay by **Kamron Murrell**:

"Robert Earl Keen is the very epitome of dedication and hard work. Because I am not a fan of country music, I didn't think that me and Robert Earl Keen would have any similarities other than the basic, were both males, and we grew up in Texas, but I found out that we have some of the same characteristics such as we are very strong willed and determined individuals that will make it to the top on their own merit despite what other people try to tell them.

Keen also relates to me when he states that he was creating his career "amidst the struggle". I can relate to this feeling because throughout my life, it seems like I go through many struggles, but I don't let those set me back or let me down. For Keen, people told him that he couldn't make it, but he had to self-promote, and scratch and claw his way to the top, and wouldn't take no for an answer. Keen can be seen as an example on self-confidence and self-motivation to achieve his goals.

Keen is a very determined person who wants to achieve all his goals. He doesn't let others negatively impact what he wants to do in life. He has been successful in being recorded by Willie Nelson, and now he wants to work on his writing career. I can take a page out of his book and be a football player at the Naval Academy or be on the Drum and Bugle Corps, and start my career as a Navy SEAL or Marine. Keen is a role model that I am now looking up to."

This is what happens when we hear a song, listen to a story, or read a text: WE MAKE UP OUR OWN STORY ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE. Another way of saying this? We have our own interpretation. OR, each brain listens through a distinct filter then creates an interpretation. I love the flexibility in listening and in sharing our experiences. September 30 on the Schreiner campus, over 50 performers shared their art. The audience, composed of students, teachers, tourists, and fans, listened and went away with that many unique stories. One literary critic says, "We create the TEXT when we read or listen to another's words." I like that.

-

THE ROAD AHEAD:

First, a nod to the September 7 coffeehouse at Schreiner featuring Max Baca and David Farias, with Terri Sharp opening the show. Packed house. I got cool cumbia lessons and we all had a party!

October 5 is the Texas Music Coffeehouse series at Schreiner University. We are featuring a Schreiner graduate who now lives and performs in Austin, Andy Barham. His dad, Mack Barham, is photographer for the THMF. Andy has a song, "Rain Falls Hard," that we need to hear! And his influences are eclectic, including Dylan, Joseph Campbell, family, Robert Earl Keen, bad decisions, Kerouac, selfish girls, dogs and hard labor. Andy and I used to have long talks about our dream for education. He now has a brown

bus that he hires out for events, festivals, and road trips. I am thinking THMF needs to go on the road with Andy in his brown bus.

Bill Reid is a special guest, and we honor his award-winning song "A Place Inside My Heart." See www.fewersorrowmusic.com for updates, stories behind songs, and a taste of the music. Great website! James Edwards, new Spanish teacher at Schreiner and a graduate, will also perform.

October 15 is the annual workshop using Native American wisdom to look at change. This year Stephanie Nestlerode (www.omegapoint.net) will lead, guiding us through the work of Paula Underwood (Turtle Woman Singing) who wrote down the stories in a book called The Walking People. A nod to the late Jeanne Slobod, my mentor, who supported this project and helped start the Center for Innovative Learning at Schreiner. The workshop runs from 9-4 with a lunch break. Space limited so call me at 830-792-7409 for a reservation. Check www.schreiner.edu for calendar.

November 2 is the last THMF coffeehouse and will feature the world music of Oliver Rajamani, from India by way of Austin. We will also pay tribute to Leonard Peltier in story and song. An American Indian who wrote his story from prison, My Life is My Sun Dance.

November 5 I will be giving a workshop for the Mind Science Foundation at Schreiner. Space limited to 25, cost \$60, lunch included. The title says it all: "Creativity: A Journey from Chaos to Dancing Stars." We will explore theories of creativity and immerse ourselves in creative experiences. Call me at 830-377-3186 to register. Kathleenhudson123@hotmail.com

The Big Band Bash in Fredericksburg is coming up in November. The American Studies Association of Texas will meet at Schreiner November 10-12.

Now, coming full circle, we celebrated the birthday of Jimmie Rodgers on September 8 at Buzzie's Barbecue with the Sunrise Lions Club and our special guest, Bill Lewis. He sang Jimmie, Dylan, and his own song. A picture says 1,000 words! Bill is a regular at Luckenbach and Hondo's on Sunday for gospel music at 1. Ils sont partis. KH