

FIFTEEN MINUTES WITH...

KEB' MO'

By Becca Newell

When he first began playing guitar and singing at 12, Keb' Mo' never imagined his music career would span five decades and counting. He believed that once he turned 30, no one would take him seriously. Little did he know that at 40, he'd get a record deal and still be a signed artist 22 years later.

He's surprised by his longevity, but he shouldn't be. He's won three Grammy Awards and his most recent album, *BLUESAmericana*, was nominated for three more—best American roots performance, best Americana album, and best engineered album.

We spoke with Keb' Mo' in anticipation of his upcoming shows at the Avalon Theatre. He tells us a little about his musical background, his love of vinyl, and his admiration of Taylor Swift.

You're currently on tour to promote your newest album, *BLUESAmericana*. What's your favorite track on the album?

Hmmm. No one's ever asked me that question. [Laughs]. I don't know; I like 'em all. I really do. But I think "For Better Or Worse" only for the reason that I like the way the recording sounds. I like the way it feels, you know? It's probably not the most popular one. But I heard it one day on SiriusXM radio. I was driving the car and turned on SiriusXM and heard it playing and was like "Whoa!" It just jumped off the speakers on the radio, like nothing I'd ever heard.

Had you not heard the song before then?

Not on the radio, in the car, driving along the street.

That must be surreal! The album was nominated for three Grammy Awards—congratulations! How does that feel?

I always think about how maybe it's got the chance to become something that can stand the test of time. I always look at, not at the numbers, but how much enjoyment are people getting out of it when they actually get [the album] in their hands.



When you won your first Grammy was there some sort of sense of validation for your efforts?

I think the biggest validation has to come from when you sit down and listen to your work without anyone patting you on the back. Just be by yourself and listen to it. If you can sit there and listen to it and work on it and get it right, let that be your validation. Then once it goes out into the world, there's no qualms about it—if you feel good, what other people think doesn't matter.

You've worked quite a bit with other artists over the years. How do those collaborations come together?

They kind of come about the same way anything in life happens. When I was growing up in L.A., and I would go play places and I'd meet people and say, "Hey! I've got a gig, why don't you come play?" The only difference is when you're kind of famous, everyone's looking at you doing it.

Is there a collaboration that you're particularly proud of?

Oh yea, I did a collaboration with Little Milton before he died. He was a blues legend. He was an awesome, awesome blues man. Awesome singer. Awesome guitar player. And I got to work with him before he died.

Is there anyone you haven't worked with that you'd like to?

Yea, Taylor Swift.

I don't think I would've guessed that. Why do you want to work with Taylor Swift?

I think she's pretty awesome. As a person. As an artist. As a writer. She has huge integrity and huge compassion for the people [in the industry] and what she's doing. I think she's changed the music business. She's taught everybody how to treat artists.

So when you write songs do the lyrics and music come together?

Usually, I like to start with some type of structure. The first thing that has to come is the subject matter or a hook, but that has to be connected with some type of subject that I'm somewhat invested in. And from there the music is the structure and every word is the right note, the right chord, the right melody to make that story pop out. And once you've done all that and mapped it out, you've got what they call a song.

Going back to the *BLUESAmericana* album, I noticed that you released it on vinyl. What was the reason behind that?

Vinyl is the best musical experience known to man. Better than cassette, better than 8-track, better than TV. The sound is the best and it's involved listening. You have to put the record on and then when it was done, you had to flip that thing over to play the rest. You couldn't just put it on and forget about it. It's just a beautiful interaction between the music and the listener. Vinyl is king, or queen, I should say.

See *Keb' Mo'* at the Avalon Theatre on Sunday, March 15th, or Monday, March 16th. Both shows at 8 pm. General admission tickets are \$70. Reserved tickets range from \$80-90, depending on seat location. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit 410-822-7299 or visit avalontheatre.com.