

STEVE KING KEITH URBAN'S KEYS



Steve on location filming the video for Keith Urban's "Once in a Lifetime" single.

"Keith is a country gig, but it's not the standard type of country music," says keyboardist Steve King. "It's pretty progressive, with a lot of different elements. He's got his own creative edge, which works out great for me, because it makes the gig a lot of fun."

The Berklee-trained King has toured with Keith Urban for several years and also appears on Urban's 2004 release, *Be Here*. "Right now we're just doing some promotional stuff, but we're fixing to do another tour in the coming year," he says. "And whenever I'm not doing that, I'm working on stuff with some songwriter friends in Nashville."

King moved to Nashville a decade ago, at age 19. He quickly discovered that in Music City, success depends not just on what you know, but who you know. For example, he notes, auditions are often not quite what they seem.

"I don't know too many people who have auditioned for something and actually gotten the gig," he observes. "Usually the artist already knows who they want, and they only do an audition as a precaution. I did this one audition when I first moved to town, and I didn't get the gig specifically because they were all buddies with the other guy who auditioned. But I ended up getting the call later on for that same gig, because the first guy bailed. They were in a pinch, and they remembered me. But that's the only audition I've ever done where I actually got the job. Everything else has been through friends."

Case in point: King's eventual connection with Keith Urban. "I was in a circle of people that intersected with that loop," Steve explains. "I played for an artist named Cyndi Thomson, who was on Capitol. She did some shows with Keith, and I got to know a couple of the guys in Keith's band. Then at one point I got a call to do a showcase here in Nashville, and it was with

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some of those same guys. So when the time came for Keith to add keys, they hired me. I didn't have to audition or anything. I just knew the right people at the right time."

Steve uses several Yamaha keyboards, including the compact S03 synthesizer, the 88-key S80 synthesizer, the Motif ES8, and the P250 digital piano. "I've tried out a lot of other keyboards, and they just don't compare to Yamaha's stuff," he says. "I keep buying them, so they must be doing something right! The S03 is great for traveling, being able to practice in hotel rooms and airports and stuff. And I've had an S80 for several years. It's small, and very mobile, so I keep that one at home and use it to play around town."

Onstage with Keith Urban, King plays the Motif ES8 and the P250. "There really isn't a better piano sound out there than the P250—it's the best," Steve says. "And I use the Motif for strings, pads, leads, ethnic sounds, all that kind of stuff. The ES8 is so versatile, across the board. And the sounds are fat! They don't sound cheap or cheesy. That keyboard allows for any situation. It has a lot of meat-and-potatoes sounds—nothing I'm not going to use! A lot of cool textures, a lot of ethereal sounds that can really sparkle. It has a much fatter tone than a lot of other synths."

In a town full of great players, King says, sometimes success comes down to factors other than pure talent. "Having a personality that gels is important. As a sideman, you're playing maybe one hour of music a night—but there's 23 hours of hotels and buses and airports, so it's always good to have camaraderie. I think that's part of the reason a lot of people get work: You look at who you're going to be with when you're not playing music. That, and having some integrity. Not rocking the boat, and not being a jerk!"

It's also essential to balance music business issues with the music itself, he points out. "When I was younger, I didn't expect the business side of things to be quite like it is. But you get into business mode, and you get into creative mode. When you mix the two, you always have to go back to your creative place. Most people I know have a love of music that's more powerful than some of the pitfalls of the industry. Being able to play on a song that inspires you—that's what keeps you coming back. Play some great music with some great players, and all that other stuff goes out the window. Deep down, there's that passion."