

May 14, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

Arts & Issues, the performing arts series I direct at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, hosted Ken Waldman and the Secret Visitors in February 2012. Our main stage series is an eclectic one, featuring theater, dance, public speakers, and music of all kinds. Ken Waldman's roots music variety show evening here included Appalachian string-band music, Cajun fiddling, old-time country ballads, plus one of the fiddlers was also a clogger and tap dancer. Ken Waldman's poetry and storytelling added a spoken word element, and gave the evening a narrative arc, which made for a more satisfying theater experience.

The program was a success, as was Ken Waldman's residency through the Creative Writing program at SIUE.

First, we drew a good crowd. Ken Waldman's event exceeded our expectations, and before the show we had to bring out additional chairs to our ballroom venue. In past years our series has had difficulties collaborating with some of the academic departments on campus. Ken Waldman took it upon himself to coordinate with the Creative Writing Program in order to visit a poetry writing class. He also contacted faculty in Music, Theater, and Dance. We attribute the larger-than-usual student attendance at this event to Ken Waldman's efforts.

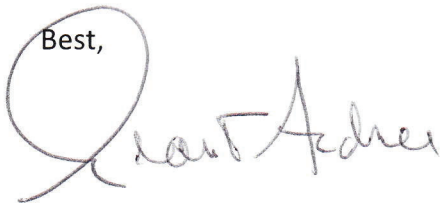
Second, the show was just great. For this, we talked about what I wanted to bring to our stage, and Ken Waldman offered a list of available artists, and explained a number of artistic and budgetary choices. Ken Waldman ended up bringing musicians from Austin, Nashville, Chicago, North Carolina, and Louisiana. At the end of the show, our audience gave the troupe a standing ovation.

Third, Ken Waldman was easy to work with and was quick to respond to my questions and concerns. Granted, his show is different. He doesn't have a band per se, so it can feel risky because at the start of the process a presenter won't know exactly what he or she will ultimately have on stage. But Ken Waldman brought great musicians, all of whom I vetted, and paced the evening well. Since each variety show is a one-time thing, there's a freshness as well as an attention to place (meaning he specifically geared the show to our community here at SIUE), which along with his Alaska connection gave us a show that was easy to market.

While Ken Waldman has been compared to Garrison Keillor--a comparison that's in some ways accurate, some ways not--what he does is actually an improvement on that successful model.

I recommend him highly, and invite you to contact me for additional information.

Best,



Grant Andree, Director
Arts & Issues