

CAL POLY ARTS

Wednesday, May 16, 2012

To Whom It May Concern,

It was Cal Poly Arts' very great pleasure to host Ken Waldman, Alaska's Fiddling Poet, for a short residency in April of this year. We cannot recommend him highly enough for both his public performance and his educational outreach.

At an extremely affordable price, Ken brought together a wonderful collection of California Folk musicians (The Secret Visitors) for a family concert, subtitled *From Cal Poly to Kodiak*. This was an afternoon of roots music and performance that left our audience amazed at the talent and artistry they had experienced. In addition to curate-ing the show, Ken worked tirelessly to help us promote it – even going so far as to come to town a week early to tape an appearance on an early morning television program. Ken provided our marketing department with press releases, articles, photographs, promotional CDs, books, and DVDs in abundance.

We had arranged for two outreach activities while Ken was in San Luis Obispo: the first took place on the Cal Poly campus with an English Department poetry class and allowed Ken to talk about his life as a poet and author. To illustrate his point that a writer could write about just about anything, Ken pulled numerous slim volumes of verse from his backpack – each a compendium of poems on a single theme. He suggested that young poets/authors might develop their voices through self-publishing such chapbooks. Through recitation and fiddle playing, Ken drew this initially disengaged group into his world, and by the end of the period, they were lined up three-deep to speak with him.

The following day, we accompanied Ken up to Paso Robles High School, where we spent a lively 75 minutes with an advanced drama class. This group didn't need coaxing to interact with Ken as he inveigled them into writing a poem by describing peculiar sounds that he produced on his violin. Again, he reiterated his poet's philosophy that everything is grist for transformation into verse by quickly producing a poem based on the words "Paso Robles."

All who were touched by Ken Waldman and his Secret Visitors during his three days in San Luis Obispo won't soon forget the experience.



Denise Leader Stoeber
Production/Development Specialist