



Taste in the making

Tool's Maynard James Keenan shifts his focus from writing dark lyrics to creating zesty wines

By [Carl Kozlowski](#) 09/11/2008

As lead singer and songwriter of the rock bands Tool, A Perfect Circle and Puscifer, Maynard James Keenan has crafted some of the loudest, most inventive and disturbing music of the past two decades. Yet the author of such tunes as "Prison Sex" is also a man of unexpected contradictions; a guy who

prefers to live amidst the desert atmosphere of small-town Wilcox, Ariz., where he oversees a burgeoning winery called Arizona Stronghold.

On the one hand, Keenan writes lyrics that can make one's stomach turn, such as this couplet from the tastefully titled "Stinkfist":

Knuckle deep inside the borderline.

This may hurt a little but it's something you'll get used to.

Relax. Slip away.

On the other hand, he's capable of discussing the more refined scents of fine wines for hours, speaking with passion about the meticulous processes he follows to put out a product he can be proud of. He's already sold 13 million CDs and sold out stadiums around the world, but now Keenan wants to take over your wine cellar.

To accomplish this, Keenan is kicking off a tour of a dozen Whole Foods stores with an in-store appearance Tuesday night at the Pasadena location on South Arroyo Parkway, where he plans to sign bottles for fans.

While he says the events will likely be straightforward affairs, they nonetheless offer his rabid fan base (which includes multiple stalkers he's had to chase from his Arizona farm with paintballs) a rare chance to meet one of rock's most reclusive frontmen.

Keenan developed his almost-obsessive love of privacy — protected for years by wearing masks and disguises onstage — as an only child who spent a nomadic youth moving across Michigan and Ohio. While overseeing his annual grape harvesting season, which runs from August through November, Keenan spoke by phone from Wilcox to explain just how he manages to keep up with it all.

"I come from a small-town background and did a little farming for summer jobs as a kid. For me it's an extension of the art form. I've been collecting wine since the early '90s but as far as breaking ground and getting involved in making it, that was around 2001-02," Keenan explains. "It's a generalization that California is a good spot to grow grapes. It's a very easy spot to grow grapes and it produces fantastic wine, but it also is a comfortable place to produce it. Arizona is seen as a hostile environment, but because of that it should create spicier wines."

Keenan considers his wines to be "a lot more European in their structure, with a lot of mineral structure and long-aging wines that are not California style." His world travels as a rock star have greatly influenced his approach to winemaking, due to the exposure he's had to flavors from all over the planet.

"I'm traveling around the world seeing places like Spain and Italy, and some of my favorite wine is from those places or in France. There are so many nuances to the wines in those regions because of the landscape and the culture," he says. "As Americans we want things very palatable and safe and we need things sold in a consistent manner, versus the regional manner found in Europe."

"You'll have a great flavor in a town in Italy and you'll never encounter it again unless you move there," he continues. "There are definitely little winemakers throughout California that are doing fantastic things, but overall they're very safe."

Keenan, 44, entered the Army after high school in order to raise the funds to attend Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Mich. He moved to Los Angeles after graduation in 1988 and wound

up working in interior design and set construction.

Keenan specialized in redesigning pet stores, due to a love of animals that is surprising considering he's the author of songs with titles like "Disgustipated" and "Killing You." He teamed up with fellow LA musician Adam Jones to form Tool in 1990 and within two years they were releasing their first CD.

Despite the drive he felt to get signed quickly, Keenan still felt a need to develop side projects and has consistently taken about five years between the release of Tool CDs. Though busy with his bands, Keenan found time to develop his own California wine label as well, called Caduceus. "For Caduceus, it's very small, low production and high quality. With Stronghold, we want to take it as big as we can. We purchased about 60 acres of vineyards in Wilcox, outside of Tucson, with the intention to have a large venue to cherry-pick the best grapes for our wine," says Keenan. "With our other grapes, we're putting \$19 bottles of Arizona wine in front of people to expose them to what Arizona wine will do — and eventually they'll find their way back to Caduceus and Page Springs Cellars," the label run by his wine business partner Eric Glomski.

These days, most of Keenan's non-alcoholic creativity is being organized and released under the Puscifer banner. While he promises the group will eventually perform live, he's first opening a store named after the band in Arizona, with various merchandise, paintings, art and limited-edition stuff. He also owns three tapas restaurants.

"It's always been a multifaceted, multi-medium project. I've worked with different chefs, filmmakers, designers, and it's gonna be quite a large project. I've been working on this project since the early '90s, and it took a long time to pull together," says Keenan. "For the music, it's not about the individual — so the more you let the music speak for yourself, the more powerful the music will be. With food, it's more about the recipe. I just like different flavors, and I can't sit still. I have different ideas that don't fit the personalities in different groups, and I have to stretch my legs."

Maynard James Keenan will sign his Arizona Stronghold wines for fans from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Whole Foods, 465 S. Arroyo Pkwy., Pasadena. Call (626) 204-6626 .

[DIGG](#) | del.icio.us | [REDDIT](#)

[Other Stories by Carl Kozlowski](#)

Related Articles

- [Arts Features](#)

Post A Comment

Requires free [registration](#).

Username:

Password: ([Forgotten your password?"](#))