

Big big country

Kenny Chesney's fans are flipping over the country star's concert tomorrow

By Kim Lyons
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

The Steelers aren't the only ones who can sell out Heinz Field. Country singer Kenny Chesney will play tomorrow to a packed house, and his local fans aren't surprised.

"He appeals to a lot of different people for different reasons," said Debbie Bartsch, 35, of Shaler. The mother of five belongs to the Chesney fan club, and has been organizing a concert pre-party and tailgate.

Dave Anthony, station manager for the four-station country music network Froggy said the station has been giving away Chesney concert tickets to crazed fans all week. The network also will be at the Chesney fan club party tonight at Saddle Ridge in Station Square, with more tickets to give away.

The mania over a country staple like Chesney proves that despite the city's location above the Mason-Dixon line, Pittsburgh has a solid country music following, Anthony said.

He was program manager at country station WEEP in Pittsburgh 20 years ago. A lot of the songs he played then still are in heavy rotation on Froggy — like Alabama and Kenny Rogers — but the fan base is bigger here now, Anthony said.

"Twenty years ago, it was unheard of for a place like Saddle Ridge, with a mechanical bull, to be successful in Pittsburgh," he said. "Most of the country music audience was outside the city, a lot of it in Washington County. But now country music is much more mainstream because of acts like Garth

Brooks and Randy Travis and The Judds."

Saddle Ridge marketing director Erika Ducouer said tonight's Froggy-sponsored party should be packed. The club is all decked out in Chesney's honor, and tomorrow night, a Chesney ticket stub gets the holder free admission to the club.

"He is so huge in Pittsburgh," Ducouer said. "This is the biggest country show we've had here, maybe ever."

Many of Chesney's Pittsburgh fans have been hooked since the beginning. Bartsch said she started listening to country music in 1990, back when line dancing was the rage in all the clubs, and discovered Chesney a few years later.

"I can honestly say there's not one song on any of the CDs that comes on that I don't care for; I love them all,"

Bartsch said. The song "Who You'd Be Today" has special significance for her, Bartsch said.

"We had two tragedies in our group of

Kenny Chesney

With: Brooks & Dunn, Sugarland, Pat Green and Sara Evans

When: 4:30 p.m. tomorrow

Admission: \$45-\$89

Where: Heinz Field, North Shore

Details: 412-323-1919



Killer licks: Chesney rules

WEB THINGS

www.kennychesney.com — Kenny Chesney's official Web site has some obvious items for a self-styled beach bum, like a Flip Flop Summer Tour 2007 Beach Towel (\$60), and some country-dude standards such as a Kenny Chesney Belt Buckle (\$15) that doubles as a bottle opener. However, there's no refund if you spill beer down your pants. Then, it gets weird. You can get Kenny Chesney Cheekies (\$10) — combed-cotton underwear with the lyrics, *I wanna wear flip-flops for the rest of my life, on the right hip.*

Tailgaters start early today



KEITH HODAN/TRIBUNE-REVIEW

All Aboard

Want to take a chartered boat to the Kenny Chesney tailgate party? Email pitttailgating@hotmail.com for details.

friends, with children who died. That song is about dying too young. It's very important to our family."

But Chesney isn't always so serious, she added. "He goes to both ends of the spectrum — he touches

his fans emotionally, but he's also about having a good time, being laid back and relaxed."

Chesney's brand of music has been dubbed "country Caribbean." It sounds more pop than twang, allowing more fans to relate.

Tomorrow marks the second time Chesney will play at Heinz Field. In 2005, his "Somewhere in the Sun" concert here was filmed for a TV special that aired during that year's November sweeps. Tickets to concerts on this year's "Flip Flop Summer" tour have sold out fast, even in cities as far north as Boston.

Anthony likened Chesney to Jimmy Buffett: both are singers whose fans respond to a toes-in-the-sand, drink-in-hand image, and who will travel all over the country to see them perform, Anthony said.

Johnny Kudlack, 34, of Clearwater, Fla., is flying into Pittsburgh today to catch tomorrow's show. This will be stop three on a seven-city Chesney trip for Kudlack, who's seen the singer 16 times, and met him twice.

"I got to meet him in Tampa and in Jacksonville, both times just by chance at a restaurant," Kudlack said. "It was really a thrill. He and his whole band were really friendly. I didn't want to bother him with questions about the tour, so we talked about baseball and working out. He was great."

Erin Egan, 30, Robinson, was ironing out the details earlier this week for a Saturday evening tailgate party for the Chesney show.

She's been a fan for the past seven years.

"His music totally touches you," she said. "He has these crazy songs about living life, but he has serious songs, too. At his concerts, there's such a great vibe — everybody likes everybody. There's no negativity at all."

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A QUIZ



Buffett

Chesney

Tropical twosome: Buffett or Chesney

Jimmy Buffett might have popularized the laid-back tropical "gulf and western" sound, but Kenny Chesney has put his own toes in the sand, riding those ocean breezes to a million-dollar payday. Think we're kidding? Take the following quiz and guess whether each of the following items refers to Buffett or Chesney.

1. Penned No. 1 hit, "Beer in Mexico" at Sammy Hagar's pool in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
2. Didn't get his first guitar until his freshman year in college
3. Began his career in Nashville, where record company conveniently "lost" the master tapes to his second album, only to "discover" them again after he became famous
4. Arrested in Buffalo in 2000 after a brief ride on a Mounted Reserve deputy's horse
5. His holiday album is titled "All I Want for Christmas is a Real Good Tan"
6. Wrote the No. 1 New York Times best-seller, "Where Is Joe Merchant?"
7. Recorded song "Guitars and Tiki Bars"
8. Ex-wife listed "fraud" as the reason for request of annulment of four-month marriage
9. Recorded "My Head Hurts, My Feet Stink and I Don't Love Jesus"
10. Recorded CD "No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems"
11. Joined onstage by a sax-playing President Bill Clinton at 1993 inaugural
12. Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning is a close personal friend
13. Sang on a remake of "Hey Good Lookin' "
14. Spotted boating on the river near Heinz Field when he was in town for a concert last summer

Answers: Buffett: 3, 6, 9, 11; Chesney: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14; Both: 13