

ACL review: Kevin Fowler

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I always thought the answer to the old question about what the dog would do when he finally caught the bus could be summed up in two words: “Kevin Fowler.”

Fowler may not be the most well known figure in country-rock, though he rules in that insular sub-genre that dubs itself “Texas Music.” But he inspires fan loyalty to a cult-like degree, he conducts his career according to his own road map and, most importantly from a fan perspective, he gives every appearance of having more fun than any 19 or 20 given barrels of monkeys.

Fowler came to his pre-eminence by a circuitous route. The Amarillo native first came to the attention of Austin audiences as a long-haired, head-banging member of the metal band Dangerous Toys. Now he has a buzzcut and a cowboy hat, but Fowler still knows how to wring a Les Paul dry (as evidenced by his dead-on rendition of Aerosmith’s “Sweet Emotion”). The crowd in front of the Austin Ventures stage on Sunday night responded accordingly.

More to the point, he is a clever and incisive writer who can craft a lyric with wicked acuity (“Beer, Bait and Ammo” and “Lord Loves the Drinkin’ Man,” to cite but two examples). He may be content to play the Bubba to the hilt (if he had bellowed, “Can I get a hell yeah?!” one more time, I was ready to put out a bounty on him), but he has a savvy appreciation for how far his persona can carry him. He gives the impression of being able to recreate himself at any time and still make valid and engaging music in the process.

In the meantime, he’s found a groove that works. As the old joke goes, the more you drink, the better he sounds. What Elsie the Cow is to milk, Fowler is to Jim Beam and Crown Royal, as songs like “Lord Loves the Drinkin’ Man,” “Triple Crown” (“...a double ain’t enough when I’m feeling this down”), “Loose, Loud and Crazy” and “Ain’t Drinking Anymore” (“...but I ain’t drinking any less”) all attest.

Fowler has never met a honky-tonk he didn’t like (outdoor festivals included) and Sunday night at the Austin Ventures stage, it was clear the feeling was mutual.