

THOMPSON SQUARE BIOGRAPHY

Thompson Square isn't a real place, exactly. It's the musical territory staked out by the husband-and-wife duo of Keifer and Shawna Thompson, an exciting and unpredictable area where country meets rock, rough meets smooth and one vagabond heart finds a harmonious common ground with another. It's the sweet destination where two journeys end and another one begins. "It's the place where we create our thing, a little fantasyland where we live," Keifer says. And now the rest of the world is invited to enjoy a nice, long visit.

What you'll hear there is the fruitful combination of Keifer's soulful intensity and Shawna's crystalline grace; her classic country upbringing and his wide-ranging singer-songwriter influences. When the two teamed as a duo six years ago, two promising solo careers came to an end in favor of a new entity whose collective diversity, range and reach only amplifies the talents of each of its members. Thompson Square is the result of two very different personalities and musical approaches finding a perfect match.

"There's an innocence about her, a genuineness," Keifer says of his wife. "I'm loud and not scared of anything, and I throw myself into situations there's no solution to and work it out later. It's a yin and yang thing with us."

"I'm very reserved, a little on the shy side," says Shawna. "Keifer is the life of the party, humorous, likes attention. I'm a realist ..."

"... and I'm a wholehearted dreamer," her husband adds.

Shawna grew up in tiny Chatom, Ala., learning traditional country songs from her guitar-playing father and soaking up the sounds of Reba McEntire and Alabama on the radio. Keifer was raised in Miami, Okla., where he was exposed to everything from Roger Miller and Merle Haggard to punk rock and heavy metal before finding his most profound influences in thoughtful tunesmiths like Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty. Both moved to Nashville within the same week, and met at a singing competition a few days after hitting town. "I walked in and saw her, went right up and started talking to her," Keifer recalls. "She beat me in pool, and that's where it started." Like Keifer, Shawna sensed a connection right away. "I knew immediately," she says. "It sounds so cheesy, but it was a love at first sight thing for me."

Each had come to Music City intending to pursue a solo career, and for a few years that's just what they did—long enough to establish styles of their own, and long enough to pay some serious dues. "We've both been through so many things that were supposed to happen and didn't," Shawna says, recalling all the promised record deals that never materialized and open doors that suddenly shut. For several years the notion of performing as a duo didn't occur to them. "We couldn't see the forest for the trees," Keifer says. "She was doing her own thing, and I was doing my thing. After a while it made sense to combine what we did. We looked at each other one day and said, 'Why haven't we done this before?'"

And so Thompson Square was born. (At first they tried Thompson Squared—as in a mathematical equation—but, as Keifer notes with a chuckle, “Nobody could hear the ‘d.’”) They adjusted to the idea of combining the pressures of married life with a career choice that demanded near-constant togetherness. “A lot of couples can’t be together 24 hours a day—but for us it doesn’t work unless it’s like that,” Keifer points out. “So it’s perfect. Singing together just completed the puzzle. To be able to share this with the person you’ll spend the rest of your life with is a great thing.”

The pieces truly began falling into place for Thompson Square in 2009. Manager Shawn Pennington—a longtime acquaintance of each who had, ironically, once counseled Keifer and Shawna against forming a duo—caught the couple’s show at a Nashville club and found himself bowled over by their powerful chemistry and cutting-edge style. Within days Thompson Square was performing for the staff at Stoney Creek Records, and soon afterward they signed to the label.

The duo quickly hit the studio to begin recording their first album, and the result seamlessly combines their wide-ranging influences into a loose, lively and identifiable sound all their own. “It’s got that rawness like country and rock bands used to have back in the day, it’s got a real, ‘band’ feel to it,” Keifer says.

Among the first tracks laid down was Thompson Square’s debut single, the playful “Let’s Fight.” It’s an ode to friendly marital spats—and the ensuing reconciliations. “Because Shawna and I get along sometimes too good, it’s hard to write sad songs about love lost when you’re not experiencing that,” says Keifer, who co-wrote the song. “But I thought it’d be cool to write a song saying, let’s fight and get things stirred up ... and then make up!”

At the other end of the spectrum is “Keeping Up With the Joneses,” a devastating ballad about the pain of addiction co-written by Keifer and sung primarily by Shawna. “When Shawna sings that, she speaks for all the women out there going through that ordeal,” Keifer observes. “She delivers it so well that I knew it needed to be her song instead of mine.” It’s just one way in which Thompson Square subverts the stereotype of the married couple singing fluffy love songs to one another. “We don’t want to do lovey-dovey songs,” Shawna declares. “This is real stuff.”

Now Thompson Square is ready to bring music fans an uncut dose of that “real stuff”: the sound of a dreamer and a realist, country cool and rock rawness, husband and wife. “This combination, it’s a cool thing,” Keifer marvels. “It’s not two of the same, it’s two different things coming together to make something better than what we can be apart.”