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Alex Miller, a rising star with humble beginnings, headline's Arcola's Broom Corn Festival Sept. 8–10

By Dominik Stallings

Alex Miller will headline the Arcola Broomcorn Festival at 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 10 on the Oak Street stage.

Miller, the country music artist and entertainer, was made famous during season 19 of American Idol, but his career in music has been in the making since he was 7 years old.

Miller's first live performance was at the Tobacco Festival in Lancaster, Ky., his hometown.

"That's where I got my start," said Miller. "I learned enough guitar and played for the whole festival. Lancaster has a big square and the whole square was filled with people," said Miller.

Miller's parents wanted him to play baseball when he was growing up. Miller, on the other hand, wasn't very invested in the sport. He said that he decided to play music instead.

His grandfather, J.B. Miller, helped Alex reach the stage and spurred him on after his first performance.

"He knew that I had an interest in music… as a kid, I had an attraction to music early on," said Miller. "He couldn't sing or pick a lick, but my granddaddy was the biggest fan of country music there ever was. He just loved music. He could play the radio and that was about it."

After the Tobacco Festival, Miller and his grandfather traveled across Kentucky, just "singing and pickin'."

"He's a smart man and one of my closest and bestest friends," said Miller.

He went to nursing homes, veteran's homes and other venues to play as much as possible in front of a crowd.

Miller eventually found his way to the Renfro Valley Entertainment Center, where he played for three years.

"That place, Renfro Valley. It was kind of like central Kentucky's Grand Ole Opry," said Miller.

There, he was able to learn from a breadth of knowledgeable musicians and further his performances. Miller hired artists from Renfro Valley to perform with him for his current tour.

Alex Miller
Photo by Stephen Johnson

In his songs, he usually plays the guitar, but he also plays the ukulele, bass, banjo and fiddle. Miller's voice has been described as distinctively low by his producer Jerry Salley, and carries a certain "old school country charm."

"I'm an OK singer and guitar player, but I take pride in my entertaining abilities. I love having people have a good time," said Miller. "I like songs that resonate with people, but I also like honky tonk numbers and drinking songs."

Miller hosts a monthly radio show called Miller Time on CMR Nashville, an English broadcasting station. His show's slogan, "The best of yesterday, today and tomorrow," showcases classics, current hits and lesser-known artists that usually wouldn't find radio play.

You can find that appreciation of different country music styles in Miller's own work. His song "Girl, I Know A Guy," shows Miller's softer side with a hopeful love song, still with a cheery attitude.

"When God Made The South" leans more into his enjoyment of a "honky tonk" with more boisterous, upbeat tunes.

Miller is currently writing songs for his next EP, "Country," which includes "Girl, I Know A Guy" and "When God Made The South." Miller said he is trying to push himself and showcase all the different styles of country that he knows and loves.

"I also like writing things that will mean something to somebody," said Miller. " You spill your guts and it's really like going into a therapy session with your closest friends."

Miller said he will perform "Puttin' Up Hay," a new song from his next EP at the Broomcorn fest on Sunday. The song might strike a chord with FFA students, an organization Miller is deeply familiar with.

"FFA has been a great part of my career. It builds leaders, true leaders… and it's run by the kids. You feel like you're a part of what's going on," said Miller.

During his high school years, Miller went to state during an FFA talent program similar to American Idol. He won second place more than once, which he was thankful for, as it helped him more in the long run.

After the Broomcorn Festival, Miller will perform at the Oklahoma State Fair on Sept, 14.