

# *Kenny Wayne Shepherd*

*In this piece I attempt to explain how the music of an incredible guitar player has impacted my life, and in some ways pushed me on my way to Alaska.*

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I first saw Kenny play in September, 2000. I had no idea who he was, but someone said I needed to go. I was living in Idaho, which does not exactly have a great music scene...

The music hit me hard. I could feel the muscles in my spine rippling in frequency with the guitar. It was a completely physical reaction, like my body was in tune with the music. I had never experienced anything like it. (This still happens to me; live or just on cd, there is a certain tone in the guitar that makes my spine twitch.)

The local newspaper ran a contest where readers could write a review of an event, and the winner would get tickets to the movies or a comedy show. As we walked out after the show, I turned to my friends and said, 'I'm going to write a review of this, and I am going to KILL it. So what do you want - movies or comedy?'

Here is what I wrote:

In the midst of his surging, frenetic guitar work, it is hard to tell if Kenny Wayne Shepherd is even aware of the rest of the room. With a hip-shot slouch, gazing at the far wall from under lowered lids, his face reflects total involvement with his art. It contorts into tongue-bending grimaces and smooths out to the slack-jawed stare of a man experiencing release. Then he pauses, his eyes snap to focus, and he shoots us a 'look Ma' grin, as if tickled by what he has just done.

The entire band is laughing and goofing around, without ever letting up on the incredible music. The room slowly empties of oxygen, and my calves begin to cramp from keeping up with the furious beat.

I wonder what it is like to be so good at something that few people in the world can match you. I wonder how it is that only the hundred people here are even aware that talent this huge came to town.

(We went to the comedy club)

For the next few weeks I heard his music constantly. Songs played so loud in my head that I was having trouble keeping focus; it was interfering with my work, it was keeping me up at night. It was actually a bit nerve wracking for a while - it just wouldn't stop.

I pictured Kenny and Noah out on the road, doing something they were passionate about. I was so envious. I had a good job, a house, and all that stuff, but suddenly it seemed a little too secure. I fantasized following the band, like a Dead Head. How long before my money would run out? That didn't seem practical, so I thought maybe I could join the tour as a roady (now that's practical). I never did come up with a plan to go on tour, but the idea of breaking out somehow stayed at the back of my mind.

In 2003 I was in Alaska helping Ray Redington before the start of the Iditarod and it hit me. I could scrap all the house, job, and security, and come to Alaska to run dogs, live out in the cold, and work like a slave for peanuts. Now there was an idea that made sense....