

The Reality of Ken and Andi Johnson

By Chris Manson

I must really love these guys, considering it was a four-hour round trip from Fort Walton Beach to Seaside, where **Ken and Andi Johnson** are getting ready to set up for their weekly show in the amphitheater as Huck and Lilly.

They offer to buy lunch at Bud & Alley's Pizza Bar, and I happily accept even though it's way too early to take full advantage of the couple's generosity by ordering several pricey cocktails. I'm grateful they don't like any of that weird stuff on their pie.

This is one of the couple's favorite local spots, along with the state parks and the Coastal Dune Lakes, where they like to take the boat out and catch fish for dinner. When dining out, they lean toward Cowgirl Kitchen and Old Florida Fish House in Seagrove Beach and Rosemary Beach's La Crema.

"You feel like you're in another country when you go to La Crema," says Andi.

I first met the Johnsons a year ago, when *Beachcomber* profiled the couple under their kid-friendly personas. At the time, they were commuting back and forth from Nashville, but now they call Seagrove Beach home.

"I'm getting more work done here than I did in Nashville. More meaningful work anyway," says Ken.

Huck and Lilly perform most Tuesday evenings at the Seaside Amphitheater at 6:30. They will also be at the Hub 30A in Watersound July 12. After tonight's show, they—Ken and Andi, I mean—will head up to Nashville for the CMT Music Awards.

The Johnsons aren't up for any CMT honors this year, but were invited due to their status as recurring cast members on the network's reality show *I Love Kellie Pickler*. Andi and the country music diva are also BFFs in real life. The show kicks off its third season Aug. 3—"We're in about 60 to 70 percent of the episodes," says Ken—and while the Johnsons are members of the Screen Actors Guild, they are quick to inform me that the pay scale for reality television is "different" from scripted series.

"They don't ever tell us what to say," Andi adds. "We just have fun, and they edit it the way they want." She calls the Pickler show a "docu-comedy."



Performers, songwriters and reality TV stars Ken and Andi Johnson devalue themselves by posing for a groupie with Editor Manson.

"It's a no-drama, positive thing," says Ken, which I find interesting since *Kellie Pickler* executive producer Ryan Seacrest is also responsible for ramming the Kardashians down America's throats.

Occasionally, you might hear one of the Johnsons' original songs on the show. Sometimes they're written while the cameras are rolling.

Since we last talked, Ken has launched **HitSongwriterHouseConcerts.com**, which is kind of like one of those 30A Fest "Songwriters in the Round" shows in your living room. Shows are set to begin in July, and Ken says the first three months are already booked. "I wanted to find a way to still make a living in the music business," he says.

The two-hour shows will feature folks like James Slater, Billy Montana, Al Anderson, and Kellie Pickler's on-and-off-screen husband Kyle Jacobs. Ken says he will offer Huck and Lilly shows, too. The only requirement to be part of the stable of performers is

"you have to have a minimum of five number-one songs to your credit," says Ken.

Speaking of which, Ken landed a song on the latest Harry Connick Jr. album. It's called "Every Time I Fall in Love." He, Andi, Kellie and Kyle went to New York recently to promote the reality series on Connick's daytime talk show. Ken had not met Connick but wanted to say hey and shake Harry's hand.

"He looked at me and walked over during a break," says Ken. "He told me he loved the song and said he was going to perform it on the show. 'And you're going to sing it with me,' he said. 'Now?!?' I asked. And Harry said, 'No, in 30 seconds.'"

You can also hear a song that Ken wrote (with Tim Montana and ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons) in the upcoming Tom Berenger-Gina Gershon film *American Dresser*. The movie's title refers to a specific type of Harley. Andi landed a cut on the recent Brothers

Osborne album. "It's called 'Heart Shaped Locket,'" she says, adding almost too giddily: "It's a cheating song!"

Ken is also involved with an outfit (sorry, couldn't help myself) called the Black Jacket Symphony, and he and Andi occasionally get a chance to see some of our local musicians in action. "I performed with Balder (Saunders) and Kyle (Ogle) and Forrest Williams and Chris Alvarado at a crawfish boil," says Ken. "I like Hugh Mitchell, too, and we see a lot of great touring musicians at the Hub and Seaside."

We barely have time to browse Central Square Records before I have to begin my long journey home (it's bowling night) and Ken has to set up for tonight's show. But I do manage to hang around long enough to eyeball a nice display for the Huck and Lilly CD. You should buy a copy for every kid you know, starting with yourself.

NEXT ISSUE: Andi shares some highlights from the CMT Music Awards.