Music

Everybody, it seems, loves Lyle

Singer's newest admirer is Sting, who has asked him to open 12 shows.

By ELIZABETH G. HOWARD
Special to The Star

Lyle Lovett already was planning to tour in support of his sixth album, "The Road to Ensenada," when Sting called.

Just like everybody else, the 20-year veteran of the music business is a fan of Sting's. Never met him, just admired his work. Sting wanted Lyle to tour with him.

"It's a real compliment that he asked," Lovett says by phone from a hotel in Indianapolis. "We are playing to people that aren't necessarily fans. It has been great playing to an audience that is, you know, just coming in, and by the end of the show they are really paying attention to what you are doing."

Just a small article in the paper announced that Lyle would play 12 dates with Sting, including the Sunday night show at Sandstone Amphitheatre. It wasn't anything conjured up, Lovett says. For him it was just another great opportunity to grasp.

"Anytime you get to work with anybody really smart and insightful, you just have to do it. That's the fun of being engaged in a creative activity. If you get a chance to work with people who are passionate about what they do, it's a very fortunate thing."

Lovett's own creative passion has collided and brushed against the likes of singer/songwriter Randy Newman, who put him on stage at the Academy Awards this year. Film director Robert Altman plucked him from the stage and studio to put him on the silver screen in "The Player" and "Short Cuts." Anjelica Huston cast him in a small role in her upcoming directorial debut, "Bastard Out of Carolina" (based on Dorothy Allison's novel), where he got a chance to hook up again with Altman fave Jennifer Jason Leigh.

Lovett calls it "leaving myself open to circumstance and chance."

"Open" perhaps is the correct term for what his life has been the last two years. But Lovett says despite the fame and recognition, his privacy is still something he owns. He also says he feels fortunate to have the kind of following that sticks by him, despite very little radio play.

His greatest following, perhaps, is in his home state of Texas, to which he pays tribute in such songs as "Don't Touch My Hat," "That's Right" and "Long Tall Texan."

A graduate of Texas A&M, Lovett draws on personal experiences, friends and family to sketch the stories of each song. The music comes along with it as he writes, first on his acoustic guitar and later arranged in his head with piano, fiddle, strings and brass until the sound becomes another part of his trademark.

"It's the same music that I did (when I was 18), some of the same songs, even. But what I am doing now is an extension of what I was doing then."

That extension spreads the spectrum from Cajun soul to country to blues to swing. He falls into the region of country singers that can't be labeled. But no matter whether it's just his soft, smoky voice and an acoustic strum or the full-blown blast of the Large Band, one element is always there.

"It's about people. That's all."

In concert

Lyle Lovett opens for Sting at 8 p.m. Sunday at Sandstone Amphitheatre. Only lawn tickets remain. They cost $20 and are available at Sandstone, at any Ticketmaster outlet or by calling 931-3330.

To hear a sample of Lyle Lovett's latest CD, "The Road to Ensenada," call StarTouch at **(816) 889-7827** and enter **5533**.

Curb/MC

Lyle Lovett's new album is called "The Road to Ensenada."

ADAMS

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interested in opera and classical music than the pop option.

"I'd love to be just soaring like Kathleen Battle and Leontyne Price," Adams said. But ultimately, the classical scene just wasn't for her.

"It's a hard career to do. A lot of practicing, a lot of study — and there are rules to that. In pop music there are very few rules."

Adams also was fortunate in that performing in Kansas City gave her the chance to develop her skills in front of an ever-changing audience of varying musical tastes. Gigs at clubs, hotels and shopping centers were all part of the mix.

"Kansas City gave me stamina," she said. "I figured if you could work these clubs, you could work anywhere. If you sing to two people in a club, and you don't know them and they don't know you, and you get them, that's something."

Unlike most pop performers, who tend to settle in New York or Los Angeles, Adams makes her home in Shawnee.

"It's a regular life. I am not the L.A./New York-type person. It's like, get me *in there*, let me *out* of there."

By now it's almost an apocryphal tale that Adams was discovered by Tears for Fears while singing at a Kansas City hotel. It was a vindication for a singer who had paid her dues, sometimes working as background music for the fox-trot crowd.

The popular rockers weren't the first famous people to notice her. But they were the first performers of that magnitude to offer her an actual gig.

Since then Adams has been building the kind of "crossover" audience that's harder and harder to come by in the increasingly fragmented music business. She writes many of her own songs.

"I write the words first and then the music. I like to write lyrics that go deeper than 'baby, baby' — lyrics that find a different way to talk about love."

For Adams, touring isn't a means to recording. Recording, she said, is a means to touring.

"I like to look into the face of the public. There's nothing like hearing the response immediately. When you see them dancing in the aisles, that's worth the whole thing."

Because she also plays piano, Adams often has been labeled a jazz singer. While she has played major jazz festivals, she admits to being a bit bemused at the jazz tag. Although her singing can indeed swing, she generally sticks pretty close to pop.

"When a woman sings and plays piano, she's called jazz, no matter what she sounds like. But Elton John has *never* been called *jazz*."