

Kareem Salama

Meet Kareem Salama, a proud native of Oklahoma and Texas, where his Egyptian parents settled. He says the themes he sings about - love, family, and religion - are as key to Islam as they are to country music.

Kareem Salama's childhood memories are colored by dusty pickup trucks and cowboy boots, the smoky smell of barbecue and the drawling twang of country music. Born and raised in Ponca City, a small town in Oklahoma, the aspiring country singer-songwriter credits his parents for encouraging him to immerse himself in different cultures. As a kid, they took him to Indian powwows, rodeos, bluegrass festivals and the Grand Old Opry.

"It could have been that my parents simply didn't have those opportunities when they were growing up in Egypt and they wanted us to take advantage of what was available to us in America," he explains.

He recalls the experience of growing up in a Muslim family in a small Southern town. "People must have thought it was so weird, the sight of this little brown woman with a hijab walking around at the rodeo," Kareem, 29, says. "But growing up, I hardly even noticed it because she wore it so confidently. She would just go around greeting people and they'd just 'howdy ma'am' back. To her, everyone was all good people, and we all have something that we could give and teach each other."

Now a law student finishing up school in Iowa, Kareem's list of interests reads like a modern-day Renaissance man's resume: water painting, boxing, Western and classical Arabic poetry (a favorite is John Donne), and of course, music.

His debut album, titled "Generous Peace," an English translation of his Arabic name. The sound is unmistakably country, but his songs carry a spiritual message that praises God and peace.

Kareem says he never planned on making an album, and he is characteristically modest about how he hopes his music will be received. "My hope is that my words will fall upon ears and hearts that may be seeking the same thing I am seeking...the inspiration to live a virtuous life that is pleasing to God," he says.

After law school, Kareem plans to move to Nashville or Arkansas when he graduates to explore a career in entertainment law. He also plans to keep working on his music.

"When people ask, 'Why country music?', I say it's so rooted in the old-time tradition, and maybe that's why my parents used to have it on at home all the time," Kareem says. "One thing my mother has told me that country music is very similar to how they chit around with a banjo in Egypt. You can see how it's similar to sitting around a fire, strumming a guitar, and singing about your dead dog."

Listen to Kareem's music at KareemSalama.com

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