

# Mp3 Ken Lonquist - The Lost Songs Of Kenland



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Acoustic folk, pop, rock, reggae and musical styles peppered with wit, humor and insight for kids of all ages --- including geezers. 29 MP3 Songs KIDS/FAMILY: Children's Pop, FOLK: Folk Pop Details: THE LOST SONGS OF KENLAND "The Lost Songs Of Kenland inhabits a pop-fantasy world that Lennon McCartney would have recognized; in some ways, its like Sgt. Peppers for kids. Lost Songs multi-layered-but-controlled production values, colorful imagery, affection for old-fashioned showmanship and feel for the light and dark sides of a kids inner world make it a young American cousin to the Fab Fours masterpiece." "" Maureen Gerarden, Isthmus Kenland U.S.A. Ken Lonquist has made his mark in the world of childrens music. By Dwight Allen Isthmus Weekly Arts Newspaper The Culture Early one Friday evening in November, Ken Lonquist sang a bunch of his childrens songs to an S.R.O. crowd at the Meadowridge Branch Library, out on the southwestern edge of Madison. Lonquist wore blue jeans, a striped t-shirt, galluses, one gold-hoop earring and no shoes. He accompanied himself on a custom-made, small-bodied acoustic guitar. About halfway through the show, a boy who was sitting up front, a curious, pesky kid of about 9 or 10, asked Lonquist what the metal thingamabob was on the floor there, next to Kens empty boots. The boy picked the thingamabob up and examined it. Thats called a capo, Lonquist said, politely. Would you like to see me use it? The boy said he would. Lonquist said, well, he might do that, sometime, and then he went into a song called My Mothers Snoring which didnt require him to use a capo but did give him a chance to snore noisily and profoundly. Lonquist, who is 35 and has lived in Madison since he was 13, has been performing for children for almost a dozen years. He has written, by his count, a gazillion songs for kids, as well as several hundred others for taller people. My Mothers Snoring is among his most popular numbers""he recorded it on his first cassette for kids, Kengos Bongos, which was made in 1986 in his living room""but it is probably not quite as popular as his fast,

funny, Alligator Rag (Dont Get Caught With Your Pants Down When Theres An Alligator Around). This song, which Lonquist adapted from a ditty he wrote for broad-minded adults back in the early days of the Reagan administration, appeals directly, if not unimaginatively, to childrens interest in butts. If you are Ken Lonquist, Alligator Rag is a good song to sing if you dont seem to have a firm grip on your audience. One reason that Lonquist didnt always have a firm grip on the Meadowridge audience was that it contained quite a few toddlers, in addition to the people whom Lonquist regards as his ideal listeners, the Kindergarten through 6th grade crowd. Ive been told by parents and teachers that Im very good at holding kids attention, Lonquist said later. But whenever there are toddlers around, you can throw everything out the window. I dont do toddler music, the Wheels On The Bus kind of thing. Alligator Rag seemed to concentrate the minds of many of the children at Meadowridge. Lonquists next number, One Speed Bike, which is on a just-released cassette called Welcome 2 Kenland, got the joint jumping. One Speed Bike is irresistible rock n roll, a classic portrait of a red-blooded, speed-obsessed kid. Lonquist even managed to get a boy in untied high-top sneakers who was reading a stack of Spider-Man comic books to look his way. Then, after doing a funny, swaying song about a tree-climbing boy named Morgan Menezes who never worries about stuff like gravity, Lonquist tried out a soft, pretty tune called Count On Me. This song includes the refrain I love you. The first time Lonquist sang the refrain, a kid sitting up front "the boy interested in the capo, it turned out" said, Oh, gross! This comment led to others "Yuck! and Euuuu! being the chief ones. Lonquist absorbed all of this calmly, and converted the refrain into I love yeeuuuu, thereby acknowledging the kids feelings and deflating them a little, too. But these kids were a tough audience, or, perhaps, simply a forgetful one; they didnt applaud when the song was over. Lonquist pulled a long face and said, Hey, did you know that if you dont clap the performer will have to go through years of very expensive therapy? A Little Dreamin A week or so later I met Lonquist for lunch at Montys Blue Plate Diner, on the east side, his stomping grounds. He was wearing shoes "high-top canvas sneakers (tied). He had an artistes beret on his head, and a few days worth of whiskers on his face, and some burrs on his sweater which suggested that hed been messing around in nature. He hadnt, he said, unless you considered walking the dogs in the park messing around in nature. However, he had been working on a new cassette collection of his environmental for kids. And later that afternoon he was going to perform some of those songs at Glendale Elementary School, which was having a Science Extravaganza Day. It was noon "rush hour at the Blue Plate, which, earlier in the

day, serves as the broadcasting site for WORT's Breakfast Special. Lonquist, whose association with WORT goes back to 1978, hosted The Breakfast Special in the late 80s, when it emanated from Cleveland's Lunch on Wilson Street. (Last winter, he filled in as host, while WORT looked for a permanent replacement). Though Lonquist describes himself as a morning person, he doesn't especially enjoy rising at 4:30 AM and spending the hours after 9:00 AM, when the show was over, as a zombie. However, he enjoyed being a radio host much more than the only other day job he has held. In 1989, when he had, as he put it, album debts up the wazoo, he taught debate and acting at Middleton High School. He wore a tie and tight-fitting shoes. The job really reinforced my desire to be an itinerant musician, he says. Unlike many itinerant musicians, Lonquist makes a living, nowadays, at his trade. He gives about 250 concerts a year, most of them for the K-12 crowd, which means, among other things, that he gets to perform in a smoke-free, alcohol-free environment and is able to go to bed at a decent hour. Children's music has become a big business, and though Lonquist isn't well known beyond the upper Midwest, he has managed, by dint of talent and energy, to stake out some territory for himself. If I weren't occupying the unique niches I occupy, he told me, it would be impossible for me to make my living solely from music. Lonquist ordered a Blue Plate veggie burger and a tall glass of milk, and told me about his parents and his seven older brothers and sisters. His father, who was born in northern Wisconsin, was a corn geneticist, one of the key figures in the so-called Green Revolution which led to improved grain production in Third World countries. Like everybody else in his family, his father played an instrument (guitar) and sang a little (cowboy songs). He was also a champion snorer, a fact that isn't obvious in My Mother's Snoring. When I wrote that song, Lonquist said, my father had been dead for several years, so I decided to make my mother the snorer. It's more fun to tease the living. Lonquist composed his first song one day when he was 7, walking home from school in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he lived until he was 10. He made up a melody for some lyrics he found in a book called The Ghost Of Dibble Hollow. Many years later, he re-used that simply, bouncy melody in his version of The Princess And The Pea, which is on Kengos Bongos. In 1967, when he was 10, he got his first guitar. (His family had since moved to Mexico City.) Soon thereafter, inspired by The Beatles (I was a Beatlemaniac, and still am) and his own problems as a budding adolescent, he began to make a habit of writing songs. He wrote so much that his sister Peg, who is three years older, decided to prove that there was nothing mysterious about songwriting. She produced a one-verse nonsense song called Be-Boppa-Doodley-Oppa. Later, Lonquist added a verse of

his own and put the song on *A Little Dreamin*, his second kids collection. The liner notes say: Music and goofy words by Peg Lonnquist, normal words by Ken Lonnquist. As the last of eight children, the smallest in a pile of achievers, Lonnquist had to make a lot of noise in order to be heard. It was a Horton Hears A Who kind of thing for me, he said, and then recited, in a small, faraway voice, the Whos pleas for recognition: We are here! We are here! As a result of his status at home, Lonnquist became something of a ham. But his hamminess didnt extend to his songwriting, which, in its adolescent phase, was mostly serious and romantic, indebted to early Paul Simon. Lonnquist believed that singing his own songs and those of people he admired defined him, and he was reluctant to do it in front of his peers. He said that the first time he performed in public "at an open mike night at the University of Wisconsin, which he sporadically attended between 1975 and 1980" he forgot all the words to Gordon Lightfoots *If You Could Read My Mind*, which he had sung in private thousands of times. I think I was paralyzed because it mattered so much to me that I be, um, okay in peoples minds, he told me. In the late 70s, Lonnquist played in a country-rock band called *Rowdy Yates*. The experience of performing in bars for big bags of bloatation equipped with pool sticks and whatnot made the idea of writing and singing for kids seem desirable. In the early 80s he started composing songs for *Childrens Theater of Madison*. He also traveled around the state as a balladeer in the employ of *Environmental Decade*, an education and lobbying group. I was supposed to be their Pete Seeger. At the same time, he was knocking out all kinds of adult songs, many of them as the *Breakfast Specials* composer-frequently-in-residence. Listeners would call in and suggest topics, and then when we broke for news I'd go write a song and perform it later in the show, Lonnquist said. (Some of those songs, including *The Kiss Your Ass Goodbye Polka*, appear on *The Late News From Clevelands Lunch*, a 1990 recording full of manic parodies. Doug Brown, a Madison-based musician who has worked alongside Lonnquist since 1978, says that the quality that impresses him most about his friend is his spontaneity. There is something almost magical about the way he can conjure up a song on the spur of the moment. Hes a real creative spirit. Kenny Aigen, a keyboardist who has played on all but one of Lonnquists recordings for children, says that the reason Lonnquist is able to reach kids is that he can remember what it is like to be one. Ken doesnt write childrens music as an adult trying to figure out what kids want, Aigen, who is a professor of music therapy at New York University, told me. Nor does he try to figure out what parents want their children to hear. He isnt moralistic and he isnt cutesy-wutesy. Lonnquist himself has said of his kids music, I try to write songs

that are fun for me, because I have to sing them forever. Banana Cheers Lonquist chased his glass of milk with a cup of coffee, and then we headed off for Glendale Elementary, in southeastern Madison. We traveled in the environmentally incorrect California style: he in his Toyota, I in mine. I listened to Welcome 2 Kenland, one his two new childrens cassettes. The other is Old Befana, a retelling, in song and narrative, of an Italian Twelfth Night folktale. Unlike his first two albums for kids, the new ones were recorded in a studio "Butch Vigs" and have high quality sound. Kenland is a lively and varied collection. It includes the aforementioned One Speed Bike, two gentle environmental songs, a do-wop-ish tune about TV, Old Witch (which Lonquist heard long ago on a Burl Ives record), a jungle-beat number about a girl with messy habits, and a song about the composers two dogs (Blue and Moon), who howl when the same girl plays her saxophone. The girl is Natalie Richter, the 13 year old daughter of Lonquists partner, Joanne Schilling. Natalie has appeared on all of Lonquists recordings for kids. But, Lonquist said, shes not into my stuff anymore. Shes into whats hip. At the Blue Plate, I had asked Lonquist if he ever listened to other performers of childrens music "I was thinking of Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, Taj Mahal, Maria Muldaur, Dave Van Ronk" and he said, No, hardly at all. Nor, for that matter, did he listen to much folk music "or, rather, to what echt folkies call folk music. He said he was more likely to find inspiration for his kids songs in rock or folk-rock or Tex-Mex or reggae or other impure forms of pop music. And, he said, he often re-read the books that excited him as a boy "Eleanor Camerons Mushroom Planet series, for instance. I want to remember the feelings I had then, so I can impart them to kids now. Inside Glendale, Lonquist sniffed the air and said, Cleaning fluid. Every school in North America has the same smell. He got directions to the gym, and then went back outside and drove his car and me through the school playground, where recess was in full swing. It sure would be bad publicity if I hit one of these kids, he said, as a girl with pigtails double-dog-dared him, or seemed to. He took his equipment into the gym, and was met there by Renee Forrest, Glendales music teacher, who told him that he would be the culminating act of all-science day. He had been preceded by a man known as Mr. Science, whose show featured a couple of chemical explosions. Lonquist had an audience of 550. He led off with One Speed Bike "a song with very modest scientific content" and got everybody clapping. He then did songs about more conventional matters "recycling, whales, water, solar energy, garbage. Some of the songs were funny, and the serious ones werent sappy or preachy. A few of them were participation songs. The effect of 550 children in a small gym shouting Garbage! every few bars was galvanizing. Two days after

Thanksgiving, Lonquist performed in the Marquee Room of the Civic Center. He was celebrating the release of his two new cassettes, and the room was decorated with balloons and streamers. Natalie was there, taking tickets. Her mom was there, too. Peg Lonquist had come down from her home in Minneapolis. Her brother had asked her to lead the audience in a kind of stretching exercise called the Banana Cheer, and also, at the end of a song called I Sold My Cat, to make the sound of an elephant trumpeting. She did both tasks with flair. When Lonquist started to sing I Sold My Cat, a girl sitting up front, a fan, said, I know this song. Lonquist stopped, and then said, I know this song, too. That's something we have in common.

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