

## Mp3 Kristin Lems - Equality Road



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Authentic "vintage folk" - rousing live renditions of funny and fiery feminist classics, several singalongs even the kids will enjoy, and a reminder that there was a huge mainstream movement for women's rights - this is how it sounded. 26 MP3 Songs FOLK: Political, KIDS/FAMILY: Kid Friendly Details: Kristin Lems set out to be a folksinger, but the 70's changed all that. The women's rights movement was burgeoning and Kristin found herself squarely in the middle of its heady energy. A prize-winning poet, she turned to writing original songs -- like "Mammary Glands," because "the songs I searched for to express myself just didn't exist in the folk archives," she explains. She founded the National Women's Music Festival in 1974 in Champaign-Urbana, and the outpouring of interest in women making music expanded her topics and her audience. Although she had had a successful folk career, singing in a duo with multi-talented partner Tim Vear at numerous restaurant and club venues, the original songs started attracting more attention, and the gigs started getting more political. She went on the road singing funny feminist songs and getting hired for conferences, fundraisers and rallies. By the time the Equal Rights Amendment was in full steam, Kristin had performed for six national conventions of the National Organization for Women and numerous state conferences, touring to 36 states. "A charmer in the most literal and least artificial sense of the word," wrote The New Yorker. Gloria Steinem declared Kristin to have "a new kind of humor - that doesn't put anybody down but tells the truth." And she received extensive airplay, especially in the public radio stations. The albums from which these songs are taken represent the pinnacle of this period of Kristin's career. We Will Never Give Up, the first of the two albums, was recorded live at the final ERA rally in Lafayette Park, Washington, DC, on June 30, 1982, the day that the time limit on the proposed Amendment expired. "I marvel that the singing shows such good cheer and resolve," she muses, "when you consider everyone there was having nervous breakdowns. In a way, the rally was a mass therapy

session!" To add to it all, it rained - and the rally was shortened. One of the photos in the CD booklet shows a group of children, young feminists, holding up a big umbrella over Kristin as she continued "singing in the rain." The rest of the first album was recorded live at Nature's Table restaurant in Urbana, IL two weeks later. It includes the songs that were planned for the rally, and several others, including some written and performed on the piano. If there is any doubt that feminists include young and old, women, men, and children, listen to the hoots, hollers, and lusty singing of the crowds if you want to hear feminism in action! The album also contains the classic "I'm Gonna be an Engineer," written by Peggy Seeger, which was for many years one of the most requested songs in Kristin's performances. The second album, *In the Out Door*, represents some of the finest songwriting in Kristin's long and illustrious career. Although the songs were written in the late 1970's, they are still up to date and almost prescient. "How Nice," Kristin's song comparing a straight couple with a gay couple, and pointedly asking who would congratulate the gay couple when they wanted to marry, is, as far as we have been able to research, the first recorded song calling for gay marriage (1979). "Days of the Theocracy" was also written in 1979 and, except for a reference to "parochiaid," the term used for state subsidy of religious schools at the time, the song is completely contemporary. One of the most extraordinary subthemes of the two albums is the inclusion of two songs in the Persian language, *Gol e Yakh* (Ice Flower) and *Kashke* (I Wish). Kristin learned them while living in Iran, where she taught English and fronted a Persian rock band. She is happy that some of the charm of Persian culture is included on these albums at this moment in time, and hopes they can be played in support of peace between Iran and the U.S. Three additional tracks were added to the compilation, all written in the last few years. One, "New Boundaries," was taken from a poem given to Kristin by a woman writing a play about Amelia Earhart, when she found a poem about the joys of flying in the 99's, the women's flying club Amelia helped found. Kristin put the poem to music and it "takes off" in a salute to adventuring women. The other two are lively, funny songs about wages - "The Living Wage" counts down a woman's paycheck at minimum wage and shows how she falls into debt; the last, "Union ABCs," rollicks through the big concepts behind the union movement by going through the alphabet. You'll have to hear it to see what is represented with "x." The double CD with booklet was designed by Laurie Haag, whose impressive talents bear special mention. Laurie, originally a drummer, is on *In the Out Door* playing drums, but plays the bass guitar on *We Will Never Give Up*. A talented multiinstrumentalist, she picked up the bass guitar and worked up the repertoire Kristin was performing

across the country during the ERA struggle. Laurie's rock solid rhythms tracks on the two albums help give the music its driving energy. Later, Laurie learned graphic design and wanted to create the cover images and the booklet that now comprise Equality Road. Laurie is also collecting ERA stories for a future full length book, and is negotiating a contract with a university press. Pictures of Laurie playing bass with Kristin can be seen at Kristin's website in the Photos area. "It stirred up a lot of emotion in me to get these songs ready to release on CD," says Kristin. "They are foundational to who I am today, and I get enormous feedback from listeners telling me they feel the same way. I know that people who lived this movement with me will shed some tears and also share some laughs -- and people who didn't will get a small taste of what the women's movement, or at least this little corner of it, sounded like in the height of our activism. More importantly, this double CD insures that our movement will not be written out of future US history sources. We were there and here's what we were doing." The dazzling 26 song collection, including intros, clapping and singing along, is just the jump start for all who need a boost. It's a healthy musical box of candy lovingly offered from the past to the future.

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