

LOWER EAST SIDE

All Words and Music © Kenny Karen

LOWER EAST SIDE

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Immigrant's clothes, victory's pose
Wayfarer's wages and needs
Ten in a room, dustpans and brooms
Family's dependence, preserving descendants

Whose dreams were assailed,
hopes were derailed
Too many mouths left to feed
Migrating pride, turning the tide
Teeming with optimists there
on the Lower East Side

Tenements lined the streets
Pushcarts and lies would invent enterprises
And gold never touched their feet
Fantasy's trail would unveil practicalities
Poverty, frailties, irrationalities

Cobblestones cry, workers defy
Sweatshops repress and recede
Old ways derided, parents provided
New generations inherit the Lower East Side

Tenements lined the streets
Pushcarts and lies would invent enterprises
And gold never touched their feet
Fantasy's trail would unveil practicalities
Poverty, frailties, irrationalities

Immigrant's shoes, journals and news
Changes and timeless reprise
New worlds collide, streets gentrified
World of our father's sustained on the Lower
East Side

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

When I was a boy, in my father's house
Honor and religion were tools of survival
Each one knew his place, under watchful eye
Trust the holy books
and the words of the Bible
Papa led the way, we were right behind
Planted in our minds was the creed to live by,
A life of faith and virtue
In my father's house I was a Jew

Comforted and safe, guarded and secure
Sabbath was the day of the week we treasured
Read between the lines, holy and obscure
Ten commandments
setting the standard we'd measure
Mama's voice would sing, passionate and pure
Songs she surely learned at her father's table
Transferred to her children
In my father's house I was a Jew

I digested all that was expected
Choosing not to ever question why
In my head the truth would be rejected
Infected by disbelief's goodbye

Nothing's right or wrong,
nothing's black and white
Would I disappoint, would I be accepted
Resigned to feel dejected
I turned away and faced what I outgrew
Would they try and understand
That my beliefs have made me who I am
And in my father's house I'll always be a Jew

NUTS

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

No one's asking my opinion
of how to begin a discussion
Whose specifics would border the inane
No one's asking my permission,
no formal request or petition
Does it matter? The subject is insane
Who came up with this idea?
Who decided to comply?
Giving up on your career, let's consult the DUI
No one needs to represent
or appear at a state deposition
The decision will not be nullified

You don't need a law degree
to pursue disillusioned princesses
Who believe there is nothing they don't know
You don't need a mother's arms
to embrace when your child obsesses
When she tells you it's time for her to go
You can't put her in her place,
she's no longer in her teens
You can't argue face-to-face,
too unnerving and extreme
You don't need the FBI
or the likes of a J. Edgar Hoover
She's a woman of independent means

Nuts -- my daughter's nuts
Her life's her own
although it cuts me to the bone
Nuts -- certifiably nuts
Oceans apart, breaking my heart,
leaving her home
Once when I was young
I had a dream
I'd help rebuild our promised land
My mama would cry, I wasn't strong,
I was denied taking a stand, I didn't go....

I admit that I'm a bit too protective
of all my possessions
My discretion throws caution to the wind
I admit that when it comes to decisions
my own apprehensions
Play the dominant role, my next of kin
Should be mindful
of the love I've considered and appraised

Overcoming my demeanor,
the changing of my ways
I associate my ancestral ties
with the hills of Judea
And my parenting skills to younger days

Little blessing of the night,
she's the light in my hours of darkness
An achiever expecting to excel
With an eagerness to fight,
with the might of her strength of convictions
She would answer the call to any bell
And with Nasser
entertaining a virtual blockade
No Israeli would abstain
from a call to his brigade
I could see her volunteering
for flights into Egypt and Jordan
Leading forces on some pre-emptive raid

Nuts -- my daughter's nuts
Her life's her own
although it cuts me to the bone
Nuts -- certifiably nuts
Oceans apart breaking my heart,
leaving her home
Once when I was young
I had a dream
I'd help rebuild our promised land
My mama would cry, I wasn't strong
I was denied taking a stand
I didn't go but she should go....

She's the center of my world
she's a girl who's in open defiance
Not content 'til it hits her in the face
She's the center of my world,
she depends on her own self-reliance
Not a woman who's fallen out of grace
Never turn the other cheek
when they hit you from behind
Sentiment is for the weak,
never seek what you can't find
But she's still my little girl
and I fear for her safety and comfort
Why debate a contentious state of mind?

Nuts -- my daughter's nuts
Freedom of choice, raising her voice
Thank God she's nuts!

CANDLESTICKS

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Crafted from silversmith's talents and skills
Wedding day gift from the White Russian hills
Welcomed the Sabbath as flames filled the air
My Bubbi's candlesticks danced
through each moment of prayer

Crossing the ocean to freedom and choice
Sacred possession antiquity's voice
Willed as a link to the ties of the past
My mama's candlesticks flickered
'til she breathed her last

Three generations symbolically chose
As a reaffirmation their faith had proposed
To begin every seventh day lighting their quest
With a day of Thanksgiving, a true day of rest

While the women of valor
and all righteous men
Sing of God's blessings and close with Amen
Wave of the hands a transcending mystique
My sister's candlesticks
bless every day of the week.

Layers of silver refreshed and restored
Strength of tradition still opening doors
Each new discovery kindles new sparks
These ancient candlesticks
brighten our way through the dark

SPIRIT OF GOD

Words & Music by Kenny Karen - March 2006

Spirit of God, lurks in the shadows
Brings forth the light of day
Calling His children back to the Father
Casts all their fears away

Spirit of God, pure and forgiving
Healing the troubled mind
Bearing the pain, fruit for the living
Leaving the past behind

Faith and belief, hearts overflowing
Reaping the seeds we've sown
Spirit of God, constant and growing
Taking us all back home

Spirit of God, salvation brewing
Honor in all we seek
"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done"
Bless us the strong and the weak

Spirit of God, voice of redemption
How far have we to go?
Measure our days grant us exemption
For all we do not know

Faith and belief, hearts overflowing
Reaping the seeds we've sown
Spirit of God, constant and growing
Taking us all back home

THE BBC

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

We've seen everything before,
confrontations two world wars
Cooler minds and thinner skin,
shades of Neville Chamberlain
We're unbiased in our views
but we always blame the Jews
Partiality is our pedigree, condescending BBC

Our photography describes
what the world can't see inside
No corruption or autocracy
Just some peaceful refugees
with some chronic maladies
And a penchant for hypocrisy
Theologians engineer a display inciting fear
Every launching pad, a child's bed
Hidden rockets don't appeal,
there is nothing they reveal
Nothing living, nothing dead

Intifada is the theme
for the lost and the extreme
All the Zionists should be curtailed
In their case of self-defense
why permit an endless fence
Show the sanctity of those assailed
It's Hamas and Hezbollah
whose endemic bravura
Show the stains of immorality
We're opposed to what you seek,
disengagement of the weak
And their sense of apathy

We've seen everything before,
confrontations two world wars
Cooler minds and thinner skin,
shades of Neville Chamberlain
We're unbiased in our views
but we always blame the Jews
Partiality is our pedigree, condescending BBC

It's much better for your health,
the once mighty commonwealth
Thinks the answer is to acquiesce
So they hate your bloody guts
and their leader is a putz
Their conditions are a frightful mess
If you'd only disappear
then the road to peace is clear
You'd have friends in every foreign land
People love you when you're down,
poster child of the Crown
Lying buried in the sand

You insist on being strong,
we believe that right is wrong
There are just so many more of them
Their petroleum would flow
if you'd just get up and go
Let 'em occupy Jerusalem
Then your roles would be reversed,
all our sympathy disbursed
You would suffer for humanity
You'd be everybody's friend,
you'd be big at the UN
They adore inequity

We've seen everything before,
confrontations two world wars
Cooler minds and thinner skin,
shades of Neville Chamberlain
We're unbiased in our views
but we always blame the Jews
Partiality is our pedigree, condescending BBC
When the Brits expire like their old empire
they'll retire the BBC

BUBBI

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Remnant of a generation,
values she has never lost
Memories preserved at any cost
Once a vibrant younger woman
linked with Polish ancestry
Abdicates her place in history
Locked within the Jewish ghetto,
family names and youthful friends
Every day's a bleak reminder,
the beginning of the end

She survives incarceration,
left behind to live her life
Someone's lover, now that someone's wife
Finding reasons to continue,
never granting amnesty
Children bringing continuity
New York welcomes countless strangers,
immigrants and refugees
Hard at work the fruits of labor,
land of opportunity

Bubbi's scale of compensation
feeds the body and the soul
Slowing down, the price of growing old
Family shows its dedication,
matriarch is compromised
Brand of courage strained and victimized
Independence stunned and shaken,
questions her ability
Bubbi's strength has been forsaken,
still maintains her dignity

Recollections unforgiving,
still applaud each new sunrise
Retrospective for the living,
sanctified through Bubbi's eyes

I AM CHAIM-KE

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

I am Chaim, I am Chaim-ke
Mama's vision and fulfillment, I am Chaim-ke
Always posing, always reverent
Implementing obligations and requirements

I am Chaim, I am Chaim-ke
Overcoming inhibitions, I am Chaim-ke
Independent, I would speculate
Tasting fruits of the forbidden,
I would fill my plate

Names adopted, altered state of mind
Document each stage I'd leave behind
Who am I today? Who will I portray?
Modify my way of life

I am Chaim, I am Chaim-ke
I'm a stranger to tradition, still I'm Chaim-ke
Generations led me by the hand
But the strength of my convictions
made me who I am

I am Chaim, I am Chaim-ke

ME AND DAVE

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

In the stillness of the evening
With the rustling of the leaves the only sound
I am seated at the piano
With my mind distracted looking at the ground
And it stings with revelation
As it sings of our frustration
To the ancient Psalmist stirring in his grave
And his harp can soothe the factions
An attraction that appeals to me and Dave

Be it truth or grand illusion
His beliefs provoked confusion in the land
As he fought the great oppressor
He would symbolize the dream of every man
As we sanctified his city
In our praise and in our pity
Building hope for spirits broken and depraved
Legions wounded by affliction
Written words would right the wrongs
for me and Dave

No compensation, loss of control
Lacking solutions, leadership role
Sweet innovation, flick of the hand
Change in command

Coronation marks a friendship
One where Jonathan would sit upon the throne
Though recoiled in his bereavement
The new monarch
now would face the world alone
And the poets find new questions
And the questions find new answers
And the answers lie beholden to the brave
And the visionaries stare into the heavens
And discover me and Dave

KOL NIDREI

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Twilight's commencement,
the day's culmination
As multitudes gather, a reaffirmation
A time of reflection, the dream of salvation
The mournful lament, Kol Nidrei

All vows and promises made and respected
All towers of frailties known or suspected
Requesting forgiveness, appeals are accepted
The power reflects Kol Nidrei

Faith is determined through interpretation
Belief is a matter of choice
Values are measured, each denomination
Projects a particular voice

Prayer books and prayer
shawls are tied to submission
Each old generation, each latest edition
Unite in the spirit of yearly tradition
As families recite Kol Nidrei

SUSQUEHANNA

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Susquehanna, ocean liner voyage of the meek
Years of waiting, years of dreaming,
solace for the weak
Isolation, apprehension,
liberty or house detention
Susquehanna, chain reaction,
gold dust's at my feet

Susquehanna, floating promise,
persecution's end
Old traditions, new dimensions,
time to start again
Pushcarts lined with quaint compartments,
borders fill each packed apartment
Susquehanna, third-rate passage,
freedom's in the streets

Standing in the crowd, face is pale and proud
Do they recognize the man?
My, how they have grown,
no more nights alone anymore
How can they understand?

Susquehanna, smokestacks blowing,
signal its return
Passing through the open waters,
tons of fuel to burn
Cries of hope to feed the glutton
Unskilled labor sewing buttons
Susquehanna, fifth floor walk-up
Family's complete

CAFÉ ROYAL

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Vaudeville's theatrical,
Shakespeare's impractical
Roles are improperly cast
Immigrant's dreams are propelled to extremes
Desperation belongs to the past
Yiddish on stage has been coming of age
Entertainment's a sweatshop away
Filled to the rafters
Where laughter would brighten each day

The Café Royal was where
Acting community flared
Sowing their oats, egos would float
Then disappear in thin air
Every production assailed
Broadway's seduction curtailed
The Café Royal would always prevail

Tearing reviews apart,
passion and bleeding hearts
Strong Lithuanian ties
Cultured Galicians
rebuked Grecian playwrights
As shallow and uncivilized
Pretense would flow
with each matinee's showing
The audience clamored for more
Bravos proceeded,
they heeded the cries of encore

The Café Royal was where
Acting community flared
Sowing their oats, egos would float
Then disappear in thin air
Every production assailed
Broadway's seduction curtailed
The Café Royal would always prevail

Lacking in revenue
all Second Avenue theatres
Had seen better days
Hollywood's calling and barriers falling
Attraction was cast in a haze
Dead on arrival attempted revivals
Would witness tradition's demise
Notices posted, a toast
to an era gone by

The Café Royal was where
Acting community flared
Sowing their oats, egos would float
Then disappear in thin air
Every production assailed
Broadway's seduction curtailed
The Café Royal would always prevail

ZEPHANIA

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Seventh grade, a foreign voice,
a stranger in our land
Immigration, parent's choice
to seek a helping hand
Youngest child's frailties,
cause for improprieties
Integrates society's demands

Friendship grew,
I learned to see the blessing I had won
Everything he meant to me,
the brother he'd become
Adolescent's failed restrain,
worth the fight but not the pain
Bid goodbye to all the times to come

Farewell Zephania, sleep well Zephania
Destiny's friends 'til we meet once again

Years move on and sentiments
sustained by childhood's past
Live to see another day,
how long will this day last?
Wife and daughter fill the space,
lines appear upon his face
Struggles to portray the roles he'd cast

Longing for a simpler age,
dreams were cheaper then
Different set and different stage,
a challenge for my friend
Sedentary state of mind,
love's allure can be unkind
Disappointment marks the fate of men

Farewell Zephania, sleep well Zephania
Destiny's friends 'til we meet once again

Phone call seems like yesterday,
my sister's on the line
Tearful information shared,
he's dead at twenty-nine
Little girl won't know the man
buried in the Promised Land
Friendship lives beyond the test of time

Farewell Zephania, sleep well Zephania
Destiny's friends 'til we meet once again

SYLVIA'S CHILDREN

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Lost in confusion, mind's disillusioned
There's no reality
Held in confinement, thoughts in alignment
Ravaged in apathy
Orientation, degeneration
References fit the mold
Sylvia's children rather the truth be told

Daughters' consistent, path least resistant
Helping to find her way
Musical menu offers a venue
Semblance of yesterday
Cultural ventures, memory's censured
Changeable atmosphere
Sylvia's children watch as she disappears

Maintenance and decorum
working in harmony
Home is her sheltered forum,
sense of stability

Time is diminished, fight to the finish
Welcome each new sunrise
World has unraveled, modest apparel
Something she'd recognize
Reverence extended, love's open ended
Pray for a day of rest
Sylvia's children honor her last request

THE GIFT

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

I search through seas of complements
from which to eulogize
My father's dream of eminence,
the beacon and the prize
His tone would sound an ancient blast
each parable or tale
His style would resonate the past,
prophetic in its scale

We wear our blackest finery,
we weave between the lines
The front row's consolation,
reverence paid, as law defines
A psalm is read,
the twenty-third, judicious in its choice
A protocol of princely words,
imbedded in its voice

We magnify tradition's call,
our garments ripped and torn
We speak in terms of rise and fall,
departed soul's reborn
He carved a path, he found his way,
his heritage in tact
He blessed creation every day,
the fable and the fact

He sowed the seeds of leadership,
accomplishments would swell
The residue of mama's lifeline
wouldn't fare as well
Through endless days
he couldn't find the strength to ease her pain
Now he will lie right next to her,
united once again

The cortege stands on common ground,
a link to history
A generation's lost and found, the old society
We stare into his open grave,
forgiveness bends and flows
A conversation comes to mind
from many years ago

I asked him if my way of life
implied disloyalty
He answered nothing undermined
the love you've given me
No loss of dedication,
just respect and trust recalled
The gift of his acceptance
is the greatest gift of all

LODZ

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

In the streets of the city, a sweet promenade
Centuries strolling through time
In the taverns and temples a family brigade
Places I used to call mine

There was theatre and laughter,
the freedom to be
Nothing that life would begrudge
The traditions of centuries gifted to me
Home was the city of Lodz

Rumors were spread, anxieties fed
Fear would restructure our lives
How many souls would survive?
Fate would obscure all that was pure

In the rooms of the ghetto, a crowded frontier
Tension would measure each call
Disbelief and denial would sanction the tears
Has God forsaken us all?

Rumors were spread, anxieties fed
Fear would restructure our lives
How many souls would survive?
Fate would obscure all that was pure

In the end only traces of life were unveiled
Evil's contempt would be judged
The redemption of years when humanity failed
Lost in the city of Lodz

LIBERATED

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

I'm accepting to the core,
fabricating metaphors
I have been oppressed, endured suppression,
landed on your shores
Lady Liberty surprised,
my ambitions galvanized
I've politicized and unionized,
campaigning door to door
I've been victim and voyeur,
a proclaimed provocateur
I've been educator, innovator,
sweatshop worker, abused
Exploited by the boss,
limitation lines were crossed
I'm an optimistic, socialistic,
liberated New York City Jew

I'm from Poland and the Pale
where my pedigree prevailed
And though immigrant and innocent
my soul is not for sale
I've opposed the moral fall,
the corrupt Tammany Hall
I've emerged a force, the Grand Concourse,
to Harvard Law and Yale
The survivors found a home
through the ashes, mud and stone
They had lived to see an opportunity
where life could start over
Bronx or Brooklyn bound
and for some Long Island Sound
I'm a Yankee Doodle, apple strudel,
liberated New York City Jew

Secular interpretations
Redefined denominations
Old world generation's residue

My anatomy's afoul, acid reflux, sagging jowls
A perennial new candidate for irritable bowel
I drink sediment and silt
to relieve my sense of guilt
Though my constitution's slowing
I'm not throwing in the towel
Giving counsel to my brood,
peace on earth then pass the food
There's ecology, theology, urology, PSA tests
Patron of the arts,
Lincoln Center's soothing heart
I'm a die-hard Democratic, diplomatic,
candid New York City Jew

I'm an over-spending, backward bending,
Temple going, shofar blowing
Do-good junkie, low rent flunky,
luggage porter, antique hoarder
Mitzvah-making Prozac taking,
Zionistic, altruistic
Underrated, understated,
liberated New York City Jew

SURVIVOR

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Elderly eyes, clouded defenders
Withered and wise nightmares ago
Each new sunrise, spoils for the victors
Tangible pictures they alone know

Family ties, boxcar recruitments
Fortune defies who would sustain
Whispers and lies, images daunting
Endless and haunting those who remain

Every survivor pays a price for living
Evidence is unforgiving
Waiting to be reunited
Death consumes the uninvited

Picked from the vine, numbers declining
Harder to find those who were there
End of the line, freedom enforces
Human resources lost and impaired

Every survivor pays a price for living
Evidence is unforgiving
Waiting to be reunited
Death consumes the uninvited

Nocturnal flame, aroma's floating
History's shame fading away....

GRACE

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

I feel a constant strain
The stains of life's untold regrets
surrounding me
For all that I've attained
There's so much more I never will achieve

The expectations that I've set
Upon myself portray an apathy
A revelation that the more I know
The less that I believe

The privilege that we wear,
the thorns of desecration
Indulged and ill-prepared,
adorned by degradation
If I should wander
where the seeds of hopelessness reside
But for the grace of God go I

The sidewalks crawl with all the vagrants
Who have fallen into disrepair
Their dreams lay scattered in the gutter
And the cardboards they call home

They ride the subway cars
The blackness of the starless nights
and vacant stares
Preaching the gospel
They ask justice for the lost and the alone

The privilege that we wear,
the thorns of desecration
Indulged and ill-prepared,
adorned by degradation
If I should wander
where the seeds of hopelessness reside
But for the grace of God go I

Forsaken, forgotten, yesterday's news
They stand accused of living a lie

The cadence of the night
Is broken into streams of light
and haunting cries
The sounds of pity and intolerance
Are mingled into one

The winds of shame and our indifference
Pervasive as their spirits die
While some accept
and some reject their calling
Still Thy will be done

The privilege that we wear,
the thorns of desecration
Indulged and ill-prepared,
adorned by degradation
If I should wander
where the seeds of hopelessness reside
But for the grace of God go I