

PUSHCARTS

All Words and Music © Kenny Karen

Pushcarts

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Pushcarts and wagons, breadlines and booze
Do it yourself enterprise
Patches on britches and holes in their shoes
Limits are all improvised
Tenements sprawling, the poor and forlorn
Immigrant's falling in line
Dreams in their pockets, the old and reborn
Pushing one day at a time

Essex and East Broadway, Orchard and Broome
Houston and First Avenue
Bathrooms in hallways, the shtetl's perfume
Offering rooms with a view
Noise is relentless all hours of the day
"Lanceleit" preserving their ties
Yiddish is spoken while English lies broken
A token of each new goodbye

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Ribbons and buttons, two suits for one
Resourceful plans of attack
Sunrise to sunset the work's never done
Packages glued to their backs
Handouts from relatives, nickels and dimes
Humbled by each rolling stone
Papa's the sacrifice, living on greens and rice
Sending his few dollars home

Pushcarts and wagons breadlines and booze....

The Forverts

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

New wave of New York's literary Socialists demands
Need for "mamaloshen, "bintl brief" in hand
Rising from the squalor, try to make a dollar
Yiddish immigrants have found their Promised Land.
Written words in prose and poetry
Columnists expose Tammany's corruption
Not the NY Times, The Sun or Daily News
Editorials, theatrical reviews
Rising observations, courting legislation
Individuals have earned the right to choose
Families left behind, living alone
Read between the lines, Daily Forverts feels like home

Radio that speaks your language, WEVD
Yiddish news and commentary tune in to history
Analysts' meetings, productions
Chicken soup greetings with "luction"
Organized labor takes time for tea – and honey
Melodies linger, Chassidic
Musical show scores each critic's
Forverts endorsement claims victory

We'll feast on East Broadway's headquarters, new criteria
Luncheons at the Garden Cafeteria
Shmulke Bernstein's crew, a Ratner's rendezvous
The waiters' patience crafted in Siberia
Memories of the past, Elie Wiesel
Stories made to last from Bashevis Singer
Lost to demographics crossing the divide
Multi lanes of traffic move from side to side
Seward Park's reprieve where children make believe
A playground's atmosphere, a growing sense of pride
Readers disappear, no one's to blame
Forverts end is near, things will never be the same

Listen to Art Raymond as his patter is improvised
Music's recollections while his sponsors are patronized
Voice is magnetic, compelling
Youthful genetics he's selling
Health care insurance that's subsidized – for seniors
Sale is completed sustaining
Station's endowment's remaining
Forvert's tradition is kept alive

Maiselach

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

He stood upon the podium, a presence in their midst
He stared into their darkened souls, a light in their abyss
He understood their faith in God might never be reclaimed
They shed their insecurities, believers once again
Slowly their eyes would open
As if they'd slept for years
Yesterday's dreams were broken
Nightmares were laced with tears

The message of the week, compelling news
Papa's refined technique, prophetic views
Secluded safety zones he'd reach
In soothing baritone he'd preach
Then he'd tell maiselach, the shtetl's voice
Embellished maiselach, language of choice
Before humanity had failed
Before insanity prevailed

Stories' infatuation
Uprooted legacies
Villagers, lost migration
Stolen identities

A sea of congregants filled every seat
Each wave of immigrants reversed defeat
And with a lion's strength he'd roar
As they'd engage the past once more
When he'd tell maiselach they'd come alive
Spirited maiselach, memories revived
Before humanity had failed
Before insanity prevailed
Now all that's left of life's unveiled in Maiselach

"J" Date

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Sitting on a barstool, checking out the babes
Looking in their eyes, extending gushing words of praise
Nothing like an old fool wearing young man's clothes
No defining moments as I start to decompose
Got to be another way to seal my fate
Undeniably "J" Date, "J" Date

Résumés deflected, lacking authenticity
Listed height is six-foot-one, I'm barely five-foot-three
Modern day Adonis, early thirties, MBA
City college dropout, fifty-five, wears a toupee
Temple Beth Shalom is where my family congregates
Unofficially "J" Date, "J" Date

"J" Date offers connoisseurs an opportunity
Children of the chosen share a commonality
No one is exempt in their pursuit of happiness
Life begins unfolding, state your name and your address

Starbucks has become the singles' favorite meeting place
Dinner's too expensive, one on one and face to face
Upper West Side's clientele express frugality
Make believers improvise a world of fantasy
Inhibitions vanish, latte's foam evaporates
I'm a victim of "J" Date, "J" Date

"J" Date offers connoisseurs an opportunity
Children of the chosen share a commonality
No one is exempt in their pursuit of happiness
Life begins unfolding, state your name and your address

Casual persona, lacking personality
Endless conversations, homemade scones and herbal tea
Family devotion is a strict prerequisite
Serious offenders in a sea of hypocrites
Looking to the future as my confidence deflates
I'm relying on "J" Date, "J" Date
You Jewish?

Remember My Birthday

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Vacant staring, conscience bearing
Color draining, voice restraining
Brief duration, complications
Last requests and silent tears

“Remember my birthday” – we jointly address her demand
Implied obligation, complying while holding her hand
Responding with flowers, subjective reply
“Remember my birthday” – we gather to honor her memory
Then kiss her goodbye

Winter’s fading, springtime’s waiting
Moments fleeting, seasons greeting
Timeless promise, finding solace
Mama’s gone so many years

“Remember my birthday” – we jointly address her demand
Implied obligation, complying while holding her hand
Responding with flowers subjective reply
“Remember my birthday” – we gather to honor her memory
Then kiss her goodbye

The Kamarna Society

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Old inscriptions, ornamental symmetry in place
Monuments are fundamental, occupying space
Born and died in brief announcements
Left behind curtailed pronouncements
Way of life, all things adopted liberty and grace

The Kamarna Society, each allotment six feet of land
Brotherhood in eternity, resting peacefully, allocations met on demand

Baltic Province, European centuries in time
Each nomadic young Judean left ideals behind
Came to build a new existence
Democratic, least resistance,
Persevere, established values, sign the dotted line

The Kamarna Society, each allotment six feet of land
Brotherhood in eternity, resting peacefully, allocations met on demand

List of families, quite impressive, people I once knew
Modest dreams became obsessive, English spoken too

Generations bound together
Membership's engraved forever
Arbitrary place of honor for the chosen few

The Kamarna Society, each allotment six feet of land
Brotherhood in eternity, resting peacefully, allocations met on demand

I Come From Money

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

I come from money champagne and caviar
Southampton money, croquet and racing cars
Blue-blooded families, stewards of Plymouth Rock
Hyannis compound, the new kids on the block
The Rockefellers, Dupont's and Vanderbilt's
Buyers and sellers, patchwork of many quilts
Each generation bequeaths their honorees
Multiplication for beneficiaries

There's no need to exceed expectations
Just relax, your endowment will kick in
Keep in mind your refined observations
While maintaining your cool pretentious grin
Every month there's a stipend delivered
Cashing checks with an off-shore origin
There's your status for you to consider
Compensation behooves the next of kin

I come from nothing, common as second prize
We all had nothing, living on borrowed lies
Europe's oppressors, our people's stumbling block
Judge and confessors, we came from lesser stock
Sitting in sweatshops, untrained and underpaid
Counting each penny, the fortunes that we made
We climbed the mountains, our children walked the plains
Our inhibitions left in der alter heim

Here we are nouveau riche, casting glances
At the new immigrants, the working poor
Every day marks a sea of advances
From an old crust of bread to soup de jour soup de jour
Why deny them the same opportunities
Our grandfathers' liberties proclaimed
Multi-ethnic and changed demographics

But the ultimate goals remain the same

I come from money, emblems and coats of arms
I come from nothing, tailors and one horse farms
Newport each summer, cruising the coast of Spain
Catskills forerunner, hotels or koch alain
The Declaration, one of the family jewels
The Ten Commandments, we live by higher rules
I come from money, decadence and decay
I come from nothing but look at me today

Kinderlach

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Yesterdays, distant yesterdays
Fading memories of the past
Wishing wells, children's carousels
An imaginary cast
Kinderlach, ageless Kinderlach
Left their innocence on the vine
Living in immortality
Vanished Kinderlach, always Kinderlach through time

Picture frames, antique picture frames
Empty faces on display
Endless plight, sealed in black and white
Undistinguished night and day
If their tears could exchange the years
Rearrange what lay in store
Alter the course of history
All the Kinderlach would be Kinderlach once more

This Little Boy

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Golden rules antiquated and defined
Treasured jewels, stipulate the ties that bind
Explanations are employed
To reflect a state of mind
New source of joy, this little boy

Covenant between God and Abraham
Chain of life for this sacrificial lamb
Ingenuity deployed
Child held by loving hands
New source of joy, this little boy

Ancient decree, Biblical times
Eighth day's command, clearly defined
One moment's pain, ritual's call
Into each life some rain must fall

Naming day, our ancestral legacy
Parents' way, reinforce the family tree
A traditional envoy
Designated honoree
New source of joy, this little boy

Yossele

Words & Music by Kenny Karen
All cantorial segments written by
Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt

Gramophone presents RCA (Rachem No)
Zeide Shaye's parlor display
Fundamental sounds of the masters
Collectibles today
Yossele was second to none
Competition forced to succumb
Prodigy was touted and captured
The Golden Age of one

I would learn, imitate
Limitations distinguished my fate
He would sing from his soul
His falsetto had perfect control

Bearded face would conceal
A protagonist's passion and zeal
A diminutive, compacted sight
Larger than life stature and height

Formal education deprived (Tal)
Musical technique verified
His religious values restrictive
Alternatives denied
Following the New World's allure
New York City's base was procured
Yossele's attention was growing
Position was secured

I would learn, memorize
My distinction was unrecognized
I would sing to each track
Simulated response would sing back

He was there, mentored sage
He would smile as I took center stage
I would change and continue to grow
Still he would follow wherever I'd go

In the end his brief life had flown (V'hu Ravhum)
Compositions craved and well known
Yossele would hold me forever
I'd never be alone

Never Again

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Never again, will we be trusting victims
Never again, trapped in satanic systems
Lost or displaced, truth lies in contradiction
Shamed and disgraced, faceless in our conviction

Never again, will our beliefs be broken
The rights of men abandoned and unspoken
They turned away protectors and advisors
Consuming prey merciless advertisers

Camp's liberation drew skeletal remains
Striped degradation, humanity's refrain
God is alive, His people relocated
Those who survived have heeded Zion's call and immigrated

We won't forget processing and submission
Statehood is met, governing coalition
Never again, dependent and divided
Jerusalem restored and reunited
Never again

Meshugaas

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Meshugaas, meshugaas, it's the same meshugaas
Marriage counseling six or seven times a week
Meshugaas, meshugaas an elite coup de grace
Twenty years of confrontation is unique
We're contentious as long as we breathe the same air
We're relentless like Rosie and Jose Ferrer
The elusive, abusively true "joie de guerre"
This hysteria is purely Meshugaas

Once physical attraction guided our course
Lusts' parallel reactions our tour de force
Lulled into false refractions we towed the line
Pre-school, a sordid entry
No rules distorted gentry
An elementary state of mind

Meshugaas, meshugaas, this insane meshugaas
What comparative analysis suggests
Meshugaas, meshugaas, unrestrained meshugaas
Kleptomania's more easily addressed
It's a war of attrition but just the veneer
An enforced proposition as sinuses clear
Just the latest edition it's gone on for years
From beginning to the end it's Meshugaas

Honored all obligations but there's no use
Promises, declarations, verbal abuse
Obsolete prowess, manifested decay
Showgirls and paramedics
Living on anesthetics
Pandemics scare them all away

Meshugaas, meshugaas, it's my own meshugaas
Ruminating each alluring young coquette
Meshugaas, meshugaas, middle-aged meshugaas
Nothing works and I'm artistically in debt
My vibrato is wobbling along with my charms
My legatos are hobbling to Sunnyside Farms
I'm a hopeless romantic with no call to arms
My degenerate behavior's meshugaas

Meshugaas, meshugaas, how I crave meshugaas
It's the mortar that connects me to my bride
The detection that points to the grave meshugaas
She'll be with me 'til I reach the other side
Patronizing her shticklach they're tasteless and tart
Subsidized dilettante connoisseur of the arts
She'll arouse provocation till death do us part
Wonderland's inherent Alice, Peter Pan, a touch of malice
Callousness is only Meshugaas

Rivington Street

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Itche, Yossel, destination
Delancey's bustle, innovation
As dreamer's tussle through the bitter and sweet
Opportunities Rivka, Freidl, working quarters
Maternal idol crossing borders
As visions spiral here on Rivington Street

Yitta, Lena, expectations
A family's courage and frustrations
A crowded stairway or chaotic retreat
Old world values in new surroundings
Moral fiber through mama's grounding
Cheap employment and unions founding
Here on Rivington Street

In those three rooms and tenement halls
They saw the rules of life written on the walls
Nothing was pure nothing was free
Immigrants clawed their way to liberty
And every day lessons were learned
One penny saved was a victory well earned
And God was kind or so it seemed
They would survive to fulfill all their dreams

Irving, Meshi, presentations
Of youthful promise, generations
Found years of solace on the soles of their feet
Max and Frieda, Aunt Becky, Harry
Independence then they would marry
Love would rescue the burdens carried
From the jaws of defeat

New Americans redefining
Their ambitions through silver linings
The predictions of freedom's findings
Here on Rivington Street

Ze! Gezunt

Words & Music by Kenny Karen

Powered by life's intuition, love's ambition
Hopeful, discrete aspirations, conversations
Language is clearly outdated, remnants of colorful times animated
Where windows of illumination still remain

Ze! gezunt, ze! gezunt
A familiar expression of warmth and good cheer
Ze! gezunt, ze! gezunt
A reflection of Yiddish sustained through the years
We're informed, we're aware
Every modern convenience discloses
We're in tune with the lost generation's sense of enduring communication
Each translation reveals and exposes
Good health proposes ze! gezunt

Provincial East Europeans, young Judeans
Cultures reclaim their allegiance, righteous grievance
Tyranny's rule undivided, faith in humanity rendered short sighted
Now Israel stands justly up righted, old refrain

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“Pushcarts” Glossary of Yiddish terms

Shtetl – a small Jewish village in Eastern Europe

Lanceleit – people from the same town or district

The Forverts – “The Forward” NYC daily Yiddish newspaper

Mamaloshen – mother tongue

Luckshen – noodles

Chasidic – Eastern European religious sects

Shmulke Bernstein – kosher “deli” restaurant located on Essex Street

Ratner’s – kosher dairy restaurant located on Delancey Street

Elie Wiesel, Isaac Bashevas Singer – well-known authors

Maiselach – tales or anecdotes

Kamarna – Galician town

Der alter home – the old home(land)

Kock alien – cook for yourselves, bungalows

Kinderlach – little children

Yossele – an endearing Yiddish name (Joseph)

Zeide – grandfather

Meshugaas – silliness

Shtiklach – absurd mannerisms

Itche, Yossel, Rivka, Freidl, Yitta, Lena, Meshi – Yiddish names

Zei Gezundt – be well