

**KENNY G**  
*Innocence*

Kenny G has a way with melody. That's not necessarily a revelation, but more like a huge understatement, and it really comes into focus at this point in Kenny's amazing career. This is a musician who has sold more than 75 million albums worldwide, owns the best-selling instrumental record of all time with 1992's 12-times-platinum *Breathless*, has the number one Christmas record of all time with 1994's 8-times platinum *Miracles*, and whose song "Going Home" has, improbably, become the official end-of-work-day anthem in China. At the heart of those achievements is Kenny's ability to convey deep emotional resonance with his saxophone, a skill never more apparent than on *Innocence*, his 20th studio album and fifth for Concord Records.

The 12-track project's theme is lullabies, which have existed for thousands of years not only as a means of soothing babies to sleep but also to impart cultural and familial traditions. "Lullabies are very special to me," says Kenny, who has been mulling an album with this musical focus for several years and even mentioned the idea in passing in Penny Lane's acclaimed 2021 HBO documentary on him, *Listening to Kenny G*. "They hold a special place in my heart. It's the melodies. They are beautiful and timeless and whenever I hear them, wonderful memories start rushing back to me."

Listeners will likely experience the same sensation while enjoying Kenny's versions of "Rock-a-Bye Baby," Harold Arlen's "Over the Rainbow," Richard Rodgers' "Edelweiss," and Frederic Chopin's "Nocturne Op. 9 No. 2" and "Berceuse," which he purposefully rendered without any interpretive twists and turns. "The problem that often happens when artists record songs with traditional melodies is that they put too many twists on things and they end up making them worse," he says. "With lullabies, you don't necessarily need to put much of a twist on them. You just do your thing and at the same time stay true to the melody. My thing is being able to look at a melody and understand how to play it. I'm very lucky that I have that sensibility when it comes to melody. I think that's also why my Christmas records do so well, and why people tell me they listen to them all year long."

For example, Kenny says "Edelweiss" may not be considered by some to be a lullaby, but that "it's in the right tempo for one and has such a great melody. I included it because it's a song I've always enjoyed listening to. And to me it sounds like a lullaby." As for "Over the Rainbow," Kenny previously recorded it for his 1999 album *Classics in the Key of G*, but welcomed the opportunity to give it another shot on *Innocence*. "I thought I did a pretty good job on the first try, but there was a part missing and it's something that's been hanging over my head for a long time," he says. "I was always wanting to re-record that song and finally got a chance to do it, which was really satisfying."

However, *Innocence* is hardly limited to the past. Indeed, Kenny co-wrote seven original songs for the album, propelled by the notion that "a lot of my songs already sound like lullabies even though they're not labeled as such. I think my natural writing style works out great for creating new original lullabies" he says, although he's quick to admit that it's nearly impossible to define what exactly makes a piece of music a lullaby in the first place.

"I know how to write a melody and I can put myself in the right frame of mind to create what I want to create, but even though they're simple, lullabies are hard to describe in words," he says. "I practice every morning for three hours, and in those three hours while I was thinking about this record, I started to fool around with melodies. One would hit me and I'd say to myself as I put it on my phone, okay, that's gonna be a great lullaby."

Throughout, Kenny's signature soprano sax uplifts, soothes, and conjures aural nostalgia of the highest order, from the first unaccompanied notes of album opener "Acapella Lullaby" to closer "Studio City Lullaby," which is a wonderful collaboration with Kenny and close friend, Randy Waldman, and was created in Studio City California. With a meditative piano countermelody underneath, "A Mother's Lullaby" finds Kenny at his most serene, while "Lullaby Tres" is imbued with a cinematic, bittersweet vibe accented by harp glissandos and an unexpected key modulation.

Kenny also recorded two tenor sax tracks "Tender Lullaby" and "Major Lullaby," "It's nice to have the deep rich tones of the tenor sax on this record too. I think these tracks add depth and a slightly darker 'vibe' to the record. Even a bit melancholy."

Helping Kenny flesh out the sound of *Innocence* were arrangers/composers and longtime collaborators Randy Waldman and William Ross, with several songs eventually being put to tape at the latter's home studio and others featuring songwriting contributions from both men. Bill Ross's gorgeous orchestral arrangements were recorded at London's famed AIR Studios, with Kenny there in person to oversee the recording.

"There was a lot of collaboration on this album, and Randy and Bill were really important," Kenny says. "Randy is a virtuoso, in addition to being a really good friend. He's got lots of ideas and he's always willing to try things. And Bill is the ultimate orchestrator/arranger/composer and it was a true pleasure to work so closely with him on this project. This project would not exist if not for Bill Ross." Kenny continues, "On many of my past records, we recorded the orchestra in London at Air Studios and we did it via Zoom, but this time I was there in person, so it was quite a thrill to stand in the room and finally shake hands with people I've seen on the screens for years. To watch them perform live made me feel very proud to be one of the musicians playing on this album."

For the last several years, Kenny has taken to the internet with gusto, as new generations of listeners have discovered his music and contemporary hitmakers such as The Weeknd and Jon Batiste have enlisted him for guest appearances on their albums. His posts have become memes and gone viral, as he continues to have fun with the whole idea of being his iconic self. And while the material from *Innocence* may not make much sense as part of Kenny's live show ("unless I'm playing at a nursery school or a private gig at somebody's house" he jokes), it's most definitely not just an album for kids. (Although in Kenny's words. "I've already given you the albums that have made the babies, now I give you the album that puts them to sleep!")

"You can put it on when you want to get into a peaceful frame of mind," he offers. "Some people will hear the new tracks without thinking about them as lullabies and say they just sound like my original music, and that's great too. Also, young parents can enjoy this album. It might help them finally get some sleep."