

Collected Lyrics 1997-2008

By
Ken Kase

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Introduction

I'm a songwriter and musician. Chances are that you've never heard of me. One reason for that (and I'm sure there are many) is that the lyrics to my songs are not "normal" rock and roll lyrics. In fact, my own band used to make fun of me for that very reason. "*What's with all the big words, Ken? When are we going to do something like 'Ooh, mama mama, gonna rock you all night long..'*" And so they would taunt me.

I didn't get any help from the music biz, either. My song, "Pauline" was once played for a record industry panel in a hotel convention room. Four of the five panelists liked it, but one major label representative who had just advised a funk metal band that when they use the word "motherfucker" in a song they should "really mean it", criticized my lyric writing ability. He said there was "too much rhyming" going on.

I asked him if it would help if I threw in a few "motherfuckers". He was not amused. Maybe that's why you've never heard of me.

I hold no special claim for my lyrics. For all their flaws, they are *mine*, expressing things that were rattling around in my head that seemed pretty important at the time. I tried to throw in a few jokes now and then, but most of all, just as in the music itself, I tried to avoid clichés wherever I could unless I wanted to use them to make a point. I write the way I talk, and my lyrics are, in a way, metered and rhymed versions of conversations you might have with me at any given time.

When I compiled the collection of the Ken Kase Group's recordings, *Collected Works 1997-2008*, I found the tracks hard to listen to. They're not so bad, but I'm a better singer now and as I listened, I could only think of how I would redo the vocal tracks.

By comparison, I rather liked what I saw when I was compiling this book. The young man who wrote those words could be vitriolic and presumptuous, but he could write with some precision when he wasn't busy being a smart ass. I've mellowed since his day, and I found myself actually feeling proud of him. So I decided to present these lyrics in written and annotated form to tell a little bit of the story behind the songs.

I hope you and my younger self enjoy it.

--Ken Kase, October, 2011

Pauline

This is how the story goes
That everyone but Pauline knows
The neighbors have their own ideas
Of how the whole thing happened

How late at night she often sits
To raise the bottle to her lips
With toast on tongue, she says out loud,
“Goodbye, cruel world—I’ll miss you!”

[cho]
And she says, “My name is Pauline
And I’m a good girl
But misfortune has befallen me
And so I raise my glass

“And all the neighbors
Will never ever know me
They all despise me...”
And they do

Wisdom at a tender age
No bottle can contain her rage
The flailing of her arms and legs
To fight a useless battle

Barely breathing, vacant stare
With dirty face and dirty hair
Words of comfort wasted there
Such stupid, mindless prattle

repeat [cho]

And late at night, we heard the strangest sound
Coming from her window
What’s another broken dish or muffled sound
Coming from her pillow
Muffled sounds. muffled cries inside her pillow

repeat [cho]

I wrote "Pauline" in the summer of 1995. The verses and chorus were written while I was on a trip to Aschau, Germany and the bridge was written on the plane on the way home. It was my first to write a song about a fictional character, in this case an alcoholic young woman. This one always went over well when we played it live.--kk

Manifest Destiny

With these hands I climbed up the ladder
Removed all doubts from what doesn't matter
With this heart I fashioned the wheel
That carries the truth that memory steals

Within these frames my immaculate ploys
Tough to create but a bitch to destroy
I built it up but it brought itself down
On top of itself with a brutal sound

[cho]

I hope it never, ever, ever comes to this
To be as big as it's become
I hope I never ever know what I have missed
While high on creation
Look at this, because all of this is mine

The people I make are designed to a flaw
I fill their minds with the things that I saw
The words that they use are so euphemistic
The politically charged just drives me ballistic

Coffee cups, smoke and a mind full of Prozac
Chemical primal scream therapy throw back
Managed care courtesy, three strikes and gone
Scientology stare and a Fuzak song

repeat [cho]

I'd rather scream my name than suffer out in silence
I'd give my soul if I could do the same as thee
Pour water on the burning embers of my conscience
And free myself from guilt which so perplexes me

Random thoughts about how people tend to justify their own selfish actions in the name of some nebulous greater purpose, and the subsequent creeping cognitive dissonance that unconsciously informs our actions and beliefs.--kk

Walk Right In

What were you thinking?
Where were you brought up?
Were you raised in a barn?
You must have been drinking
To think that your behavior was mistaken for charm

When they taught lessons in school
Were you absent that day?
Are you accustomed to forcibly getting your way?
It's not ok to just...

[cho]
Walk right in, survey the scene
Fooling everybody, thinking you're squeaky clean
But on your way out, you took what you wanted
With a tacit disregard

On your way out here
Did you kick any puppies that got in your way?
You're out of control, dear
Did you hurt or abuse anyone today?

The ego you preciously guard
Is a menacing beast
Arrogant, dangerous, self-serving
No shame in the least

repeat [cho]

Pointing the accusatory finger in your direction
Isn't something that I really want to do, but there you are
I'm the self-appointed guardian of justice
On behalf of someone very dear to me
A part of my family
So watch yourself the next time you are exercising power
In the bedroom of wherever you might be
There's a monster in your closet watching all your darkest hours
And his ugly ass reports right back to me

repeat [cho]

A rant based on a friend's real life story about date rape. -kk

I Guess Your Word

I read you like a cheap novella
That I flunked out in high school
We've tried it your way long enough
Now we're going to play by my rules

A foolish boy's December pride
His talent notwithstanding
Forego the clauses, skip the part
Where I'm the one left hanging

[cho]

I've got half a mind to tell your wife the things that you do
'Cause just like her I'm getting messed around, more often too
I guess you could have said as such this was how it was going to be
And I guess your word doesn't mean as much to you as mine does to me

I age twenty years each day
For all the time I'm spending
On a steady stream of crap from you
And the lies are never ending

A shadow of my former self
Was the servant to your master
But look who's got the power now
You jug-headed little bastard

repeat [cho]

Drink up, boy! Drink it down!
Do us a favor and get out of town
And after you're through dragging my ass around
Don't expect to ever work again

There's no such thing as an overdose
Of righteous indignation
In as far as you're concerned
I've a right to my frustration

Knowing you is good therapy
What a breakthrough i have made
Your name and face just function
As a dartboard for my rage

repeat [cho]

"I Guess Your Word" chronicles my early experiences of getting stung by the music industry, in this case by a small label that had not lived up to its promises. I'm not quite so angry about this situation now.--kk

Coffee House of Doom

[cho]

Well hello my son, and welcome to the coffee house of doom
Fluorescent bulbs, wacky art on the walls just fill the room
If it weren't for this place, I'd have no life at all
Now it's just like hanging out at the mall
I'll give you my money
I know what you're after now

Way back, long time ago in France
It seemed a really good idea at the time
Girls and the guys would hang, philosophize
And smoke till dawn
From these humble places was born, so they say,
Philosophy, art, music, paper mâché
But what would they say now if they saw what it's become?

Now it ain't nothing but a joke
A smoke, a steaming, wicked, demographic brew
The object here is not to drink, to think
To bitch and moan and show off your tattoo
Stirred up and strung out and high on caffeine
Words get in the way of what I really mean
Conspicuous consummate face time is so much fun

I shake, but it doesn't really matter
Caffeine just makes me lose control
My drug will all illusions shatter
And save me from my soul

repeat [cho]

I love coffee, especially when it's served in independently run shops. Where coffee houses once served as meeting places for thinkers and artists, by '97 they were becoming showrooms for conspicuous consumption—in my mind, a glaring example of our culture's continued journey from substance to style. The trend continues unabated.--kk

Song No. 11

Hello, it's me
I really can't complain
I nearly got all the salt out
and the wound has begun to heal

Yes, indeed
Unbridled and unkempt
And I can't wait to tell you
What is soon to be revealed

Innocence, the backseat of my consciousness is rumbling
The security of happy ever after
Knocking down the door of my strange bittersweet lament
The sound of broken glass is mingled with your laughter

[cho]
Even though you're far away
I think about you every day
Now I'm back and here to stay
And we will never run away

Now that I've returned
A few things have to change
Away with your foot magnets
I've got lots of things to do

How will you react
When I put this in your brain?
You never even bothered
To shave it when it grew

Innocence, the backseat of my consciousness is rumbling
The security of happy ever after
Knocking down the door of my strange bittersweet lament
The sound of broken glass is mingled with your laughter

repeat [cho]

Oh no, you didn't notice I was gone
There's dirt upon your hands
Sorry that I was gone so long
And that it fucked up all your plans
What can I do to make amends? I guess I'm not myself these days
I mean, I mean...

I wrote this song for the Sun Sawed in 1/2 album Bewilderbeest in 1999. The lyrics were written with no definite objective in mind, other than to find combinations of words that sounded good based on whoever was around and what they happened to be doing at the time--an approach I take more and more often when writing lyrics nowadays. I particularly like the way the pre-chorus verse reads and sounds. -kk

Theraphosid

Will the age of information
Contribute to your degradation
The privacy you dearly prize
Is mine to pluck and jeopardize
That's all I live for
Don't think I've gone away

Cameras show a look of panic
The files show that you may be manic
In time soon everyone will see
Your consumer seed will find no purchase
Without me--I'm at your service
Day or night whatever you might need
That's all that I live for
Don't think I've gone away

Don't laugh it off or come to doubt me
You can't make a move without me
I know how you vote and how you dress
I know about the books you're reading
The organic slop that you're been eating
I even know your bedroom is a mess
That's all that I live for
Don't think I've gone away

Written a little over a year before the events of 9/11 and the subsequent Patriot Act, this song is about the increasingly voyeuristic practice of surveillance of ordinary citizens by the Powers that Be, public and private, via various technological and political tools. Paranoia or foresight? You make the call!--kk

An Achromat's Tale

Strangely boasting lust for my survival
Reminding myself yet once again
The spoils of long fought, long ago won battles
Will stay with me until the end

[cho]

If you see in me a something strange whatever
Don't be afraid to find I've got myself together
Don't even think you've got me figured out
You might find under certain circumstances
That your assumptions may be cast in doubt
When you're the object of the strangest glances

With nothing left to gain
Nothing left to gain
Ordinary quite contrary
Achromatic visionary me

Fingers open, revealing something secret
Skilled and subconscious sleight of hand
Fun and fearful dance around the spectrum
Deciphered that I might understand

repeat [cho]

A very personal song. I am partially sighted due to a congenital condition known as achromatopsia. I have no color perception, an extreme sensitivity to light and no depth perception. The condition itself is exceedingly rare--one in every 33,000 births. I've only met two people in my life who have it, and when I wrote this song in 2000, I hadn't met anyone yet. Life can be hard, but I wouldn't trade what I've learned from being who I am for anything in the world. That's what this song is about.--kk

The Names of the Roses

Just because I didn't do my best
It doesn't mean I love you less
It's just one of those strange things I can't account for
I didn't have ambition, lest
The laurels upon which I rest
Are crumbling and I need something to hold on to

[cho]

Pretty flowers of kindness
Taken by the thorns right from the ground
And although it hurts my hands
I just couldn't stand the memory
Of the names of the roses

Not to bite the hand that feeds
I'd rather starve in my hour of need
Than to take a wrecking ball to the house of the sun
With sneakers on I do declare
I trampled through your garden fair enough
I sure didn't want to hurt no one

repeat [cho]

Rest assured 'cause now I'm back
With rhyme and reason left intact
To try to put your garden back together
With heart and soul on hands and knees
I came here asking pretty please
To mend the lovely flowers I've destroyed

repeat [cho]

When I first joined the St. Louis pop band Sun Sawed in 1/2 in 1994, things didn't go so smoothly. I found myself out of a job after a few months and it was my own fault. Turned out it was the greatest thing that could have happened at the time, since my next move was to form the Ken Kase Group. This song is a tongue-in-cheek apology to Ken and Tim Rose and Tim's then-wife Sue for my shortcomings. Since then, I've rejoined and made some great music with the Sun and everything's peachy. Things worked out in the end, and I got a good song out of it. --kk

Window

My window looks upon the things you hide
A perfect view of the world outside my room
With my face pressed against the glass
I take in everything that's come to pass so far
False hopes--I burned my hands when I held the ropes, so tight
Stranger still, I gained strength as I climbed the hill and I'm closer

I'll shield my eyes when it gets too bright
I'm not alone and not afraid to fight and I do
I don't need that kind of nourishment
it's not a bothersome impediment, it's me
You'll find out it's not that easy to sell me out that way
It's mine and there aren't that many of my kind in this world

It's all right, I just don't want to stand in your sunlight
In my world I should know when I'm not standing upright

I never cared for this song and I have no idea what possessed me to write it. Or maybe it just hits a nerve. The recording sounds unfinished to me now. --kk

Everything Changes When You're Old

Everything changes when you're old
There's lots to think about
When your body doesn't work no more and
Everything changes when you're old
You can't remember stuff
You used to think was so important

But in a way that sounds okay
There's things I'd just as soon forget
'Cause introspection leads to sadness
And when your hair starts falling out
You save on buying combs
And remember when they cost a nickel while you try to...

[cho]
Think about the things you did
Think about your soul
Think about the life you've lived
'Till you're as dead as rock and roll

Everything changes when you're old
You get a discount on your food
Or save a little when you're at the movies
So you can buy alpaca pants
And a condo on the beach
In a place you've never, ever been before

You can be crotchety and mean

Your suspicions all confirmed
About the younger generation
When kids throw baseballs in your yard
You never have to give them back
'Till the cart you to a nursing home where you'll have time to

repeat [cho]

What a drag to face the truth
You've forgotten who you were
And all the things you once believed in
So when you're ready to be gone
To shuffle off this mortal coil
At least you'll know that everything is paid for

It's an illusionary trap
The death of your ideals
Far precedes the passing of your body
But who the hell am I to say
I've still got a few good years
And I'll be fortunate if I live enough so I can...

repeat [cho]

This song was written at the tail end of the time in our history when people used to make plans for retirement. How times have changed. My parents were fully retired when I wrote this gentle jibe at how they were whiling away their time eating out and going on trips. Every time they went to Florida, I'd joke with them about spending all the inheritance money. What better subject matter for a quasi-punk anthem? Grammar prigs are probably annoyed by the nonsense word "illusionary", but I needed five syllables in that line that the word "illusory" could not provide. I took that liberty.--kk

Insincere Apology

We regret to inform you
May we please kindly implore you
Take care, take care, we adore you
Now clean up that spot on the floor, you

[cho]

There must be something about me
That just can't live without me
That kind of circular logic

Could become something tragic
So please accept my insincere apology

I want a chance to lick the batter from the beaters of life
Without getting my tongue tied up in a Windsor knot
I'm sick and tired of drinking coffee and defending my rights
When I don't know if anything is any good or not
Oh, no--I'm so sorry
No matter how much you ignore me
'Cause you know it ain't got nothing to do with dignity
I don't know because it's such a big part of me

repeat [cho]

I know this surly epitaph will leave you far behind
Take it as a compliment to you and all your kind
Your ignorance is beautiful, you're primitive and wild
Confirm all my suspicions, please and make it all worthwhile

repeat [cho]

When I look back on the years in which these songs were written, recorded and performed, I'm astonished by the thought of how close to the edge of abject poverty I was living. I lived for the band, caring about nothing else but getting the music out. Food and money were largely incidental and I managed to build up a fair amount of bills. This song is a rant against my creditors. --kk

Your Calendar

Please let me stop to catch my breath
I didn't even hear the last thing that you said
The clock is ticking faster than my heart
Straddled on your calendar the days rip me apart

And I knew what the ground rules were
But never had a shadow of a clue
That I might need you there
Please put me on your list of things to do
On your calendar, please put me on your calendar
On your calendar, please put me on your calendar

I wish I didn't spread myself so thin
The meaning and the consequences finally setting in

Please don't try and stop me, the time the day allots me
If you do you'll surely find that chaos is my peace of mind

repeat [cho]

These unscheduled passions have a basis in reality
Just enough to justify their irresponsibility
Careful guarded hearts can hide behind the measurement of time
Stepping careful circles 'round that which is yours and which is mine

Can we be content to spend our days
Living every minute in a chronological haze
Satisfied just to be penciled in
I know the waste of time's a joke but where do I begin

repeat [cho]

*Another real life story, this time about falling for someone who has a very busy schedule.
Such normal, mundane circumstances often make for high drama in a pop song.--kk*

I Spy

While I was walking with my paranoid strut
Like a pet dangling from a leash
Thought I heard footsteps from behind but
It was just my imagination

I was made a fool in the diner last night
Peeking out from behind my menu
Sniffing all my food and the coffee I was drinking
When everyone's against you paranoia's just good thinking

I don't know what made me feel this way
Guarded apprehension on a partly cloudy day
She made me nervous, I can only guess why
Maybe these words she said as she passed by

[cho]

I spy with my little eye
Something that begins with you
You make me laugh and you make me cry
That's why I'm gonna have to kill you

She's quite an expert on inkblot art
looks like elephants making love in a fountain
On the slagheap of the obsessed and deranged
She's definitely queen of the mountain

She keeps calling me Leroy--God knows why
She's got me mistaken for some other weird guy
I'm an innocent victim and I suppose it's too late
I'll just give myself up and ask her on a date

I could do better I know in my heart
Than to step out in the night with this psychopathic tart
I'll be the envy of all of the fellas
The snarl on her face makes the whole world jealous

repeat [cho]

*I wrote "I Spy" as part of a larger, unfinished work called "The Bar Band Oratorio".
Since it was written in service to a loose plot about playing in bars for a living, this song
has a Broadway feel to it. It's sort of amusing to me now, but it always worked way better
in a live setting. A grotesque parody that explores the point at which love, obsession,
poor working conditions and very small-time fame and notoriety intersect. --kk*

Shiner

Shiner, I love to watch you shine
Though you were never mine
You're in the corner of my eye

Shiner, how did it come to be
That I began to see a wisdom greater than your age
Like words down on a page
I read them time and time again and hardly look away

[cho]

And what I would give to spend the hours beside your incandescent glow
Whiling away the time with talk of things that only we can know
Riding in tandem through the streets like nineteen years ago and then
Clearing a path for one another in the company of friends

Shiner, I know you'd never come to me
Proclaiming Thomas Hardy love to pass off as sincerity
Shiner, I won't forget again
I'm thinking of you when you least expect it matters so

Knowing what you know
That all the time that's passed won't change what matters anyway

repeat [cho]

When you're trapped into a corner
And you second guess your plans
And you just can't go the distance to meet the demands

Stand your ground and fix your posture
Close your eyes and chop your hands
And remember a black eye won't hurt so bad

repeat [cho]

"Shiner" is a song about friendship and encouragement and is one of several songs I've written about people and places in Chicago. The music and some of the lyrics were written in St. Louis in 2002 and the rest of the lyrics were finished in Chicago in 2007. It has references to a couple of people I know, but is mostly about a long lost friend and how we re-established our friendship after nineteen years in the wilderness. A very positive, warm-hearted song, especially coming from me. We continue to be friends.--kk

File Under This

I wrote a song in my bedroom
The greatest gift that I could give the world
And I thought it up on my own
Six weeks to get it down and in the can
And now you have it in your hand
But when's the money coming?

[cho]

Though it seems like a far cry from wonderful
Somehow tainted and blasted and bitterful
Twice removed and not quite here and now
Paint by numbers will get you a masterpiece
Step by step, it's a thrilling and new release
Second generation sacred cow

Folks say how do you do
but "what" is what they really want to know
'Cause you can't make a living that way
They clap politely after hours and say

Do you even have a job?
You could work for my friend, Bob
Out in the yard

repeat [cho]

I'm the spoiler of all of the aggregates
I'm the blip on the bell curve's tail
I'm the flaw in the fabric that forfeits right of sale and lets you down
So I say unto you, my compatriots
And to all of my long lost friends
Just give me time while I tie up loose ends

repeat [cho]

Written upon my return to active recording and performing in 2007 after a six-year abstinence (and not having much fun at it), I clearly still had a chip on my shoulder about the music industry. I'm much less indignant now, but I had fun writing this song. The music is from 2002, lyrics from 2007. --kk

Chocolatown

I gotta go, you know I gotta face the music
I gotta chance and I think I better use it
Oh, don't you do it--go back to St. Louis
Get back alive and wonder how you lived through it

My days in Chocolatown are numbered
Until the money's gone and options are all plundered
I took a lickin' and I'm poverty stricken
It's some kind of miracle that I'm still alive and tickin' right
Yeah, I think I got it made
First thing I did when I got to town
I bought a brand new pack of blades

Got into town in time to catch the five-o-niner
Me and Doug and Kari, Jason, Tom & Shiner
Gave the tamale guy about six hundred dollars
Got really rowdy and got thrown out by our collars

We'll be lucky if we don't all get arrested
But then again it's all to be expected
'Cause when you stagger you can't walk the straight and narrow
Oh my God I'll be regretting this tomorrow night

Yeah, I think I got it made
First thing I did when I got into town
I bought a brand new pack of blades

I took the L down to Chinatown
The conductor man won't open the door
He said a man in a van just flew off of the Dan
Now there ain't no station no more
But that's all right
Yeah, I think I got it made
First thing I did when I got into town
I bought a brand new pack of blades

Let's all play follow the leader
Drive up to Evanston to meet her
At ten o'clock you know there's gonna be an overthrow
The boys'll jump and jive and wail just like a dynamo

"Cocolatown" is about a series of wild weekends in Chicago including a trip by the Ken Kase Group to play the International Pop Overthrow Festival. This is another in a series of Chicago songs in which I memorialize people I know and things that happened. Funny thing is, as I traveled on the Red Line L train to meet a friend, a guy in a large truck really did fly off the Dan Ryan Expressway, colliding with the Chinatown L station and unfortunately killing a few people. I had to get off the train before that stop to avoid the accident, but the incident went in the song, elevating it to the ranks of the great folk songs about train disasters. Well, not in the pantheon proper, but maybe a little footnote in one of the alcoves. --kk

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