

KENNY MARANELL “PURE COUNTRY”

By Tony Texley, 2022



Kenny Maranell 1966

Throughout the 1960's, Rock & Roll had dominated the Pipestone County music scene. Steve Ellis & the Starfires, The Pulsating Pilgrims, The Rebels, The Bengals, Hallucination Generation plus J.D. & the Wild Ones, blazed a musical trail for the rest of the Midwest rock and rollers to follow.

Watching the onslaught of this music mayhem was a young budding musician from Woodstock, Kenny Maranell. Kenny had taught himself to play acoustic guitar in his teens.

Kenny's early music influences were Elvis Presley & Jonny Cash. Although I titled this story "Pure Country" Kenny also enjoyed the Beatles & Buddy Holly.

In Kenny's free time he also started writing songs and singing while accompanying himself on guitar.

Kenny told me "How good a singer is, doesn't depend so much on who's singing, it depends mostly on who's listening.

By 1966, Kenny had composed about 15 songs of his own and developed his singing voice and guitar playing. After talking it over with his parents, Gracie & Melvin, they decided to travel down to Iowa Great Lakes Recording Studios (IGL), located in Milford, IA, to record some of Kenny's country western style material. Three songs were picked to record in the studio, "Rovin' Bum," "Free to Live My Natural Life" & "My Little Angel."

There was one major issue, Kenny did not have a band to accompany him during the recording process. In stepped IGL's own version of the "Wrecking Crew," talented musicians from the area who became studio musicians. Members were Dennis Kintzi (keyboards), John Senn (bass guitar), Curt Powell (lead guitar) & Tom Gordon (drums). This was Kenny's 1st time in the recording studio but remembers they all made him feel very relaxed and comfortable.

I asked Dennis what he remembers about the session and his reply was "Kenny was a "Rovin' Bum" (FREE SPIRIT)



IGL Release 1967

From the recording session, 2 tracks were chosen to be put on the 45, “Rovin Bum” & “My Little Angel”.

Kenny had 500 copies of his 45 pressed on the IGL label for distribution and it was released in July 1967. Although the 45 did not make the local music charts it did get him noticed in the Midwest music scene.

A front-page article on Kenny also appeared in the Pipestone County Star after the release.

With the recording session and the release of the 45 behind him, Kenny could be found making guest appearances with other local groups at Showboat Ballroom, Hollyhock Ballroom & local bars. Kenny could also be found performing at Valley Fair & The Flame in the Twin Cities.

One of the highlights of Kenny’s early career occurred when he signed on as a performer at the Brown County Fair in New Ulm, MN and shared the stage with Jan Howard, Stonewall Jackson & Dave Dudley.

In 1969 Kenny moved to Southern California and played in several pick-up bands and then it was on to Nashville.

While in Nashville, Kenny made the rounds sitting in and singing with the bands in clubs and bars down on Printers Alley and around town.

It was here that Kenny caught a break when a song he composed years earlier on a napkin (bar stationary, as Kenny calls it) in the Cavern Bar in Marshall titled “Angel,” caught the ear of legendary Country & Western singer Claude Gray. In 1960, Claude had scored a #7 C&W hit on the Billboard Hot Country Singles chart with a Willie Nelson penned song “Family Bible” that is still being covered by artists today.

Claude was looking for new material to record on his next release on DECCA Records. Claude liked the song “Angel,” changed a few words, went into the recording studio with it and released it on a 45 in 1971. Upon its release, it became “Pick Hit of the Week” on 5 major radio stations. Pretty impressive for a boy from Woodstock, Minnesota.



DECCA Release 1971



Kenny 1970

Kenny’s upcoming years were filled with twist & turns & family life, while still centered around music.

During his music career (still going!) Kenny has rubbed elbows with Stonewall Jackson, Jonny Paycheck, Leona Williams, Buddy Emmons, Dottie West, Dave Dudley, Ray Griff, Al Bruno, Whirley Fairburn, Jan Howard, Gene Davis, Claude Gray & Earl Ball to name a few, and as Ken says

“Some whose names were known on other continents, and others whose names never made it past the city limit sign of their own hometown.

Kenny figures he has written over 50 songs and many others that are in the “Old Shoe Box,” waiting to be finished another day, along with ideas for new songs to start.

In 2015, Kenny released a 20-track cd titled “Changin’ My Tune.” All are original compositions penned by Ken and tell the stories of his travels through life. Now back in the Midwest after years on the road, Kenny says he’s just having fun with music.

There are so many stories Kenny told me that I did not have room for in this article. But Kenny sums it all up when he told me: “I really DO enjoy good musicnot noise.....music!!! There IS a big difference to me, but each to his own, right.”

Thanks to Kenny for putting up with all my questions, which seemed never ending sometimes.

Also, Dennis Kintzi- Recording Engineer IGL Studios & member of the IGL Wrecking Crew, who’s vast knowledge of the 60’s Midwest music scene was a tremendous help in fact checking.

Special thanks to Paul De Zeeuw, native of Pipestone County, who started me on this story quest by giving me his copy of Kenny’s IGL release when I knew nothing about it. Paul is an accomplished guitar player and singer and performed with well-known acts as “Faith & Believers,” “Sundusters,” “Brass Tax” & “Sidestreet.”

There you have it, another music history lesson from Pipestone County – “Pure Country.”

I also learned that rock and roll wasn’t the only tune in town!

Thanks for reading and keep the memories alive

Tony Texley

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Kenny