

# National Post

Today's Paper & Archive

## Life is pretty easy for a boy named Caillou



Composer Jack Lenz and children's entertainment icon Caillou enjoy a tour at Toronto's Hockey Hall of Fame. "We have magical songwriters in Canada, like Joni Mitchell or Leonard Cohen," says Lenz. "But they never got asked to write Winterfest is Best." Peter J. Thompson, National Post

**Lia Grainger, National Post** · Friday, Dec. 3, 2010

"It all starts with a poem he's asked to write," says composer Jack Lenz. He's sitting in the dressing room of the Montreal Canadiens, or rather, the meticulous replica of the team's dressing room that occupies a cozy corner of Toronto's Hockey Hall of Fame. Seated next to Lenz beneath the dangling jersey of Guy Lafleur is Caillou.

Although they seem an odd couple -- legendary Canadian composer and beloved Canadian children's book character -- the appearance of Jack Lenz and Caillou at the ultimate Canadian hall of worship is actually quite logical. Created in 1987 by Christine L'Heureux, the fictional four-year-old boy known as Caillou has become an international celebrity over the past two decades. The curious Quebecois youngster has starred in a television series, numerous touring productions and even a full-length feature film. This winter, Caillou will be entertaining Canadian audiences coast to coast in Caillou's Greatest Skate of All, a singing, dancing and rollerblading extravaganza with music and lyrics composed by Caillou's guide today -- Jack Lenz.

"That poem expresses all the things he loves about winter, and of course one of the big things is hockey," says Lenz of the play's narrative. Although he's written music for everything from film ( *The Passion of Christ*, *Men With Brooms*) to television ( *Due South*), to award shows (the *Geminis*, the *Genies*), composing for children is a challenge Lenz always enjoys tackling.

"I have seven kids," says Lenz. "They're my test market."

When Paquin Entertainment approached him to cowrite a live hockey musical for children, he knew he'd have ample material to draw on. "I've done a lot of music for children's shows over the years," says Lenz, "and I've also written for and about sports."

Back in 1977, Lenz composed the song that to this day plays during the seventh inning stretch of the Blue Jays games. "The team was brand new, and they didn't want to promise too much," laughs Lenz. "They wanted a song that said the team was just OK."

Lenz has also written songs for the Edmonton Oilers and the Buffalo Sabres. "I even did a hockey album with Guy Lafleur called *He Shoots, He Scores*," says Lenz with a laugh.

And, like most Canadians, hockey is in his blood. "For us growing up in Saskatchewan, we literally grew up playing hockey on ponds," says Lenz. It was no stretch to come up with catchy lyrics to songs with titles like *Hockey Lovin'* or *Winterfest is Best*. Lenz explains that when he's given a script, all that exists are the song titles -- it's up to him to fill in the music and lyrics.

"I thought, you've got to be kidding. We're going to do *Hockey Lovin'*? But we did -- it's in there." Lenz is happy to acknowledge the balance between art and craft in this type of song writing. "We have magical songwriters in Canada, like Joni Mitchell or Leonard Cohen." He grins. "But they never got asked to write *Winterfest is Best*."

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Lenz takes Caillou by the hand and they walk toward the Hall of Fame's games area, where a pack of about 30 schoolchildren are playing. One little boy in a Blue Jays baseball cap catches sight of Caillou's spherical head, and that's all it takes. "Caillou!" he shouts, and within seconds the children have mobbed the composer and his muse, hugging him, grinning and clamoring to get closer. Then they all start to sing a Caillou song from the old TV show. It's not one of Lenz's, but he doesn't mind.

Once Caillou's Greatest Skate of All plays here in Toronto, you can bet they'll be singing a couple of new ditties he penned.

- Caillou's Greatest Skate of All plays Toronto on Dec. 4 at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts. For more information, visit [caillou.com](http://caillou.com).

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