

# Marvelous music made for little ears

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November 10, 2010



## Caillou's Greatest Skate of All

Friday, 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

Bell Centre, Surrey

Tickets: \$29.50 and \$24.50

Sunday, 1 p.m.

Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts

Tickets: \$22.50 to \$31.50, from [ticketmaster.ca](http://ticketmaster.ca)

You don't need to explain winter to Jack Lenz. The veteran Toronto-based composer, who scored the music to Caillou's Greatest Skate of All, which is at The Centre for Performing Arts on Sunday, grew up in Eston, Saskatchewan, in a house with no indoor plumbing.

Just in case nature should call and refuse to hang up during one of Saskatchewan's frequent winter storms, Lenz's father devised a solution of sorts: He hung a rope between the outhouse out back and the back of the Lenz house, so that the kids could grab a hold and not get blown away by a Saskatchewan winter breeze.

On the day I speak to him in Toronto, the forecast is full of storm warnings, which Lenz

laughs off.

“I’m from the Prairies, so they (Toronto storms) don’t seem to be very big when they get here,” he says. “They (Torontonians) don’t know what a storm really is.”

Nothing like growing up on the Prairies to turn a guy into a weather trash-talker. As far as the kid part of the equation goes, Lenz has even more impressive credentials in that department: seven kids of his own, ranging in age from nine to 35.

That helps Lenz get into the heads of a target audience that, in the case of a show like *Caillou’s Greatest Skate of All*, tends to be toddler-sized.

“[Raising seven kids] gives you a sense of who [kids] are, and what they love,” Lenz says.

And all of that lifelong exposure to winter and children serves Lenz well when it comes to scoring a children’s show such as *Caillou’s Greatest Skate of All*, which is a combination of two things Canada happens to excel at: children’s entertainment and winter activities.

“Caillou represents all those iconic things,” says Lenz. “It represents Canadian hockey, which we believe is our sport and doesn’t belong to anybody else, and skating and (also) this great little children’s show.”

It turns out that not only does Lenz have a significant background in scoring kid’s shows — he has worked in the past with Raffi, the popular children’s performer — but he also has an appreciation for the music of sports. He scored the recent movie of the week about Don Cherry, and wrote the Toronto Blue Jays theme song, *OK Blue Jays*.

Lenz even co-produced a disco album that Montreal Canadiens legend Guy Lafleur recorded in the late ’70s.

“When Gilles Paquin at Paquin Entertainment brought it *Caillou* to us [Lenz and writing partner Doug Cameron] to write the music for it. It was a treat because it’s really what we love doing,” Lenz says. “And it’s fun to write songs about hockey.”

But while producing hockey disco albums might be a work in progress at the best of times, there is a real art to scoring music for kid’s shows.

Lenz says that he’s afforded more creative latitude on kid’s shows than he is on adult shows he’s composed for, such as Mel Gibson’s blockbuster *The Passion of the Christ*, or *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

“People seldom have a preconception, or even a misconception about what will work for kids,” Lenz says. “Generally you know it’s simple songs, memorable songs, lyrics that are silly, lyrics that are fun, these things are the staple of kids’ music and so I’ve done a lot of it.”

It’s one thing to know that children love simple, memorable songs. It’s another thing

altogether to write them.

“Kids love stories,” Lenz says. I’m sure you know from your own child, if you tell a story to a child and leave some room in there for them to use their imagination, it’s always going to be fun, and always going to take you places you didn’t expect to go.

“Knowing those things, then you try and come up with lyrics that sort of leave room for them,” he adds, “and also are fun for them to sing, and fun to say.

“That’s kind of the goal of it, whether you always achieve it is questionable, but you always know you’re trying to be in their world.”

In that way, you might even say that Lenz, and other Canucks who work in Canadian children’s entertainment — which has proven to be one of our great enduring cultural exports — belong to a special club: kid whisperers.

“I hadn’t thought of it (kid whispering) that way,” Lenz says, “but that’s a lot of what it is.”

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