

KINDA KENNY

PROFILE BY JOYCE D. WEGNER

Wherever he goes, Kenny Edwards draws attention because of his striking resemblance to Nashville's quintessential country gentleman, Kenny Rogers. It wasn't always this way, however. After moving to Canada from England, Edwards joined a country western band and entertained audiences with a wide range of country hits by various artists. In 1994, while Edwards was recording an album, his producer, James Bowers, commented on the strong similarities to Rogers in both Edwards' voice and appearance.



A
REPRINT OF WESTJET'S
INFLIGHT MAGAZINE ARTICLE
ABOUT KINDA KENNY
(October 2004)



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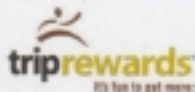
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Kinda Kenny

Edwards didn't think too much about the resemblance until 1998, when he read an article in *Reader's Digest* magazine about abused children. He decided he wanted to do something to help kids. With the help of his wife, Jude, and many friends and volunteers, Edwards started the first of his annual "Put a little love in your heart" benefit concerts to support the Vancouver Union Police Foundation for Abused Children.

"There's so much sadness involved in abused children," Edwards says. "I was brought to tears about their situation; I just knew I had to help in some way." Using his connections in the entertainment industry, Edwards began booking acts for the first show. But close to the show day, Edwards was still short one act to fill the bill. "That's when I decided to do a couple of numbers as Kenny Rogers," he recalls. "I received an enormous response from the audience."

As a result of that concert, Edwards began receiving requests to appear as Rogers so he shifted his focus from country music in general to Kenny Rogers specifically. "Kenny Rogers is an extremely talented and popular country music legend," Edwards explains. "Everywhere I go, everyone knows who Kenny Rogers is."

Consequently, it's not unusual that Edwards is often mistaken for Kenny Rogers. While entertaining in Billings, Montana, several years ago, Edwards was invited to go backstage and meet the real Kenny Rogers. "The first thing he said was, 'Hey, I just got taller!' since I'm at least six inches taller than he is," Edwards laughs. "He was extremely personable. We took a couple of pictures and he shook my hand. When I was leaving, he smiled and said, 'Now don't get me into any trouble.'"

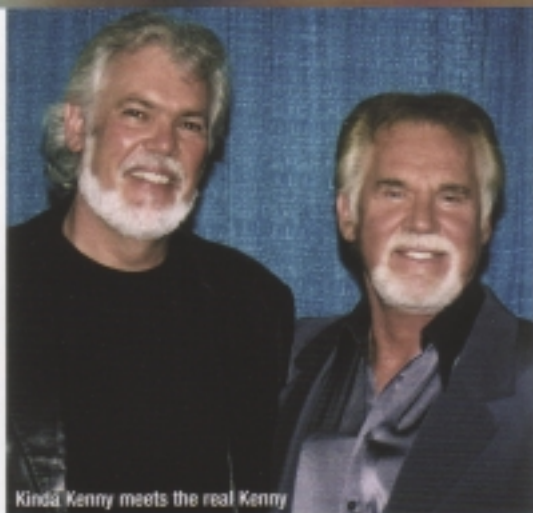
"Everywhere I go, everyone knows who Kenny Rogers is"

Edwards then rejoined the audience to enjoy Rogers' show. Soon after, he was tapped on the shoulder by Miss Montana, asking if she could have a picture of the two of them. Edwards politely explained to her that he wasn't the real Kenny Rogers. "She was a bit embarrassed, but I told her it happens all the time."

After six years of entertaining as a Kenny Rogers tribute artist, Edwards is now known as "Kinda Kenny"

and has performed internationally. He's been voted the #1 Kenny Rogers impersonator by his peers and has toured with top Legends shows performing at the most prestigious venues throughout North America.

Watching him perform at both the Calgary Stampede's Cuff & Billy Saloon and at the Merritt Mountain Country Music Festival last year, it's amazing to see the response to Kinda Kenny. Even before he reaches the stage, fans clamour after him believing him to be the real Kenny Rogers. When asked if it grows tiresome having to correct each and every fan, he pauses before answering, "Well, I used to correct everyone that



Just like the real Rogers, Kinda Kenny is ever the gentleman

approached me but watching the disappointment on their faces made me feel bad. So, after meeting Kenny Rogers and realizing that he seemed completely okay with my representation of him, I am less apprehensive about it now." However, Edwards is quick to add, "I never purposely represent myself as *the Kenny Rogers*."

As soon as Edwards steps on stage and the first few notes of Rogers' biggest hit, "The Gambler" pumps through the gigantic speakers, the crowd is on their feet. His likeness and his voice grabs the audience's attention as they begin to believe they are actually listening to the real Kenny Rogers. Kinda Kenny coaxes the crowd

into joining in for a few verses and they do so willingly. It's an electric performance reaching both cowboys and cowgirls.

Edwards has even produced his own CD of Rogers' hits and sells them at his shows. "Fans started asking if I had a CD," he explains. "At first I thought it was a bit odd, but after receiving so many requests I decided it would be worthwhile to make one." Walk through the event grounds with Edwards after his set, and it's easy to appreciate why people are so accepting of who he is and what he does. Just like Rogers, Edwards is ever the gentleman. He is quick to smile and happily poses for pictures and signs autographs for everyone.

Since his first performance as Kenny Rogers, Edwards' career and his benefit concert grows with continued success. Held at the Bell Performing Arts Centre in Surrey, B.C., (this year, on October 2), the show consistently sells out. Over the past five years, thousands of dollars have been raised to support the cause. "All the monies raised go directly to help the children," Edwards says with pride.

When he's not on stage performing as Kinda Kenny, Edwards leads a life as a successful realtor in the Okanagan Valley. So, if you see a real estate sign with what appears to be Kenny Rogers' picture on it, you're not seeing things, it's just Kinda Kenny doing his day job. ✦



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