

# Ken Medema

## singing our stories, inspiring hearts

For four decades, Ken Medema has inspired people through storytelling and music. Though blind from birth, Ken sees and hears with heart and mind. His ability to capture spirit in word and song is unparalleled.

One of the most creative and authentic artists performing today, Ken custom designs every musical moment of his performance with brilliant improvisation that defies description. With an ever-growing circle of friends around the world, Ken's vocal and piano artistry and imagination have reached audiences of 50 to 50,000 people in 49 United States and in more than 15 countries on four continents.

From the time he was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1943, Ken has been unable to see with his physical eyes. His sight is limited to distinguishing between light and darkness and seeing fuzzy outlines of major objects. "As a kid I was not widely accepted," he says, "and I spent a lot of time by myself. Because I have lived with some degree of being different all my life, I have some sympathy for people who have been disenfranchised, whether they have been disabled or politically oppressed or whatever."

Music early became a major component of Medema's life. "I started banging on the piano when I was five years old," he says, "making up crazy little fantasies on my mom's piano. When I was eight years old my parents got me a wonderful teacher who taught me the classics with Braille music and taught me to play by ear." His teacher also taught him to improvise. "Every time I learned a piece my teacher would tell me, 'Now, you improvise in that style.' So music became a second language."

After graduating from high school Medema studied music therapy at Michigan State University in Lansing, where he concentrated heavily on performance skills in piano and voice. He worked as a music therapist in Fort Wayne, Indiana, returned to Michigan State for a master's degree (1969), then worked for four years as a music therapist at Essex County Hospital in New Jersey. It was while employed there that he began writing and performing his own songs.

In 1973, Medema left his work as a therapist and began a career as a performing and recording artist. He recorded albums for Word and Shawnee Press; then, in 1985 founded Brier Patch Music. Brier Patch is an independent recording, publishing, and performance-booking company with headquarters in Grandville, Michigan. Brier Patch is named after Brer Rabbit's home in the legendary Uncle Remus stories. "Brer Rabbit lived in a place not comfortable for anyone else," Medema says, "and we decided to follow him there." Brier Patch creates musical expressions that celebrate all aspects of the human experience, with an emphasis on spirituality and such universal concerns as peace, justice, and the environment.

Today, Medema performs in a widely variety of venues, from local congregations to charity fundraisers, to high school and university campuses, to denominational youth gatherings, to universally televised religious programs, to corporate conventions, to annual assemblies of national organizations. He is co-founder of Interlude Retreat Corporation, which gifts retreat experiences for music directors, runs conferences and workshops and visits small but mighty churches to explore the musical possibilities for that congregation.

He has recorded over 40 albums and his latest, ***Nothing Like the Rain*** has just been released in CD and USB format.

Ken Medema and his wife, Jane, have been married since 1965 and live in the San Francisco Bay area of California. They have two grown married children and four grandchildren, **Aaron** and Sonya Medema (Charlotte and Henry) and **Rachel** and Dennis Gilchrist (Logan James and Fiona Lee).