

**Mr. Greg** "Sweet Ella Jenkins"  
featuring the Chapin Sisters



SMITHSONIAN  
**FOLK  
WAYS**  
RECORDINGS

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

b/w

"I LIKE ANIMALS"

# “SWEET ELLA JENKINS”

Mr. Greg featuring the  
Chapin Sisters

*Ella writes so many songs!  
And she gave my mommy her album.  
One time we visited Ella Jenkins in  
Chicago and that's why she gave my  
mommy her album. An album is a  
group of songs. I play the guitar with  
two guitar picks. My ukulele is rusted.  
You can see it on our playdate.*

— **Clare**

Ella Jenkins believes deeply in young people’s capacity for learning, and has spent her life bringing people from different generations and backgrounds together through music. With her ukulele, harmonica, and various percussion instruments, Ella has introduced a wide range of cultures to the classroom and used movement and interactivity to teach basic skills to at least three generations of young children. “The First Lady of Children’s Folk Song” and a GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, she has dedicated over sixty years to learning from and sharing her knowledge with children across the globe. Ella has toured extensively and performed on classic children’s television shows like *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, *Barney*, and *Sesame Street*; all while remaining present and beloved in her longtime home of Chicago. It was there that she found her voice in the civil rights movement and the flourishing folk music scene, and it is there that she still resides in her centennial year.

Ella Jenkins is one of the few artists who have recorded for both Smithsonian Folkways and its predecessor, Folkways Records. Since her debut record *Call-and-Response* in 1957, Ella has released dozens of albums and changed the way music is taught to children in classrooms and beyond. This year, we celebrate Ms. Ella Jenkins’ one hundredth birthday with an open-hearted tribute by Bay Area native, local preschool teacher, and Folkways musician Mr. Greg.

Like Ella, Mr. Greg (Greg Gardner) has dedicated much of his life to teaching children in his community. He loves bringing Folkways records into his classroom and using music to encourage preschoolers and kindergartners to develop an understanding of their world through movement, dance, vocalizations, and play. And he and his students love Ella Jenkins!

Mr. Greg sings his original song “Sweet Ella Jenkins” with accompaniment by Ben Sigelman and the lilting harmonies of the Chapin Sisters. “I Like Animals” reinvents Ella Jenkins’ song of the same name, and features Sigelman, Greg’s co-teacher Laura Diamonte, a student from his class, and a friend of his daughter’s. The songs encourage us to join together in sweet and silly celebration—a fitting tribute to the woman who started it all.

As Mr. Greg sings: *We learned these songs from Ella, she taught us how!*

# SWEET ELLA JENKINS

by Dr. Ty-Juana Taylor,  
author of *A Life of Song: The Story  
of Ella Jenkins*

*I dance to Ella Jenkins' songs.*

*I have a guitar too.*

— **Nina**

*I love her hair.*

*We have curly hair.*

— **Maddie**

*I like Ella Jenkins' kazoo.*

*It sounds funny.*

— **Rede**

For over seven decades Ella Jenkins has been uplifting the voices of children through song. Now, Mr. Greg takes a leaf out of her book by celebrating her centennial year with two interactive songs for kids. A musician, preschool teacher, and longtime Ella fan, Greg created the tracks “Sweet Ella Jenkins” and “I Like Animals” after being inspired by a friend to find a way to commemorate Ella’s one hundredth birthday. Greg’s desire to share Ella’s music pre-dates by decades his teaching and sharing her songs with his students. Greg recalls an early memory when he was a preteen boy of thoughtfully curating a mixtape for a friend that included Ella’s song “You’ll Sing a Song and I’ll Sing a Song.” Years later, his old friend—the mixtape recipient—attended Ella Jenkins’ ninety-ninth birthday party and encouraged him to create these new songs.

What better way to honor “Black Royalty”<sup>\*</sup> than with a song highlighting many of our favorite tunes performed and written by Ella over the years. As Ella would, Gardner challenges you to learn something new through song. When listening to “Sweet Ella Jenkins,” you’re on an aural scavenger hunt to identify the Ella Jenkins songs that were cleverly woven into the fabric of this piece through melody, lyrics, or gesture.

Can you name them all? Gardner highlights: “You’ll Sing a Song and I’ll Sing a Song”; “Miss Mary Mack”; “Many Trees All Around the World”; “Wake Up, Little Sparrow”; “Long John”; “Hambone”; “This Train”; “Did You Feed My Cow?”; “Pole Pole”; “I Think I’ll Go to Oregon”; “Chicago, It’s the People”; and “The Cedar Trees.”<sup>\*</sup> Can you identify others? With a catalog of nearly 40 albums, it could be difficult to know all of her songs, but “Sweet Ella Jenkins” beautifully creates a collage highlighting many of her works across the decades and the globe.

The track pulls from bluegrass and old-time music traditions through vocal style, harmonization (courtesy of the Chapin Sisters), and instrumentation (courtesy of Ben Sigelman). This mixture of genres also pays homage to Ella Jenkins’ musical legacy as “A Singer of Folk Songs.”<sup>\*</sup> While growing up around the blues in the South Side of Chicago, Ella was also a longtime member of the Old Town School of Folk Music Scene in Chicago. From those relationships, Ella has been “Making Music Together”<sup>\*</sup> with American folk music musicians throughout her career.

So, as Gardner suggests, we should all raise a glass to Ella Jenkins as she celebrates one hundred years of life this year. May we continue to explore how her music has shaped our own musical experiences as adults.

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<sup>\*</sup>*These are titles of Ella Jenkins’ songs*

# ELLA AT 100

by Mr. Greg



*E is for Ella! Ava in Mr. Greg's classroom*

When I was young, my friend Jeremy Brown and I frequently made mixtapes for each other that featured standout songs from the records we had salvaged from Bay Area record stores. One tape that I gave Jeremy featured Ella Jenkins' signature tune, "You'll Sing a Song and I'll Sing a Song," into which I added my own pubescent voice in the blank spots that Ella created for her listeners' responses. Fast forward twenty-eight years, Jeremy moved to Ella's hometown of Chicago and was invited to Ella's ninety-ninth birthday by Tim Ferrin, the director of an upcoming documentary on Ella. Jeremy sent me photos of the party and talked to me about the idea of recording a tribute song for the "First Lady of Children's Folk Song" for her one hundredth birthday. I agreed that it was about time to write a song of appreciation for this woman who has contributed so much to this world through her songs and advocacy for children and civil rights. While writing the lyrics to "Sweet Ella Jenkins," I tried to include references to some of my very favorite songs of hers. Test your Ella fandom and see if you can identify all the references. I am joined on the song by longtime Ella fan, Ben Sigelman, on the cello and guitar. Children's music royalty the Chapin Sisters add beautiful vocals with their children. I am grateful to have the opportunity to share my love of Ella Jenkins through this song.



*Mr. Greg and his students sing with sweet Ella Jenkins*

# SWEET ELLA JENKINS

## full lyrics

*You sing a song and we sing it right back  
A call and response with a rhythmic clap  
Our voices all blend and our toes start to tap  
Tap to the tune of Miss Mary Mack*

*And we all sing along, yes we all sing along  
With the first lady of the children's folk song  
From the Oregon coast where the cedar trees grow  
To Lincoln Park in North Chicago*

*Oh Ella.... Sweet Ella Jenkins  
Oh Ella.... Sweet Ella Jenkins  
Let's raise a glass to a woman with class...  
And sing with sweet Ella Jenkins*

*All you kids in the country and children in town  
Play your instrument, make a pretty sound  
Play Long John and Hambone and Pole Pole  
Songs we all learned from Ella way back in the day*

*Wake up little sparrow, come join the choir  
Sing a song for the lady that we all admire  
Her heart's a been a beatin' for a full century  
And her songs will live on for eternity*

*Oh Ella.... Sweet Ella Jenkins  
Oh Ella.... Sweet Ella Jenkins  
Let's raise a glass to a woman with class...  
And sing with sweet Ella Jenkins*

*This-A-Way, That-A-Way, Did You Feed My Cow?  
We learned these songs from Ella, she taught us how  
To sing from the heart with a voice strong and proud  
And we all sing her songs together*

*Ella, you sing your songs and we sing em right back  
We hum along, strum along, whistle and snap  
To This Train, Tah-Boo, and Miss Mary Mack  
We all sing your songs together*

*Oh Ella.... Sweet Ella Jenkins  
Oh Ella.... Sweet Ella Jenkins  
Let's raise a glass to a woman with class...  
And sing with sweet Ella Jenkins*



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*Ellie draws her own rendition of Ella's classic album cover for 'You Sing a Song and I'll Sing a Song' in Mr. Greg's classroom*



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*Adeline with her Ella Jenkins signature kazoo in Mr. Greg's classroom*

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*Lamont recording the introduction for "I Like Animals" at Children's Day School*

# Mr. Greg "I Like Animals"



# I LIKE ANIMALS

In her songs for children Ella did not shy away from topics like family, death, the environment, patriotism, race, faith, and culture. What many do not realize is that she wrote and performed songs for nearly every topic, corresponding to nearly every occasion a child (or adult) may experience—including a visit to the zoo. Gardner provides a lovely variation of Ella’s tune, slowing the tempo, adding new lyrics, and modifying the rhythm. A plucked bass line accompanies us through the song, offering fun additions to the animal sounds being recited. The musicians incorporate folk music instrumentation and vocal harmonies akin to yodeling. Gardner gives youth a catchy platform to explore and share in Ella’s love for animals through identifying their favorite animals and sounds. Do you have a favorite animal in the zoo?

— Dr. Ty-Juana Taylor

*I write songs like Ella Jenkins. I just write songs in a language that is not real. I make up the words like “sunset roll.” Those are real words.*

*My favorite Ella Jenkins song is...*

*I do like “There are Many Pretty Trees Around the World.” My favorite kind of tree is an apple tree because they grow in my grandpa’s backyard. And my grandpa makes applesauce with them. How does Ella write and make so many songs?!*

— Ava

When Ella and her partner Bernadelle first listened to “Sweet Ella Jenkins,” they said, “It’s a wonderful tribute,” and then Ella jokingly asked why I didn’t cover one of her tunes: “Is it because Greg heard I was a baaad cat?” This prompted me to laugh and gather a few friends to record one of my favorite Ella Jenkins songs, which we often sing in my classroom, called “I Like Animals.” I could not resist adding more animals and lyrics to Ella’s infectious rhyme scheme. I suggest that you and your children add some of your favorite animals to the song as well. Four-year-old zoo animal expert Lamont Walker begins the song with a spoken intro of his favorite animals. His father, Lamar Harris-Walker, who works at the San Francisco Zoo, led my class on a behind-the-scenes field trip around the zoo. Ben Sigelman plays cello, and my daughter’s friend Leo Montes and my co-teacher Laura Dimonte add backup vocals. And yes, it is true, I think Ella is a “baaad cat,” but in the sense that RUN DMC used the term on their cassette that I had in 1st grade. She’s “not bad, meaning bad, but bad, meaning good.”

— Mr. Greg



# I LIKE ANIMALS

## full lyrics

*I like animals yes I do  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like the wildebeest also known as a gnu  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like giraffes and lions too  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like the spotted cow that moos  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like parrots and owls that hoo  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like the giant tapir and the itsy-bitsy shrew  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like koala bears and kangaroos  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like the little lamb and the mama ewe  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like the cockatoo and the caribou  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like the anteater and the yellow baboon  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like animals how about you  
I like the animals in the zoo*

*I like animals yes I do  
I like the animals in the zoo*

# BIRTHDAY WISHES

for Ella Jenkins from her  
young fans in Mr. Greg's  
preschool class

*Ella Jenkins, I want you to eat a flower cake. The flower needs to be yellow and I want the grass to be green for you. I want there to be a number on there like four or one hundred. — Edie*

*I think you should go to the playground for your birthday. — Maddie*

*I'd like to give you presents and birthday cards. — Ada*

*Ella Jenkins, I'm so excited for your birthday. Invite your friends to your house for your birthday and eat cake. Eat one hundred pieces. — Adeline*

*But Adeline, then Ella would get cavities if she ate all that cake. How about just two slices? I was thinking just one slice but since she's the birthday girl I said two. — Sophie*

*When I am one hundred I will jump up to space. Maybe you can jump up in space for your birthday because sometimes one hundred people jump up in space. — Teddy*

*I want you to sing on your birthday. I want you to sing the "I Like Animals" song. — Harper*

*I also like the animals in the zoo but I don't like lions because they are sooooo scary! I think the lion that I saw at the zoo was eleven. It was older than Ella Jenkins. It was bigger. — Kai*

*I want you to sing one of the songs that I made up on your birthday! It's called "Sunset Roll." My brother Max made up the poem and I turned it into a song like you. — Ava*

*I wanna sing happy birthday to you, Ella. — Rede*

*I want to make you a rainbow drawing with lots of fireworks! — Nina*

## SWEET ELLA JENKINS

(Gregory Todd Gardner, BMI)

GREG GARDNER: vocals  
BEN SIGELMAN: cello, ukulele, electric guitar  
ABIGAIL CHAPIN: harmony vocals  
LILY CHAPIN: harmony vocals  
ELSPETH CHAPIN-LEE: additional vocals  
WILLA CHAPIN-THOMAS: additional vocals

## I LIKE ANIMALS

(Ella Jenkins/Ell-Bern Pub. Co., ASCAP)

Additional lyrics by Greg Gardner

GREG GARDNER: vocals  
BEN SIGELMAN: cello, electric guitar, fiddle  
LAURA DIMONTE: harmony vocals  
LEO MONTES: harmony vocals  
LAMONT WALKER: spoken introduction

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Mastered by Mike Monseur  
Annotated by Ty-Juana Taylor, Greg Gardner, Sophie Abramowitz  
Photos by Greg Gardner  
Illustrations by Greg Gardner  
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Production coordinator: Sophie Abramowitz  
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Editorial assistance by Carla Borden  
Art direction, design and layout by D.Norsen

\*Exclusively on “Sweet Ella Jenkins”

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**Smithsonian Folkways Recordings** is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In this way, we continue the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the production, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

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