

# “Footloose”—Kenny Loggins (1984)

Added to the National Registry: 2017

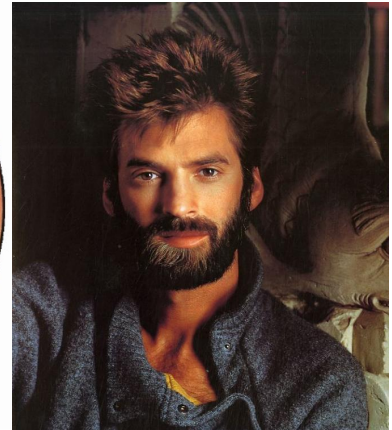
Essay by Dave Whitaker (guest post)\*



*Soundtrack album*



*Original 45 label*



*Kenny Loggins*

## *The Movie:*

Kevin Bacon bounds into the prom in the closing scene of “Footloose” with his rouse-the troops proclamation “I thought this was a party! Let’s dance!” Audiences heeded the celebratory cry and the movie danced its way to the top of the box office for three weeks in early 1984. It raked in \$80 million domestically, ranking #6 for the year.<sup>1</sup>

Thematically, the movie traversed in the classic trope of puritanical adults bent on rescuing misguided, rebellious teens from their delinquent proclivities. When outsider Ren (Bacon) comes to town, he’s stunned by the antiquated no-dancing-allowed law and becomes a rebel with a cause. His effort to fight the system puts him at odds with the town council and local preacher (John Lithgow).

It may sound like a plot set in the emergence of rock-n-roll in the 1950s, but the seemingly eye-rolling fiction was based on real events in the present day. In 1981, the high school junior class in the Oklahoma town of Elmore City petitioned to overturn an 1898 law outlawing dancing so they could hold a prom. Reverend F.R. Johnson, from the nearby town of Hennepin, declared, “No good has ever come from a dance... When boys and girls hold each other they get sexually aroused.”<sup>2</sup>

Dean Pitchford turned it into a movie. He’d never penned a screenplay before but was no novice to songwriting. He won an Academy Award as the lyricist for the title song to the 1980 film “Fame.” Irene Cara turned it into a top-five hit. Pitchford would also co-write the nine songs which comprised the “Footloose” soundtrack.

## *The Soundtrack:*

Nineteen eight-four was one of the most important years in the history of pop music. Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” wrapped up a record-breaking run of seven top-ten hits. Bruce Springsteen unleashed his own blockbuster with “Born in the U.S.A.,” eventually matching “Thriller’s”

envious count. Prince, Madonna, Lionel Richie, Cyndi Lauper, Tina Turner, and Huey Lewis & the News all similarly milked albums for multiple top tens in 1984.

Only five titles topped the “Billboard 200” album chart that year. In addition to “Thriller” and “Born in the U.S.A.,” Prince reached the summit with his “Purple Rain” soundtrack and Huey Lewis & the News achieved the feat with their “Sports” album. The only other chart-topper that year was the “Footloose” soundtrack, which logged ten weeks at #1.

With sales certified by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) for nine million, “Footloose” ranks as one of the ten best-selling soundtracks of all time.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, The National Association of Recording Merchandisers (NARM) and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame listed the soundtrack among their “Definitive 200” list of albums. Dave’s Music Database ranked the album as one of the top 100 soundtracks of all time and one of the top 100 albums of the 1980s. Like its peers, the album sent a slew of ditties into the upper echelons of the “Billboard” Hot 100 charts. Six of the nine songs charted, most notably the Mike Reno and Ann Wilson ballad “Almost Paradise” (#7) and “Let’s Hear It for the Boy” by Deniece Williams (#1).

### ***The Song:***

Of course, the most memorable cut was the title song, co-written and performed by Kenny Loggins. Released as the first single, the toe-tapping “Footloose” ousted Van Halen’s “Jump” (itself fueled by a can’t-sit-still manic energy) from the pinnacle the week of March 31. The call-to-dance anthem ranked #4 for the year.<sup>4</sup>

It was the biggest hit of Loggins’ career, but it wasn’t his first venture into top-ten territory. He’d reached #4 with the 1972 Loggins & Messina song “Your Mama Don’t Dance” and hit #5 in 1978 with “Whenever I Call You Friend,” a duet with Stevie Nicks. In 1980, Loggins proved his talents could translate to the movies when “I’m Alright,” from “Caddyshack,” got to #7.

However, being part of 1984’s cream of the crop isn’t an automatic pass into the National Recording Registry. Take a gander at the top 10 songs of 1984:<sup>4</sup>

1. Prince, “When Doves Cry”
2. Tina Turner, “What’s Love Got to Do With It”
3. Paul McCartney & Michael Jackson, “Say, Say, Say”
4. Kenny Loggins, “Footloose”
5. Phil Collins, “Against All Odds (Take a Look at Me Now)”
6. Van Halen, “Jump”
7. Lionel Richie, “Hello”
8. Yes, “Owner of a Lonely Heart”
9. Ray Parker, Jr., “Ghostbusters”
10. Culture Club, “Karma Chameleon”

Other than Kenny Loggins’ “Footloose,” only Prince’s “When Doves Cry” and Tina Turner’s “What’s Love Got to Do with It,” both as part of their respective albums, have been inducted into the National Recording Registry. None of the other songs have been inducted as parts of albums or as individual songs. In fact (as of this writing), only six songs from the entire decade

have been inducted (not including those as parts of albums). What makes “Footloose” so special?

The American Film Institute named it one of the top 100 movie songs. Dave’s Music Database also ranks it in its top 100 movie list, as well as lists for party songs and mainstream rock tracks. It also received an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Song.

Often the tunes that capture collective hearts and souls are those that elicit the listener to bump and grind, whether it be in the bedroom or on the dance floor. In the movie “Footloose,” music serves as a clarion call for the youthful spirit to kick back against the stodgy powers-that-be who would dare to squelch that need to groove, clothed or otherwise.

However, the lyrics and mood of the song “Footloose” don’t sound the alarm to unite in extending middle fingers to some oppressive authority. They don’t incite rebellion or have any political motivation. Like Kool & the Gang’s “Celebration,” one of the other National Recording Registry inductees from the ‘80s, the song is simply about having a good time and partying the night away. Like Bill Haley & the Comets’ “(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock,” Chubby Checker’s “The Twist,” and Martha & the Vandellas’ “Dancing in the Street” (all National Recording Registry inductees) it comes down to Ren’s immortal words at the closing of “Footloose”: “Let’s dance!”

*Dave Whitaker has authored more than 20 books including “Music of the 1980s” and “The Top 100 Songs of the Rock Era, 1954-1999.” His website, DavesMusicDatabase.com is devoted to ranking, rating, and reviewing music of all genres and eras. It has more than two million visits while his Dave’s Music Database podcast, available on Spotify, has reached listeners in over 50 countries.*

\*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and may not reflect those of the Library of Congress.

#### *References:*

- <sup>1</sup> Box Office Mojo: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl2001896961/weekend/>
- <sup>2</sup> 405 Magazine (5/26/2015). “Dance Fever: The Town That Inspired (and Got) Footloose” by M.J. Alexander <https://www.405magazine.com/dance-fever-the-town-that-inspired-and-got-footloose/>
- <sup>3</sup> MentalFloss.com (12/13/2018). “The 20 Best-Selling Movie Soundtracks of All Time” by Austin Thompson. <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/567464/best-selling-movie-soundtracks-of-all-time>
- <sup>4</sup> *Billboard* Year-End Hot 100 Singles of 1984: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billboard\\_Year-End\\_Hot\\_100\\_singles\\_of\\_1984](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billboard_Year-End_Hot_100_singles_of_1984)

*Other Resources:*

- Dave's Music Database (1/4/2022): "4/21/1984: The *Footloose* Soundtrack Began 10-Week Run at #1" <https://davesmusicdatabase.blogspot.com/1984/04/the-footloose-soundtrack-began-10-week.html>
- Dave's Music Database (1/28/2021): "3/31/1984: Kenny Loggins hit #1 with 'Footloose'" <https://davesmusicdatabase.blogspot.com/1984/03/kenny-loggins-hit-1-with-footloose.html>