

BIO

Karen Briggs has been performing and composing for over four decades. She has musical encounters everyone from Yanni and the Royal Philharmonic to Stanley Clarke, Diana Ross, Chaka Khan, Ledisi to Kirk Franklin to Annie Lennox to Keb Mo to Naseer Shamma to Juan Sebastian to RZA & the Wu Tang Clan! She has graced the stages of such prestigious venues as the Apollo theater, Carnegie Hall, The Taj Mahal, National Theaters in Iraq, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and China's Forbidden City! She has traveled to over 50 countries to entertain audiences as a featured soloist in several music festivals and concerts. She appears in at least seventeen music video concerts.

Clever arrangements on popular tunes such as Amazing Grace, Scheherazade and Little Sunflower have been staple crowd pleasers. She easily fits into an array of genres on the instrument from gospel to jazz to R&B, pop, hip hop and classical pieces, all re-imagined in a way that suits her skillful swagger on violin.

Currently regarded by many as one of the greatest violinists of our time, Karen serves as both an inspiration for many of today's contemporary musicians and has continuously proven to be an asset to any project that she's participated in.

To date, she has released two independent solo projects "Making It Talk" (aka "Amazing Grace") and "Soulchestrual Groove" with a third highly anticipated project called, "Sonic Woodwork" released in February of 2026!

She was born in Harlem, NY in 1963 to Frank & Ruthie Briggs. The family later moved to Portsmouth, VA, where in 1976, at age 11, Karen was recruited by Mrs. Jerelene Harding to participate in the public school orchestra class.

Her gifts became apparent in only a few months, as she soon became concert master of her junior high school's orchestra and soon after became a member of the TAM (Tidewater Area Musicians) Youth Orchestra.

She experimented privately outside of traditional genres for violin. Validated by recordings by violinists such as Dr. Roland Sunkins, Noel Pointer, Jean Luc Ponty and Stefane Grapelli, as well as recordings by soulful vocal queens like Aretha Franklin and Mahalia Jackson served as the key inspiration and development of Karen's signature soulful sound on the instrument.

Karen later attended Norfolk University in 1981. She majored in Music Media and took violin lessons under Dr Peter Zaret. In her sophomore year, she became a member of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. While accumulating more classical technique and insights into harmony, Karen quickly became sought-after for her soulful approach to the instrument for local events at churches, parties, jazz events and clubs.

After winning Top Dog Night at New York's Apollo Theater Amateur Night contest, Karen recorded her first solo recording, "Making It Talk" which was later re-released as "Amazing Grace".

It was her eventual move to the entertainment capital of Los Angeles that she would solidify her future as a full-time musician!

Encounters to work with so many talented musicians and artists were abundant. Percussionist, Munyungo Jackson (Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder) took interest in her abilities as a musician and helped to introduce her to the top ranking musicians on the LA music scene. This was accented with her embarkment on the local latin music scene, which significantly extended her rhythmic vocabulary on the violin.

Then, came the tours. Her first major tour came in 1990 as one of the choreographed violinists with UK Pop sensation, Soul II Soul. Only a year prior, she'd traveled to Bulgaria with pianist, Milcho Leviev, Percussionist, Tootie Heath and Nedra Wheeler on upright bass. "Katoomi" performed at the national theater with the Bulgarian Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In 1991 Karen auditioned for Yanni, a keyboardist/composer from Kalamata, Greece who had begun coordinating his solo music career. It was also at this time that Karen had recorded and audiophile recording called "Karen", produced by David Manley. By 1993, the well-rehearsed Yanni string band was flown to Athens, Greece and paired with The Royal Philharmonic for a PBS broadcast video concert that would be remembered by millions around the world for many years. Linda Stokes of LSO Designs, created the burnt orange peplum dress suit worn by Karen for the recorded concert.

Karen stood up and out in a multi-million dollar production recorded live at the Acropolis, of which Karen was highly featured! Her solo's on "The Rain Must Fall" and her violin duel with Persian conductor/violinist, Shardhad Rohani on "Within Attraction" were powerful highlights to the huge success of the project and singled Karen out in a way that catapulted her to the international world spotlight almost overnight thus, earning her the moniker, "Lady In Red".

The resulting video was broadcasted nationally on PBS in 1994. It became a huge and record-breaking success internationally. The accolades for her unique and sometimes controversial approach to the violin was completely overshadowed by the validating mass approval of this presentation. Karen toured and recorded with Yanni for a total of thirteen years.

In 1999, Karen was invited to record with newly forming group, "Vertu". Headed by former members of the successful jazz/rock group, "Return To Forever" Stanley Clark and drummer/composer, Lenny White.

Keyboardist, Rachel Z and guitarist, Richie Kotzen completed the "Vertu" jazz/ rock ensemble. Karen saw this opportunity as a refreshing entrance into an edgier musical expression. Vertu recorded on the Sony 550 Label and toured Europe, performing several major jazz festivals. Karen contributed an original composition entitled, "Anoché" to the recording project.

1999 continued to be a stellar year as Karen was invited by the legendary Diana Ross to record "He Lives In You" with Producer, Arif Marden. Next, Karen appeared at the NYC event called

“FiddleFest”. Fundraising event that spawned the biopic movie, "Music of the Heart", featuring actresses Meryl Streep (as Roberta Tavares), Angela Bassett, Gloria Estefan.

Karen was included amongst amongst other violin legends, Itzhak Perlman, Issac Stern, John Blake, Mark O'Connor and Midori, thus marking this Karen's Carnegie Hall debut. She was accompanied by Dave Grusin on piano representing jazz violin.

Since this time, Karen has continued performing and collaborating with a variety of musicians from various and cultural influences such as Senegalese musicians bassist/composer, Cheikh Ndoye, Baba Maal, Chiel Minucci & The Special Efx Allstars, Naseer Shamma & the Peace Builders, The Lao Tizer band and several others.

Her participation in the genre of hip hop must not be overlooked! Karen, citing the need for live instrumentation in the genre, agreed to record on the highly successful single, "Reunited" with RZA and The WuTang Clan. Later, renditions of classic hip hop (ie. Hot In Here, Gangsta's Paradise, Forget About Dre) featured Karen on Volume's one thru five of Hidden Beach's Unwrapped series. She was later signed by Steve McKeever to the Hidden Beach label. Since no releases were made during her two year time span with the label, Karen pursued the release of an independent project.

"Soulchestrual Groove" featured more of Karen's original material, as well as, clever arrangements on Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower" of which the melody married well with a recognizable bass line from Curtis Mayfield's "Um' Your Pusherman". Minnie Riperton's "Loving You" and Rimsky-Korsokov's "Scheherazade" were also re-imagined arrangements that became popular for the artist.

Her current long-awaited release entitled, "Sonic Woodwork", was released in February of 2026. This project continues to focus on Karen's composition, performance and arranging skills, as they are tailor-made for her signature approach to the violin and will reveal evolution and growth while including very accessible ideas for the listener and a new conceptualization of a modern music featuring violin. With the exception of live bass on some tracks, Karen performed all of the instrumentation.

Her recognition awards include The Charles Mingus Award, The Jazz Legacy Award for Outstanding Achievements, the Portsmouth Distinguished Graduates Award and Best Female Jazz Violinist.

Karen is also a mother of two, an enthusiastic cook, who also enjoys graphic design, interior design, calligraphy, video editing, audio production and single handedly creating string arrangements on tracks for other artists.

She looks forward to more presentations of her humor-infused, live feature performances for international and diverse audiences with the hope of being an inspiration in influencing people to pursue their wildest dreams.