

BIO (LONG) 3 pages

Karen Briggs has been performing and composing for over . She has performed and/or recorded with Yanni, the Royal Philharmonic, Stanley Clarke, Diana Ross, Ledisi, Kirk Franklin, Annie Lennox, Keb Mo, Naseer Shamma, Juan Sebastian and even the Wu Tang Clan among many others!

She has graced the stages of such prestigious venues as the Apollo theater, Carnegie Hall, Taj Mahal (India), National Theaters in Iraq Cuba and Mexico and China's Forbidden City! She has traveled to over 50 countries to entertain audiences as a featured soloist in several clubs, music festivals and concerts. She appears in at seventeen music video concerts.

Clever arrangements on popular tunes have been staple crowd pleasers, yet she also composes her own music. With her violin, she effortlessly finds a role to play in a spectrum of genres ranging from classical to gospel to jazz to R&B, pop, hip hop, all re-imagined in a way that suits her skillful swagger on her instrument.

Currently regarded by many as one of the most legendary 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 produced and recorded two independent solo projects. "Soulchestral Groove" and a third highly anticipated project called, "Sonic Woodwork" released in March of 2026!

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

As she experimented privately outside of traditional genres while being validated in her efforts while listening to music by violinists such as Dr. Roland Sunkins, Noel Pointer, Jean Luc Ponty and Stefan Grapelli. Her soulful melisma was influenced by recordings she had heard by soulful vocal queens like Aretha Franklin and Mahalia Jackson.

Karen later attended Norfolk State University in 1981. She majored in Music Media and took violin lessons with Dr Peter Zaret.

In her sophomore year, she became a part-time 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, Joe Zawinul, Stevie Wonder) took interest in her abilities as a musician and helped to introduce her to some of the top 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. In 1990, 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.

Later that same year, Karen was in invited to do a world tour as one of the three choreographed violinists with UK pop sensation, Soul II Soul.

It was in 1991 that Karen auditioned for Yanni, a keyboardist/composer from Kalamata, Greece who had begun coordinating his solo music career.

By then, Karen had recorded and audiophile recording simply called "Karen", produced by David Manley. However, in 1993, the well-rehearsed Yanni string band was flown to Athens, Greece and then paired with The Royal Philharmonic for a video concert that would be remembered by millions, called "Live at the Acropolis".

Karen stood up (and out) in a multi-million dollar concert video production of which she was highly featured! Linda Stokes of LSO Designs, created the burnt orange peplum dress that made Karen stand out from the rest of the orchestra.

The resulting video was broadcasted nationally on PBS in 1994, just months after Karen had survived a notorious 6.7 magnitude Northridge earthquake.

Her solo's on "The Rain Must Fall" and her violin duel with Persian conductor/violinist, Shardad Rohani on "Within Attraction" were powerful anchors to the huge success of the project and singled Karen out in a way that catapulted her out of obscurity and into a worldwide spotlight and thus, earned the moniker, "the Lady In Red".

The accolades for her unique, and often times controversial, approach to the violin was completely overshadowed by the validating mass approval of this presentation. Karen toured and recorded with Yanni off and on for a total of thirteen years.

In 1999, Karen was invited to record with newly forming group, "Vertu". Headed Stanley Clark and drummer/composer, Lenny White. Both are recognized as former members of the successful jazz/rock group, "Return To Forever", which also included keyboardist Chick Corea and guitarist Al DiMeola.

Keyboardist, Rachel Z and guitarist, Richie Kotzen completed the "Vertu" 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, "Anoche" to the recording project.

The year 1999 proved to be a stellar year of accomplishment! She was invited by the legendary **Diana Ross** to record "He Lives In You" with producer, **Arif Marden**. Next, Karen appeared at the NYC FiddleFest Fundraising event that spawned the biopic movie, "**Music of the Heart**", featuring actresses Meryl Streep (as Roberta Tavares), Angela Bassett, Gloria Estefan, 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. In addition, Karen recorded "Reunited" with RZA and the Wu Tang Clan.

Since this time, Karen has continued performing, touring and collaborating with a variety of musicians from various musical and cultural influences such as Senegalese bassist/composer, Cheikh Ndoeye, Baba Maal, Chielie Minucci & The Special Efx Allstars, Naseer Shamma & the Peace Builders and still with Diana Ross among several others.

Her participation in the genre of hip hop must not be overlooked! Karen, citing the need for more 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*) featured Karen on Volume's one thru five and then later, Volume 8 of Hidden Beach's Unwrapped series.

Her first independent release, entitled, "Soulchestral 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". Rimsky-Korsokov's "Scheherazade" was also re-imagined as "Scheherazade's Grove", an arrangement that is still currently popular for the artist. Her most soulful rendition of "Amazing Grace" is also included.

A long awaited release entitled, "Sonic Woodwork", is available as of March of 2026. This project continues to focus on Karen's composition, performance and arranging skills. The music is tailor-made for her signature approach to the violin and will reveal evolution and growth while including her accessible musicality for the listener.

The new conceptualization of a modern "Contempo Orchestra" is realized in her music. With the exception of live bass on some tracks, Karen performed all of the instrumentation and designed all of the artwork, of which the outer cover features a painting that Karen embodies as one of her hobbies.

Karen's award recognitions include: The Charles Mingus Award, The Jazz Legacy Award for Outstanding Achievements, the Portsmouth (Virginia) Distinguished Graduates Award and Best Female Jazz Violinist. The Mayor of Portsmouth, Virginia officially declared November 15th as Karen Briggs Day!

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 the tracks of other artists.

Karen looks forward to more presentations of her humor-infused, live feature performances for international and diverse audiences with the promise of being an inspiration to many to just follow their wildest dreams.

Karen's Music can be downloaded from her website:

www.karenbriggsviolin.com, Apple music and Spotify