

CHICAGO MUSIC GUIDE

Start Download Now

Simple, fast and powerful. Specially designed for macOS - Download Nov Media Player

[Chicago Music Guide ▾](#)
[Articles](#)
[Calendar ▾](#)
[Classifieds](#)
[Directory ▾](#)
[Interviews](#)
[Media ▾](#)
[News](#)
[Open Mics](#)
[Podcasts](#)
[Reviews](#)
[Tips](#)

LOGIN

Username or Email Address

Username

Password

☐ Remember Me

[Log In](#)

[Lost your password?](#)

SOUNDS OF CHICAGO



FEATURED EVENTS



FEATURED LOCAL ARTIST – Karen Willough

June 1, 2019 Dennis Kelly



An Interview with Karen Willough:

[Start Download \(Free \) - File](#)

[Get PDF Tycoon 100% Safe & Se](#)

DK: Good day Karen, thanks so much for your time today in answering some questions, I really appreciate it! How are you?

KW: Great, thanks. I just finished debuting second solo cabaret show, "So This Is Love?" here in Chicago. I'll be doing some performances over the next few weeks before I start touring my cabaret show.

DK: You have quite the musical background Karen, so, let's start from the beginning shall we? You were born in Central America long were you in Central America before coming to live in NY?

KW: I was just an infant when we moved to New York-Brooklyn. That's where I grew up. But I went to Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan. Later on I went to the College of New Rochelle, an all-women's Catholic college in upstate New York; but returned to the city and attended NYU grad school.

DK: Do you have a big family/small family and is anyone else in your family musically inclined?

KW: I'm an only child but I have quite a large number of cousins. Sadly, I'm the only one with artistic leanings.

DK: Was it in New York where you started to sing and perform? What type of music were you exposed to and did you find singing to be the most?



KW: From the time I was little I was a bit of a ham. My mother's friends will tell stories of how I would perform on Christmas shows when they would visit. I'd make programs detailing the evening's entertainment and hand it out to the guests as I'd seat them in the living room. Then I would sing and play the piano (one at a time), and act out a play, doing all the parts myself.

In college, I was part of "Props and Paint"—the drama club—and performed in the musicals. It was there where I first developed my love of the genre. I also sang with choir, but I don't think I had an appreciation for it at the time. After college, I worked with several theater groups but primarily with



Conservatory Theater (ACT), headed by Arlene Wendt. I learned so much about musical theater from that amazing group of p

DK: Where did you go to and live in while in Europe?

KW: I lived in the Netherlands but traveled quite a bit while I was there—to about 30 countries. I was singing in a really cappella choir, my first high level choir, and that's when I really developed an appreciation for the music. The choir perform number of places, for example, at the 125 anniversary of the cathedral in Shewsbury, England. It was very surreal sometimes in churches almost older than the country I grew up in, and practically in the birthplace of people who wrote the masses I san

DK: How many languages are you fluent in and when did you learn them?

KW: I'm fluent in Dutch, and can manage, badly, in German. However, I can sing in those languages as well as Latin, Italian, S Slovonc (Russian-ish), French, and English, of course.

I was forced to learn Dutch when I moved to The Netherlands. Because we lived very close to the German border a lo products in the supermarket were German, menus at local restaurants were in German, we got German radio and tv stations. shop at malls in Germany. No one spoke English where I lived so it was either Dutch or German. The choir also sang ir German, or Latin. I was very excited when we had a concert in England.

DK: How influential was the music of the countries you lived in to you and what you are doing in music now?

KW: I really liked Dutch radio. It may be different now, but at the time they would mix genres as well as time periods and lan. So you might hear an Italian song from the 1970s followed by an American pop song from the 1980s followed by a Fren from 1960. I heard so much music I'd never heard before. What I liked specifically about Dutch music, was that it didn't fo standard "verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, verse, chorus" that American music has. It was...all over the place...unpredi loved that. I did translate one Dutch song and record it—"World without You." It's my most popular video.

DK: Do you have a favorite language that you love singing in?

KW: Believe it or not, Latin. All those broad vowels. So much fun to sing.

DK: Let's talk about your training, where have you studied music and what have been some of the biggest takeaways that hel in your career?

KW: Interestingly enough, I hadn't really started training to be a singer until fairly recently. I initially intended to be a son Although I've been singing in choirs since I was five, I never had any training until just a few years ago. First with a profe classical singer, and now presently with Davin Youngs and Hilary Feldman.

Davin has been just wonderful in helping to first, get rid of bad singing habits, and then help me "relax" into my voice—to sin and with confidence. But also be able find my physical weaknesses and develop them.

Hilary focuses on the song elements and how I can use my voice, and the physical elements that make up my voice, to bring meaning. A song is never just a song.

DK: In your biography, it states you won an LASC award in the Rock category, how did that come about for you?

KW: Living in New York, in my 20s, I was a member of the Songwriters Guild of America. We were encouraged to enter a songwriting competitions as possible. At the same time I was taking songwriting classes where we had to write songs in all not just genres we liked or were comfortable with. We also learned a song could be produced in just about any genre. So I'd produced one of my songs called "Alice Angel" into a hard rock format and it happened to place that year in the LASC comp The following year, 1996, one of my other songs, "You Know I Have Angels" received an Honorable Mention in the B Songwriting competition. That song went on to be included in a Canadian film in a country format. I released it in 2017 in a L format. Both were produced by my friend **michéal Castaldo**.

DK: What have been some of the biggest hurdles in your career and how have you overcome them?

KW: Probably my own insecurities. It took a long time to trust my voice and know that when I opened my mouth the sour wanted would come out.

There's also so many aspects to putting on a solo show or putting together a CD—it can be overwhelming. Everyone will g different advice. At some point you have to trust your own instinct because it's your face and your name that's out there, no You're going to have to stand by the choices you make.

DK: It looks like 'Scrumptious' is your only full album to date and that came out last year, correct?

KW: Yes, and I was insane to do it. Just kidding. I had done a few singles at that point and thought I could handle managir You've probably heard about the stage fright that Adele gets before a performance. I got a little bit of that the first day of rec the studio. I wasn't even singing the first day—we doing rhythm and brass. But I remember waking up and thinking: "If e happens to me, 10 people don't get paid today. Or tomorrow." That's a lot of responsibility. And I thought about people like Bey Ed Sheeran—hundreds of people depend on their voice. I can't even imagine living with that pressure on a daily basis.

Then you're in the studio, and there's a balance between perfection and cost. Being a musician, you know how it feels to want



"one more time" to get it just right. But as a project manager, you know you have schedule and you have to keep an eye on that. You're paying all the musicians for their time, the studio, the engineer, the next group about to come in. Do we have enough time to get a good recording? Should we do it one more time? You have to make decisions on the fly. It's the kind of thing you do when you're ready for until you do it.

DK: How was the album received by your fans and how do you feel it did for you as an artist?

KW: The download and streaming have been primarily of selected songs and not the full album, so unfortunately, most haven't gotten the story arc. The songs that HAVE been streamed, have been A LOT, so for that I'm grateful. Huge difference between the US and Europe. "All Around My Hat" gets streamed a lot in Europe; "Shall We Dance" is popular here in the US.

DK: The collection of songs on the EP is most unique and impressive, from the popular song, 'Dance With Me' by Orleans Around My Hat', a song with an unknown origin from approximately the 1820s. How did you come to piece these songs together like this? What do they mean to you personally?

KW: Although AOR no longer really exists, there is a story arc to the songs. It's about a relationship. It starts with "Dance with two people meeting; "Whispering"—they get to know each other; "Truly Scrumptious"—they fall in love; "All Around My Hat"—I separated; "Shall We Dance"—they are reunited, and like when they first met, they dance.

It's like cabaret, and why I love performing cabaret—the songs tell a story. I love finding the right songs to tell the story.

DK: How long did you spend putting the album together and recording it?

KW: The thought process began about a year before the album was physically completed. Picking the songs, hiring the studio, reserving the studio, rehearsing the music—that took about six months. The actual recording was just a few days. Mix production took about two months. My producer, michéal Castaldo and I met when we were both at the Songwriters Guild back in New York. It's wonderful working with someone so talented, that I've known for so long.

DK: Were there additional (guest) musicians on the recording?

KW: Yes, one very special person—**Michael Jones**. He is the person responsible for encouraging me to have a solo career and without him, this would have happened. We've done a couple singles together and if we're ever in the same city at the same time, we hope we can do a live performance together.

DK: Do you have plans on a follow up album as yet?

KW: Possibly. I just need to find the right story. Especially now that I've had the experience, I expect it to go a bit easier the next time around. (Knock on wood.)

DK: You also have a video for 'Shall We Dance', which is wonderful. Do you plan on putting any more videos together in the future?

KW: Absolutely! That video was done by **Scrappers Film Group** and I'd love to work with them again. First I need to find the right song.

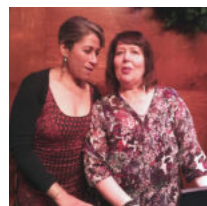
DK: In 2011, what ended up bringing you to Chicago?

KW: It was actually my ex-husband's work. He was transferred here, but I always wanted to live in Chicago. I first visited the city in 2000 and thought it was spectacular.

DK: In all the cities you've lived and performed in, how does Chicago compare as a music scene and how does Chicago compare to you personally?

KW: I think it's much easier for musicians to get work here than in New York. And talking to musicians from the west coast, it's the same thing. There are many more smaller venues that are willing to let you step on their stage. Craigslist always has postings. Facebook groups have many gig listings. If you've got the guts, the gigs are there.

DK: Tell me about your involvement with Beckie Menzie and cabaret music.



she wanted me to go.

KW: Beckie Menzie is probably the most talented, big-hearted person on the planet. A friend has been bugging me to see one of her cabaret shows for years. When I finally did, I was in awe. It was the best cabaret show I'd ever seen. I accosted her after the show and begged her to teach me. I'm surprised I didn't get a restraining order. She began coaching me and after a few months she told me she thought I didn't have what it took to be a cabaret singer. She said, "You have a lovely voice, and you're proud you have to be honest when you sing cabaret. You have to leave your heart on the stage. You're not dishonest." Somehow I convinced her to continue and after a "breakthrough" session, I got where she wanted me to go.

If you haven't seen one of her shows, you need to. She's phenomenal, and kind, and I am grateful for every moment of time she gives me. To quote Wayne and Garth: "I'm not worthy!"

DK: How much time do you personally spend managing your career? (per week/month)

KW: Geez. When am I NOT doing that? It can range from three to five hours per day. That includes weekends.

DK: What have the best (most effective) online tools you've found in promoting your works?

KW: Instagram/Facebook, and my website have been really great tools.

DK: Tell me about 'So This is Love?' How long have you been doing this and how have audience responses been?

KW: This is a new show for me, which just debuted at Uncommon Ground (Edgewater) in May. I'm getting ready to tour it now about six month from soup to nuts, as the saying goes. It was really well received. Most people who've seen me perform were surprised to know that I could be funny. It's a funny show, and I've really enjoyed combining singing with getting laughs. I haven't done any of that since my ACT theatre days.

DK: Do you have any music tips that you feel would be useful to other musicians?

KW: I belong to several music groups on Facebook and it upsets me when some young singer posts a video or SoundCloud says they've never had a lesson. Inevitably, someone will say he or she is very good but would benefit from having lessons. Always someone that then attacks that person and says, "Don't listen to him/her! You don't need lessons!" And that is the advice to give.

EVERYONE THAT WANTS TO SING SHOULD HAVE LESSONS. Even if you don't want to be a professional, if you're going to sing on a regular basis, you should have lessons. Just so you don't damage your voice; and also if you want to improve it. If you have something that much, why wouldn't you want to get better at it?

DK: What do you have planned for the remainder of 2019?

KW: Lots, actually. Along with touring "**So This Is Love?**" I'm planning on launching a YouTube show with all kinds of tips for writers. Readers should subscribe to my YouTube channel so they'll be notified when it starts.

I'm also planning on recording a new song and, fingers crossed, writing another new show.

DK: What are some long term goals you have personally and professionally that you'd like to see yourself accomplish?

KW: I'd like to have four more cabaret shows written in the next three years and be able to tour them as well as continue with singing gigs. I'd also love to perform some of them back east and possibly in Europe.

DK: Where are the best online places for people to connect with you?

KW: Following me on Facebook, and Instagram; and they should subscribe to my YouTube channel so they know when it starts. My website will have info about my upcoming performances, as well as things my friends in the industry are doing.

Biography: Karen Willough, songwriter and longtime choral singer grew up in New York and graduated from Stuyvesant High in Manhattan. After completing undergraduate education at the College of New Rochelle, she went to New York University for graduate studies in Psychology.

She quickly discovered that the field was not for her and bounced around in an assortment of jobs while continuing to study and pursue a songwriting career. Karen met michéal Castaldo when they were both members of the Songwriter's Guild of America, offices located in New York. He produced several of her original compositions.

After living on another continent and traveling to over 25 countries, Karen finally returned to where she belongs—the world of cabaret.

Karen sang with Capella Sint Jan in The Netherlands for several years, before returning to the U.S. Since 2012, Karen has been singing with Chicago's prestigious Mount Carmel Morning Choir under the direction of Paul French. She also studies and works with the incomparable Beckie Menzie, who introduced Karen to the world of cabaret.

Karen made her solo debut with "Tra le tue Braccia" It was followed by the duet "World without You" with Chicago jazz musician Michael Jones, who also plays trumpet in the song.

"Scrumptious," Karen's first CD/EP includes a swing version of "Whispering," most famously recorded by Paul Whiteman in 1937 as well as a sultry rendition of the 1975 Orleans song "Dance with Me." The title track, "Truly Scrumptious" comes from the 1984 film "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang." The song also features a flugelhorn solo by Caleb Mitchell, graduate of the prestigious music program at DePaul University and trumpeter for the group "The Right Now."

Fun Facts:

The video for "World without You," starred Paul Walter Hauser, who appears in the Oscar-nominated film "I, Tonya."

"Shall We Dance," another duet with Michael Jones, reached #4 on South Africa's indie chart and stayed there for over a month.

Video:

Shall We Dance by Karen Willough



Audio:



Links:

Official: <https://www.bendingwillough.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/karenwillough/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/bendingwillough>

Featured Local Artist Featured Local Artist, Featured Local Artist of the Month

RELATED POSTS



FEATURED LOCAL ARTIST – Jury of Fears

The featured local artist this week is Jury of Fears. Learn all about them and...



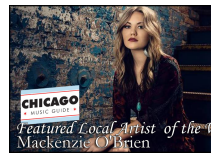
FEATURED LOCAL ARTIST – Fools' Brew

The featured local artist this week is Fools Brew. Learn all about them and check...



FEATURED LOCAL ARTIST – Projecto 7 Salsa & Latin Jazz Band

The featured local artist this week is Projecto 7 Salsa & Latin Jazz Band. Learn...



FEATURED LOCAL ARTIST – Mackenzie O'Brien

The featured local artist this week is Mackenzie O'Brien. Learn all about her and c...

ROMAN SOBUS

photography



Performance Publicity Event Documentary



Guitar Center

MASSIVE SELECTION of

DRUMS ONLINE

Shop Now

Everyday Band & Orchestra Sale



Save on over 30,000 band & orchestra sets for all levels and genres!

sheetmusicplus

SHOP NOW >