

An American in Berlin

A jazz-guitarist's story of travel, music, and people

Karl Schloz was born in 1971 and raised in the suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri. Growing up in the Great Midwest of America with two older sisters and hard working parents, jazz was not common on the radio or in the household. "My earliest memories of music are my father listening to country radio in the garage on the weekends while he fixed up the house and my sisters playing records from the Eagles on the living room stereo", remembers this 35 year old accomplished musician. "It wasn't until I was 14, when I first heard the Miles Davis "Four and More" record that I instantly became interested in jazz." Already playing the guitar since receiving one as a Christmas present when he was 11, Karl was rocking and rolling while trying to learn just what these great jazz players were doing.

When I was 16, and received my drivers license, I began weekly trips to Southern Illinois University to take lessons with jazz guitarist Rick Haydon. Soon my mother was taking me out of high school classes so I could study more guitar. "The support of my parents was so great; they just let me go my way with the music." After graduating high school, Karl enrolled in the jazz studies department at SIUE and received a Presidential Scholarship. During the four years of study, Karl continued gigging around the St. Louis area playing motown, pop, rock, and an occasional jazz date. "I played weddings, bar mitzvahs, cocktail parties. I backed-up The Drifters, The Temptations, The Shangri-La's. I became the first-call guitarist for anything at the age of 20. But my real love was playing with the great St. Louis jazz players such as Joe Charles, a forgotten but very influential drummer, and tenor saxophonist Willi Aikens; and working with the great bassist Tom Kennedy, where he would regularly "kick my ass" and tell the right chords!" All of this performance became just as important as the day-time studies at school. "I met the legendary guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli when I was 21 when he was playing in the local jazz club. Every time he came through town he would give a lesson---things I use to this day; and he encouraged me to move to New York City and give him a call when I got there." So I did!!

Arriving in the Big Apple at 23 years of age, Karl moved into a one-room flat on 28th street and Broadway with a few dollars saved up from gigs in St. Louis. "My first week in New York was a dream. Jim Hall was playing at Sweets Basils—I went every night, and Bucky was playing at Fat Tuesdays. I went down to see him and he told me to meet him the next day at noon at the Local 802 musicians union. He spoke to an older gentleman, and I was in! Ready to go!" "But it took a good year before I was finding some playing. My first gigs were with a trio I put together in a cigar bar near the United Nations. Four sets, one drink, and 20 dollars! My guitar stills smells like smoke!" Soon Bucky was calling me to fill in for him when he could not make a date. He also gave me a seven-string guitar to learn on. Once I started, I have never gone back. I also began playing in big bands; such a wonderful experience. That is where I met so many of the great NYC horn players: Joe Magnarelli, Glen Drewes, Warren Vache, Harry Allen....etc. An invaluable experience and I became known as one of the few "rhythm guitarists".

Karl also met his wife during this time in New York. "I was going to here the Bill Mays trio at the Blue Note and stopped in a little place to have a beer. That is when we met, and I never made it to the jazzclub!" "We spent all out time going to hear the great music in New York; all the great jazz, classical guitarist Julian Bream at Lincoln Center, Joao Gilberto and Carnegie Hall, The Metropolitan Opera..." "We were married on the Brooklyn Bridge and Bucky Pizzarelli sat at the head of the table at our party!" Karl continued working, backing-up Rosemary Clooney and touring with Mel Torme's pianist, John Colianni. "It is great to work as a sideman, but the more I learned, the more I needed to pursue my own music." "After our son was born, we decided to make a change and move to Europe. I had some contacts in Berlin, so we packed up and went."

"Berlin was such a welcoming town. I think I met every jazz player on the scene in the first week! The musicians a very open to new players and sounds, and there are so many outlets to pursue an idea. After about three months I received a call from Till Brönner to play on his "Chattin with Chet" record. I went to the studio, layed down a track, and he said "That's it! You saved the tune!" "We have worked together on so many productions since; with Hildegard Knef, Manfred Krug, the No Angels, Mark Murphy, and now the upcoming Thomas Quasthoff record. We also did a project called The Players Club with my favorite pianist, Frank Chastenier, bassist John Goldsby, and drummer Wolfgang Haffner. Some of the most swinging music I have ever played!"

Now living in Berlin for six years, Karl recently played on Tom Gabels CD and Bill Ramsey's production with the Hessischer Rundfunk. "Now I am concentrating on my own production. I have my own sound---all of the musical experiences coming together. It is important to have that solid ground of the past, but we live now and the music must reflect the present." "I follow my ear and pursue the music that I want to hear...That keeps the music honest, and the audience feels that more than anything."

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