

## **Jazz Vocalist Karla Harris | Bio**

From velvety vulnerability to soul-tinged power, jazz vocalist Karla Harris brings sophisticated warmth and a dynamic delivery to the music, drawing listeners into the story and musical substance of the songs she sings. She has made a career within the art form she loves for more than three decades, performing for audiences from Portland to Provence. Her repertoire blends genres with subtlety, remaining respectful to the roots of a song; her art lies not only in expansive vocals but also in tapping into the emotion of a tune, and delivering it fully. “She lends her pulse to be a part of the heartbeat of the entire process, vocals and instrumentals,” writes AXS.com, “and the strange meandering force that lies between.” Critical Jazz says, “Rich, full-bodied and with a slight buttery finish, Karla Harris has mad skills – a vocal artist with impeccable phrasing and the innate gift to have the band play with and not around her.”

Karla’s love for singing started first with a love for words and the power of their expression. As a girl, she often spent early Saturday mornings writing little stories and the afternoons setting the turntable needle up and down to transcribe lyrics from some favorites in her parents’ eclectic album collection – Nancy Wilson, Barbra Streisand, Sammy Davis Jr., Billie Holiday, the Fifth Dimension, Aretha Franklin .... Karla and her cousin put on shows for relatives at family gatherings, but her first taste of performing for a “real” audience came at age 10, when she sang a solo during a grade-school choral concert.

While in college, Karla was asked to sing with the St. Louis Jazz Quartet, a group featuring well-loved Midwest jazz vocalist Jeanne Trevor, an early mentor. Karla soon became known as a diverse and in-demand singer, working regularly with St. Louis’ top groups. In the early 2000s, she began singing in combos led by internationally acclaimed bassist Tom Kennedy, whose credits include such greats as Rosemary Clooney, Freddie Hubbard, Mike Stern, Lee Ritenour, Ben Vereen, Dave Weckl, and more. An invaluable experience, it helped pave the way when a 2005 move to the Pacific Northwest landed Karla in Portland, Oregon’s, celebrated jazz scene.

In Portland, Karla began working with players such as Randy Porter (Diane Schuur, Gino Vanelli, Madelaine Eastman), Bobby Torres (Joe Cocker, Etta James, Tom Jones), Steve Christofferson (Nancy King), Todd Strait (Kevin Mahogany, Eldar, Karrin Allyson), Mark Simon (Leroy Vinnegar), Mike Horsfall (Chuck Redd, Pink Martini, Rebecca Kilgore), and more in that nurturing environment. She became a regularly featured artist at premier jazz rooms and performed at events such as the Oregon Coast Jazz Party, Cathedral Park Jazz Festival, Bite of Oregon Festival, Portland Jazz Festival and Nantucket Arts Festival. Of her live shows, WSIE Radio says Karla is “a powerful singer at ease in any setting, a singer for all seasons who makes any song memorable.” Clubscene writes, “She engages us and makes us happy to be spending the evening with her.” As one Atlanta fan put it, Karla “has more dimensions than the string theory.”

Karla released her first CD, *“Twice As Nice,”* a collaboration with Tom Kennedy, in 2007. Featuring Kennedy’s arrangements, the recording is a collection of standards, including two songs each from favorite songwriters Jimmy McHugh, Cy Coleman, Harold Arlen, Johnny Mandel, Richard Rodgers and Burt Bacharach. Of the project, Jazz Scene Magazine wrote, “Always respectful of her American Songbook choices, Harris has superb intonation and a contemporary, appealing approach to the songs.”

In 2012, Karla relocated to Atlanta, where she performs with many of the city’s first-call artists. She has opened for Grammy-nominated jazz singer Kate McGarry, and has performed at a TED Talk (an experience she considers one of her Top 10 Days), the Atlanta Jazz Party and Callanwolde Jazz Series, and the city’s top jazz venues. Through her work in Atlanta, Karla met Los Angeles-based pianist, composer, arranger Ted Howe, producer of her 2015 recording, *“Karla Harris Sings the Dave and Lola Brubeck Songbook.”* The CD is the first-ever studio recording dedicated exclusively to vocal versions of 11 Dave Brubeck compositions with lyrics written by his wife of 70 years, Lola Brubeck, and features Karla with Ted Howe, Tom Kennedy, drummer Dave Weckl and saxophonist Bob Sheppard. The project, released on Summit Records and debuted in a performance at the Sarasota Jazz Festival, received multiple reviews praising its conceptual approach and execution:

“She makes these seldom-heard lyrics come alive.” — Jazz History Online

“A work of sheer elegance and distinction.” — Jazz da Gama

“The Brubecks would have been pleased.” — Jazziz Magazine

Karla’s versions of Brubeck classics such as “Take Five,” “Far More Blue,” and “Trav’lin Blues” are heard on jazz radio internationally.

A new recording introducing Karla Harris as songwriter is slated for release in 2018. Titled “*Certain Elements*,” the project is a suite of original tunes, plus covers of songs written by Michel Legrand, Marilyn and Alan Bergman, Bill Withers, Jim Hall, Terry Kirkman and others, arranged especially for Karla by some of her closest colleagues. Featuring a sparkling roster of musicians from Portland and Atlanta, “*Certain Elements*” brings together Karla’s past decade musically. The project, like the artist herself, is a blend of backgrounds, and joins contemporary jazz, Latin, swing, and blues influences.

In 2017, Karla was named an artist-in-residence at Kennesaw State University, where she teaches applied vocal jazz to aspiring singers embracing the art form, a role she relishes.