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When it comes to her career, *this Karen has no complaints...*

By "CP" Christopher Peppas

The next time you take in a Karen Cameron show (and why wouldn't you) you will be transported back in time to the once-flourishing Big Band Era of music.

It was when large groups of twelve to twenty-five musicians would be seated behind matching music stands clad in matching formal wear playing the hits of the day and fronted by the "girl singer."

Imagine, if you will, going to the Paragon Ballroom in Chicago or Devine's Million Dollar Ballroom in The Cream City and checking out Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Gene Krupa, Lionel Hampton, Cab Calloway and so many others. The lights would be brought down low and the "girl singer"



would belt out a torch song tune and get the male half of the audience's undivided attention in the process.

"Music is a gift from God, I think," Cameron said in a recent interview. "I never expected that I could make a living by merely singing."

Karen grew up playing the piano like her mother and her sister. The contemporary tunes of the day were on her

setlist back then along with heavy doses of Classical Music and Church Music.

As opposed to most vocalists who started out in smoky saloons and waterfront watering holes, Karen started at the top and she's never looked back.

Fresh out of college (in 1966), Karen got hired to sing with, get this, Fred Waring & The Pennsylvanians. You read that correctly. She

started out “blending” her talents with one of the last, great Big Bands extant.

She appeared on TV on the weekly show The Hollywood Palace with Waring and hosted by some unknown crooner, Bing Crosby (jk).

You may have to hit the internet, but the Big Bands didn’t disappear, become extinct or join the dinosaur as making only historical annals in dusty libraries.

One can still go see bands of that ilk perform that timeless music with arrangements that hold up, note for note, to this very day.



in The Big Apple and every major venue in between. She settled in the Boston area and played all the major lounges, ballrooms and hotels there for years.

Karen even played for the royals. Well, the Hollywood royals Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor at a show at the afterparty of their performance of Noel Coward’s “Private Lives.”

The two actors stayed on opposite sides of the show in 1983 during one of the many times they weren’t getting along. A grinning (perhaps chemically enhanced) James Taylor bore witness to that as well.

Cameron’s musical whirlwind of a career took



Locally, Jeff LaBarge and The Swing Explosion Band featuring Peter Sorce and The Superband with their panoply of great players, among others, come to mind.

They could head to the portal on The Time Tunnel and get dropped behind a music stand in the 1930s, 40s or 50s and seem like they belong there.

Karen played in such legendary places from The Hollywood Bowl to Lincoln Center



her to France and Germany in Europe and Argentina and even Uruguay in South America, the latter for a tribute to the songs of Benny Goodman at their storied Opera House.

Karen’s musical influences include Nancy Wilson, the Gold Standard that is Ella Fitzgerald, George Benson, Barbra Streisand and others.

“I didn’t listen to copy anyone,” Karen explained. “I learned my phrasing from listening to the music and musicians.

Somewhere along the way, Karen decided to play “Where’s Waldo” with her microphone to add an exclamation point to her unique phrasing style. This at once delights the audience and is a thorn in the side to sound engineers.

Karen Cameron has released two CDs over the years that can be checked out on YouTube. “Young and Foolish Again” and “A Quiet Place.”

Great vocals are only a part of the package. Cameron has published three books as well: “Prayer and All That Jazz,” “She Sees Angels” and “Running Barefoot.” All three are available on Amazon.

“I’m grateful to the Milwaukee jazz community,” Karen said. “They welcomed me with open arms and encouraged me to keep doing what it is I love to do the most.”

That works out then because the jazz community continues to be able to tap into the endless font that is Karen Cameron. You’ll surely agree when you take the time to see for yourself.

