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‘Trombone Gumbo’

The sounds of Charlotte native **Kenneth Carr**

New Orleans may be the home of seafood gumbo, but Charlotte is the home of “trombone gumbo,” an equally delicious olio of musical styles, served up fresh by trombone master Kenneth Carr.

Carr has appeared on Grammy-nominated and Dove award-winning songs by John P. Kee and Vanessa Bell Armstrong. He has done background tracks for The Winans, and has performed at the same concert events as Ray Charles, Outkast and Al Green. He’s also produced music queues for shows such as “The Bill Cunningham Show.”

A spoonful of salsa

“Trombone gumbo” is how Carr describes his musical style, and it also is the title of the third track on his latest CD. Carr raps,

“Lord, this is your boy, KC, bringing the praise, brass voice, mixin’ it up, makin’ it hot, extra spicy, trombone gumbo.”

His sixth album, “Amazing Love,” truly is a gumbo of jazz, rap, hip-hop, shout, R&B, gospel, techno and even salsa, as heard in the song “Gracias a Dios.” And though Carr is known as a trombonist, on this album he also plays drums, piano and bass horn baritone, in addition to performing vocals.

Blending all these styles and instruments together, Carr has invented a sound all his own, which is produced in his own recording studio in New Jersey, KCMusic Studios. When you go to look for “Amazing Love,” you might find it listed under “Contemporary Christian” at Cdbaby or “Jazz” at iTunes. Amazon links the album to three categories, “Jazz, Rap and Hip-hop.”

“I don’t like to just peg myself into one corner,” Carr says. “What I normally do is just mix up a lot of different styles that I put my own spin on.”

Carr recently mixed it up at a celebrity All-Star Karaoke contest in Harlem, hosted by Patrick L. Riley. Did Carr sing like everyone else? No, he played trombone to “Don’t Stop Believing” in what he says was the first-ever instrumental karaoke.

A faith base

Carr first began playing music in public at a local church in Charlotte, the United House of Prayer for All People. At the age of 6, he performed on trumpet with the church band, and he eventually toured with this band.

“My faith plays a front-row seat in all of my music,” Carr says. “I do secular music, but mainly Christian music – some with words, some without words.”

In his early career, he began doing production and horn background tracks for gospel artists, and when he began producing his own albums, he infused them with Christian inspiration. His past albums have

names such as "Heaven" and "Make a Joyful Noise." In New York City, Carr attends the church of Creflo Dollar.

"I want people to feel like they have another swing at life again, to be happy and uplifted," he says.

Carr was born and raised in Charlotte. He graduated from West Charlotte High in 1984, where he was inspired by his music teacher, "Mr. Davenport," who recently passed away.

After high school, Carr started a local band, Kenny Carr and the Tigers, which still

"I want people to feel like they have another swing at life again, to be happy and uplifted."

performs today, and he has recorded some of his music here in town, at Reflection Sound Studios on Central Avenue and Gat3 Studios on Pressley Road.

Between 2003 and 2007, Carr opened a custom clothing store on East Boulevard



Kenneth Carr plans to open a new music venue in Charlotte in 2015. Photo by Ronnie Wright.

called kc7designs, working mostly with the Charlotte Bobcats, Charlotte Panthers and televangelists. His mother was a professional tailor, and Carr always has loved fashion.

Over the years he has lived in Los Angeles, New York and Europe, but he always has stayed connected to Charlotte, where his parents and brother still live.

New Charlotte flavors to come

A new Charlotte project is set to open in 2015. Carr plans to renovate a house in the Mountain Island Lake area into a live music venue for private gatherings, small concerts, karaoke nights, weddings and other events. He has based part of his concept on places he has seen in L.A., where celebrities gather for live music in intimate settings.

Sometimes he will be available to play at the site, he says, but he also will contract with other musicians to play there. The country setting and casual vibe will offer an alternative to the smoky clubs of uptown or South Charlotte.

"Charlotte is a great hub for a lot of great independent artists," says Carr. "However, I think the exposure of something different is not available. It's like the same scene – whether it's a club or a bar."

Certainly, this new venue will provide another way to enjoy Kenneth Carr's "trombone gumbo," a true Charlotte delicacy. ■



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As a **Y Achievers** Team Coach, you lead a small group of teens by facilitating confidence-building activities and fostering character and leadership development skills. Help with resume writing, business and social etiquette, public speaking and goal setting. You share stories and advice from your own career path, motivating youth in our community to thrive and succeed.

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