

Karen Mal – Bio

Karen Mal was raised in Plainville, Connecticut and attended college in New York City graduating in 1990. Circa 1992 Karen arrived in Door County, Wisconsin and for the ensuing seven years spent her summers performing in, as well as being one of the musical directors of, productions by the American Folklore Theatre [AFT]. The theatre is located on the Door Peninsula within Peninsula State Park, and close to the town of Ephraim in Northern Wisconsin. During the off-season Karen traveled and performed music in other parts of the States. In 1999 Karen and her husband Chris Irwin – they met and married while working with the AFT - relocated to Austin, Texas and their duo album **“Chris Irwin & Karen Mal”** was released by Sweet Home Records the same year.

Karen’s self-produced debut solo debut **“Mercury’s Wings”** was released by Austin, Texas based Boar’s Nest Records in 2002, having been recorded at the label’s studio, and the disc was reissued by Illinois based Waterbug Records in the Spring of 2005. The album title track, penned by Karen, was written about her friend and American Folklore Theatre founder Fred Alley. In addition, Mal and Alley co-wrote three songs on **“Mercury’s Wings.”** The support players/vocalists on the recording included Christine Albert [harmony vocals], Chris Gage [guitar], Marvin Dykhuis [guitar] Paul Percy [percussion], Jeff Plankenhorn [dobro], Eamon McGloughlin [fiddle] and Kelly Willis [harmony vocals]. In 2004 Karen recorded an album with her friend Laurie McClain, and they self-released the disc. The recording location was clearly indicated by the album title **“Live At The Main Street Café In Homestead, Florida.”** Karen’s sophomore solo album **“Dark-Eyed Sailor”** was released by the Waterbug label in the late summer of 2005. It’s a collection of traditional songs, plus the contemporary “trad. folk facsimile” “I Courted A Sailor” composed by Brit Kate Rusby. The album also featured “Bangrolly Reel” an instrumental written by Irish bred album producer/multi instrumentalist Gabriel Donohue [guitar, mandolin, bass and more] and recording session fiddle player, Matt Mancuso. Laurie McClain was responsible for the liner photography and album liner design.

In recent years, Karen has been a winner or finalist in a number of songwriting competitions, including the Texas Hill Country based Kerrville Folk Festival’s New Folk Songwriting [2001 and 2002], Portland Songwriter’s Association [2002], Alabama’s Mountain Valley Arts Festival [2002], Oregon’s Sisters Folk Festival [2002], Utah’s Founders Title Company Folk and Bluegrass Festival - KRCL Performing Songwriter Showcase [2002] and the South Florida Folk Festival [2003].

Mal has opened for, or appeared onstage with, performers such as Tom Paxton, Slaid Cleaves, Tom Prasada-Rao, Gail Davies, Buddy Mondlock and Tom Kimmel. Mal has acknowledged in interview that she is influenced by the music of performers such as Joni Mitchell, Cheryl Wheeler, Nanci Griffith, Eliza Gilkyson, John Gorka, Ellis Paul, Slaid Cleaves and Bill Morrissey. Released on the Waterbug imprint in late September 2007, **“The Space Between”** the twelve song collection featured eight Mal originals and co-writes, plus covers of songs penned by Rachel Ries and Jonathan Byrd.

Discography :

with Laurie McClain : **“Live At The Main Street Café In Homestead, Florida”** [2004] :

with Chris Irwin : **“Chris Irwin & Karen Mal”** [1999] :

Solo : **“Mercury’s Wings”** [2002] ; **“Blue-Eyed Sailor”** [2005] : **“The Space Between”** [2007] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 10/05 & 10/07

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