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LAPD Concert Band

BY MICHAEL ELLINGTON

If you were born into a family in which your mother played piano, your great-aunts played and taught piano, and both of your siblings played instruments, it would be no surprise if you ended up playing an instrument, too. The subject of this month's Los Angeles Police Concert Band Member Profile decided she'd settle on 10 instruments. Meet Karen Zelazo.



Karen and clarinet.

Karen spent part of her youth in San Bernardino. Other instruments in her house included a violin and a trombone. The first time she had ever seen a clarinet was in the hands of her older brother. She says she "liked the way it looked and sounded, and wanted to play, too." That was when she was in fifth grade. By the time her family had moved farther south and west, Karen's musicianship had evolved considerably. There was a lot

of music in her house, but she was the only member of her family who decided to make performing music her career.

While attending Cerritos High School, she played in the concert and marching bands. "I was a clarinet player but learned saxophone so I could be in the jazz band. Saxophone became the instrument I loved and concentrated on." Her first paid gig came when she was 17. It was a Dixieland show. She played tenor saxophone and made \$50. She thought it was the greatest thing, getting paid for doing something she loved.

Every musician has or has had some kind of "day job." During high school and college, Karen worked at a music store and taught music lessons. She also secured regular gigs at the Magic Kingdom and played at Disneyland for many years. It was during her high school years when she discovered she loved musicals. She cites them as her favorite kind of performance. Later, she taught junior high school band.

A short stint at Riverside College led Karen to California State University at Long Beach, where she majored in saxophone. Her bachelor's in music from Long Beach resulted in her earning a master's in music from Oregon State University's American Band College.

Karen's versatility as an instrumentalist has found her in the company of a wide variety of musicians. She's performed with the Rams Band, Ringling Brothers Circus, Cypress Pops, those aforementioned Disneyland groups and some great jazz bands and orchestras.

We'll tell you about the list of instruments Karen plays in a minute, but know that along with music, she also enjoys hiking, working in her garden and spending time with her family and friends. She also enjoys listening to a variety of music, but jazz and "smooth jazz" are her favorites.

Karen plays clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass saxophone, flute, piccolo, and alto and bass flute. This past year has been a challenge for everyone, but for a multi-instrumentalist like Karen, the lockdown and limited opportunities gave her a chance to focus on her craft. "The pandemic has given me a lot of time to practice and improve my skills. I play a lot of



Karen with sax and clarinet.

instruments, so I try to play a different one each day to keep my skills up."

When asked why she plays, Karen said, "Music becomes a part of you. I do it for the love of playing and performing, being able to express myself."

For more information about the Band, see our website at www.lasown.com and contact Jim Starr, executive director, at sngcop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolicefoundation.org, and in the "Comments" box, put, "For the Band." ♦



Karen and flute.

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