found the Creative Music Foundation, and in 1972 the Berger family moved to the arts colony, where the very first Creative Music Studio kicked off in flutist Ilene Marder’s living room. Local musical heavyweights Jack DeJohnette, Dave Holland and Anthony Braxton gave generously and often of their time after CMS moved into its first home and headquarters, a vast barn on Witchtree Road. Here city-based jazz masters materialized beside local luminaries, astonish[ing] student musicians who'd look up to find themselves playing alongside giants. Such moments became the legend, lure, and gateway into the Creative Music Studio experience. Karl's steering of such ensembles placed him among a handful of pioneers shepherding the improvisatory orchestra as an emerging art form. These were student-based orchestras peppered with an occasional guiding artist.

In addition to DeJohnette, Holland and Braxton, other guiding artists eventu- ally would include Don Cherry, Lee Konitz, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Don Byron, Jumaaladem Tacuma, Ava Mendoza, Nana Vasconcellos, John Lindberg, Cecil Taylor, Oliver Lake, John Cage, Charlie Hayden, Jimmy Giuffre, Pauline Oliveros, Marilyn Crispell, Tani Tabal, RickCyro Baptista, Frederick Rzewski, Bob Moses, George Lewis, and Carla Bley.

During its first heyday (1971 through the mid-1980s), CMS moved into full-scale facilities in and around Woodstock, including a former soccer camp called Oehler's Mountain Lodge in West Har- ley. "Intensives" became more focused, goals and side projects, more ambitious.

A sonic river moving ceaselessly through the MusicMindport opened by the Bergers, never failed to demonstrate what Karl called "the principle of flow." The phrase came into ubiquitous CMS use, circa 1985, after the Bergers made the first of three visits to teach at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado—do at the invitation of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (who gave Ingrid the name Serto or "gold lake of understanding.") Upon their return, it became difficult to establish where music ended and spiritual practice began.

Along the way, the very notion of "studying a specific instrument" flew out the window. Mornings began with exercises to clear the mind, find one's breath, and practice "studying a specific instrument" flew out the window. Mornings began with exercises to clear the mind, find one's breath, and practice "studying a specific instrument" flew out the window. Mornings began with exercises to clear the mind, find one's breath, and practice "studying a specific instrument." Karl and Ingrid planned a return to Europe, optimism they shared with Ornette, Rinpoche (who gave Ingrid the name Serto or "gold lake of understanding.") After the return, it became difficult to establish where music ended and spiritual practice began.

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Aside from Karl’s credentials as a one-time winner of the Downbeat Magazine Musicians Poll for his work with Sun Ra Arkestra, the Son of Time Machine, Berger held high-profile positions in several schools, including head of the music department and dean of jazz education at the University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth in the USA and professor of composition and dean of the music department/jazz at the Frankfurt Conservatory in Germany. He spent several years teaching at the New School in New York City.

Karl Berger, a classically trained piano player and Pulitzer Prize-winner known as "GamalaTaki" facilitating cross-pol- lination among vastly diverse musical traditions. Workshops included learning to respond to music moving "faster than thought.

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New blood for CMS

It’s often claimed that CMS was “rebuilt,” which implies that it ceased to be following the recession of the late 1980s. This isn’t entirely true. What is true, however, is that jazz aficionado Rob Saffer approached Karl in 2008

“Karl left a great legacy of teaching and created an environment for students that was as much a teaching of life as of music. I myself had the pleasure of meeting and working at the Studio with many extraordinary international musicians, and I am grateful for that. The creative consciousness never ends may he continue in peace.” — Jack DeJohnette

and offered to help bring CMS into the mainstream. Whether by coincidence or design, a triumphant turn of events would soon assure that outcome.

In 2012 Karl reinforced CMS’s significant position in the history of modern American music through a digital archival project with Columbia University to preserve and make available recordings of exclusive historic performances by prominent innovators who had taught at and worked with CMS.

With this endeavor, also supported by the Grammy Foundation, hundreds of hours of archival recordings were digitized over several years by CMS recording engineer Ted Orr in the Sertso Recording Studio in Woodstock. Volume One received rave reviews from *Jazz Times* and from *Jazz Magazine*, which called it the best historical jazz record of 2014.

With a new board of directors in place, Karl handpicked Billy Martin (of Medeski Martin & Wood) after seeing him perform and, as CMS executive director. Martin in turn, brought on New York City-based musician/composer/educator gaby fluke-mogul as program director gabby fluke-mogul & Robbie, Swans, Coheed & Cambria, and more.

Arrangements for Jeff Buckley’s classic debut “Grace,” a line formed eager for his talents. Natalie Merchant’s “Ophelia” was next, then “Better Than Ezra, Sly & Robbie, Swans, Coheed & Cambria, The Cardigans, Angelique Kidjo, Buck- ethead, and Bootie Collins. Contacted by Britney Spears’ manager, who sought string arrangements similar to that in “Eleanor Rigby,” Karl coolly suggested he call George Martin.

Karl’s memory will live on

Karl Berger’s accomplishments have been explored in the 2018 feature documentary film, “Karl Berger: Music Mind,” directed by Julian Benedikt. It’s been described as “… an inside look into the creative process and unique approach toward music that makes Karl Berger one of a kind.”


The inevitable shock awaiting the end of every human story is softened with the fact that Karl shared and worked with CMS. Karl is survived by Ingrid Serto, his wife, vocalist and musical partner, and by his daughter Savia, a dancer and choreographer. His younger daughter, Ida, predeceased him. He is further survived by his many thousands of students, fans, fellow musicians, and friends around the world.

There will be a private memorial service at the KTD Tibetan Monastery in Woodstock, date to be announced. A public celebration of his life and music will be held at a later date.