

Kelley Polar

Kelley Polar began his musical studies at the age of three with stack of LPs, a plastic Fisher-Price turntable and his six-year-old, disco-loving sister. Lessons in piano, violin and finally viola followed, the latter becoming his passion and primary musical vehicle. At 18, Polar was a prizewinner at the William Primrose International Viola Competition, followed by an infamous tenure at Oberlin Conservatory. By the mid-nineties, Polar found himself in New York City pursuing an advanced degree at the illustrious Juilliard School and cementing his reputation for general deviance.

Fate introduced a chance meeting in 1998 with Morgan Geist, head of the Environ record label. Geist and partner Darshan Jesrani were deep into the production of their first Metro Area record, and aware the duo were seeking live strings to complete the germination of their signature sound, Polar gamely assembled a group of Juilliard players and dubbed the group "Kelley Polar Quartet." KPQ would eventually be heard on some of Metro Area's biggest tracks — "Miura," "Caught Up" and "Dance Reaction," to name but a few — and even made the occasional surprise appearance in the group's live performances.

It wasn't long before Polar determined that his Quartet should strike out with an original venture, and while some influence of Metro Area's style was evident, Polar's mix of western classical theory coupled with ignorance of current dance music trends made his early Environ records capture listeners' imaginations. The inaugural solo Kelley Polar Quartet 12" (*Audition EP*, 2002) was the buzz of taste-making DJs the world over, and with the subsequent EPs (*Recital EP* and *Rococo EP*), Kelley Polar Quartet became a well-regarded name among discerning spinners, record buyers and journalists by 2004.

Around this time, Polar was expelled from Juilliard, and despite his flourishing recording career, he decided he could no longer handle his self-destructive city lifestyle. He returned to the countryside of his youth and began playing chamber music under an assumed name in rural New Hampshire.

It was in this rural setting that Polar found himself as a solo artist. Dropping the "Quartet" suffix from his name, he began exploring taut song ideas rooted more in idealistic pop than the pulsing floors of nightclubs. After a yearlong exile, Polar returned to New York in summer 2005 to mix his debut album, *Love Songs of the Hanging Gardens*, with Morgan Geist. Released the following autumn, *Love Songs...* received an incredible response from listeners and critics alike. *Spin* magazine praised the album as "romantic, no-gravity dance pop," *The New Yorker* called it an "ambitious new age disco record;" the *Chicago Reader* voted it "Best Music of 2005" as did *Stylus Magazine's* "Best Records of 2005." A live European festival tour in 2006 connected Polar with his fans and further cemented the album's staying power; indeed, *Pitchfork* described the album in May 2007 as "one of 2005's great unsung gems."

Today, Polar is the violist for the Apple Hill Chamber Players, a group known worldwide for playing primarily in conflict areas such as the Middle East, Northern Ireland and the Caucasus. He has recently completed a new album, *I Need You to Hold On While the Sky Is Falling*. Again mixed by Morgan Geist, the album will be released worldwide in March 2008, followed with a worldwide tour by Polar with his new live band. Polar has also recently completed his first remix for the band Caribou (formerly Manitoba) on Merge/City Slang.

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