

reconnecting:  
jim keller



Off the Hook: **Jim Keller**  
calls 867-5309/Jenny

He got it! Jim Keller, co-writer of the 80s' Tommy TuTone smash, now calls Phillip Glass "The Boss."

Woe to the poor sons of bitches who, in 1982, had the phone number 867-5309 (no area code need be dialed then). This infamous collection of digits was mentioned (often) in the hit song "867-5309/

Jenny" by the New Wave band, Tommy TuTone.

Jim Keller, who was a band member and co-writer, recalls the unceasing publicity like the ringing of an unanswered phone.

Newspapers across the country featured stories of those beleaguered phone owners, who would get countless calls by pranksters asking, "Is Jenny there?"

"Every area code had that num-



ber,” he says from his office in Manhattan. “The record company loved it because every time that [newspaper story] hit, it was more press [for us].”

The band disconnected soon after that, and Keller found himself without work, education or even a future.

“I had nothing going on and I wasn’t making any money,” he says. “I was basically a starving musician at the time with no discernable future. And I was never anything other than a starving musician.”

Through what he calls a “bizarre set of circumstances,” he hooked up with renowned classical music composer Phillip Glass, and wound up working for Glass’ music management office for almost two decades.

Why would Glass hire a guy with no resume except for co-writing a hit song about a local girl with a local phone number?

“Because I have been living on my wits for my entire life,” Keller says. “I’m sure that Phillip somehow related to that. I said, ‘Look, don’t pay me. Whatever. If it works, it works, and if it doesn’t work, get rid of me.’ I think that appealed to his entrepreneurial nature and he hired me. Go figure, because I had no classical background whatsoever. I could tell you who played banjo on a Buffalo Springfield track, but I couldn’t tell you any-

thing about opera at that point.”

Still, Keller straightened his skinny tie, rolled up his sleeves and got to work.

“I came in weekends and worked nights,” he says, “just to educate myself. I literally went through every single file in [Glass’] filing cabinet. I read up. I didn’t go to college. I didn’t have any training. I didn’t know any office etiquette. I knew how to play the guitar and sing songs. And, unfortunately, that wasn’t getting me by at that moment. It was hard. It was a lot of work. And it worked out for both of us. I’ve been with him for almost twenty years.”

With his advanced degree from The School of Hard Knocks, Keller done good. And these days are better than ever.

“At this point,” he says, “I’m helping [Glass] oversee his management publishing company. It allowed me to start a family and get health insurance.”

It also allowed him to continue to be a not-so-starving musician. With the bills paid and the mouths fed, he performed in clubs and jammed with small bands. The gigs were mostly for his own enjoyment, but eventually came his beloved album *Sunshine In My Pocket*, and now his latest work, *Soul Candy*.

*Candy* has been getting good reviews, and not just by music reviewers. Here’s what Tom Waits had to say: “Listening to Jim Keller’s music makes me feel like I have big plans, no worries and all of my hair.”

Keller’s renewed success is even sweeter now than when he first hit big.

“It’s a risk,” he says. “When you put yourself on the line, it’s risky. The last time I was playing music,

# jim keller

it was not a great place to be. I had to force myself to do it because I knew I had to. I stopped playing totally when I started working. I got married; I had a kid [a daughter, now fourteen]. I really focused on trying to get that together. I was in my forties. I started again about five years ago.”

It was a far cry from his days as a member of one of the most popular groups in any area code; however, like a bazillion bands before Tommy Tutone, they came and went in an MTV flash.

“God bless youth,” Keller says. “They don’t give a fuck what happens next. Every step of the way [for Tommy Tutone], it was exactly where we wanted to be and where we wanted to go. The first record had a small hit on it. We toured with Tom Petty for half a year. What could be cooler than that? Unfortunately, if we had a little more foresight, we may




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have been able to map something out. We weren't built that way. We sort of self-destructed before we even began. But when it's happening, you're not really thinking about what's next. [After the fame is over,] you are a lost puppy like everybody else. But it took me years to find a grounded spot.”

What matters most to him now, after family and his art, is sincerity.

“I want to write a song that I can sing, and that when I sing it, I mean it,” he says. “Nothing matters if you can't mean it. The idea is to try to dig in and find subject matter that resonates with something that is real.”

For Keller, there is plenty of life and living to do, and with the success of his latest CD, more resonating to come. 

For more on Jim Keller, go to [jimkellermusic.com](http://jimkellermusic.com)

## Jump, Jive and Wail at the Swing 46 Jazz and Supper Club in NYC

**By Jacob Schirmer** | If you've never been swing dancing in the city then you definitely need to check out Swing 46 ASAP! It's located at 46th street between 8th and 9th Avenue. Upon entering the boozy, dimly lit restaurant, you'll notice the massive bar that takes up most of the front entrance. Art deco chandeliers hover above with an inviting glow, calling you to partake in a little libation. Ask for Jake the bartender, who is dressed to impress, and he will whip you up a pre- or post-Prohibition-style cocktail that will certainly get you loosened up for the dance floor. Tell Jake to keep your tab open and then saunter to the back, martini in hand, to the stage where a six-piece band warms up to bust out jazzy tunes. As the soul music floats out over the blue-hue-lit bodies, you are suddenly transported back in time to the great jazz era. It's so infectious that you will want to get up and try a few swing moves yourself, no matter what type of person you are. Show up at 8:30, opening hour, and get in on a free swing dance lesson before the band starts playing. You may work up an appetite after swinging the night away, so grab a table to dine on steak and pasta, or head over to one of the plush button-leather couches and rest your feet. Grab another drink before you head out; they are fresh, amazing and not too pricey. Swing 46 is such a great treat! Do something different than your ordinary night out, grab some friends and hit Swing 46 for a fun-filled night of great drinks, food and, of course, dancing.

If you don't have a dinner reservation, there is a \$12 cover charge to enjoy the live music and dancing.

Check out Swing 46 here: <http://www.swing46.com>

