

# Karel Goetghebeur #2

**Jeff** - You have this other project that that is extremely interesting I went to your website and you have to talk about it Sax4Pax. You have to just. I'll let you go and because it's so interesting and people need to hear about it.

**Karel** - Yes Sax4Pax, I don't know if people understand the word "Pax", but Pax is Latin for peace. I think it was 2014 yeah, it was 2014 when I saw the old testament prophecy of Isaiah. And it's also a verse that is in the UN building near the building in New York that says, "and then they shall beat their swords into plowshares." I was like hey, I'm not a farmer I don't need any plowshares, but I do need saxophones. And to make saxophones, I need brass and where can I find brass? I was like artillery shells that's it! Because you know Belgium had two big world wars fought here. A lot of ammunition has been fired here. And the ground here especially in the part of Belgium that I live in well it's still full with artillery shells, actually still live bombs. Every day farmers pick up bombs from the fields. So, I decided to melt down artillery shells it's a new sheet metal and turn it into a limited-edition series of 193 saxophones.

**Jeff** - But how did you get the shells? I mean how did how did it go about that?

**Karel** - Well I had one way of doing it. I could get in touch with scrap dealers because they always have those shells in stock. People sell it to them if they sell it at the bigger factories that outfit them for recycle. And I could easily get made my 2000 pounds that I needed to make 193 saxophones, but that was too easy. I mean when is too easy I'm not interested so. I needed a challenge. So, I decided to organize and set up a national collection campaign and I threw a press conference. I asked the Belgians to donate the shells they have if they want to this project. And that they did. They massively donated shells that I needed and in a very short time I collected actually over two thousand pounds of artillery shells. And I went to a factory in the Netherlands that decided to go along with my project and recycle my 2000 pounds. Which is quite unique because normally if you want your custom alloys well you need thousands of pounds. You need to order so much brass and then they will make a custom alloy for you. But they're like the project, they were impressed by it, they decided know what, OK we're going to do it for you, we want to work with you on this project. And that's how it came about.

**Jeff** - So I had to have been, a big PR moment you know, for you for the company that was you know, working with you. I mean I'd imagine when you reached out to the people to asked him to donate once the word got out about that especially with the Internet and social media had been a lot of attention for you?

**Karel** - it was, the thing was I had the idea back 2014. And I started pitching the story to people. I was like what do you think I want to do this. So many people, a lot of people say that's crazy idea, but most people said that's not possible you cannot do it. And again, don't tell me something, don't tell me that I can-not do something. I will always try at least I will try.

**Jeff** - Right

**Karel** - In 2014 I met Rafael Ravenscroft. Rafael the name itself doesn't sound familiar but he's the guy that played Baker Street for Gerry Rafferty. And Rafeal and I, we met, and we became friends. He was so full of ideas, so our ideas came together. That's how the whole project, he added on the Sax4Pax saxophones we have actually augmented reality. So, if you have app on cell phone you scan certain emblem on saxophone it will come alive. Which is very unique.

**Jeff** - I saw that I saw that what's the website for that project again?

**Karel** - That says Sax4Pax, Four being the number 4, SAX4PAX.com.

**Jeff** - S-A-Ax-4 excuse me SAX4PAX.com.

**Karel** - Yeah, that's it.

**Jeff** - When I saw it, I was blown away so how many saxophones have you made so far for this?

**Karel** - For the world think I have to check but I think 30 almost 40 at this point. Slowly starting. I just normally the project would've been picked up in 2014. We decided me and Rafael because he added some ideas the project. We wanted to do a press conference in England his hometown. His Hometown Exeter to announce that Rafael and I would get into this adventure. But and it was planned for 23 October but the 19 October I get a message from his best friend. And he said "Karel, I'm so sorry but Rafael, passed away." I was like, whoa that was really sad because had a lot of ideas and plans. But also, we liked each other we were friendly with each other. So, at that point I actually decided not to push through with the Sax4Pax project. I was like I don't want to do it alone and I don't want to use his name when he's not around so I'm going to bury the project. But weeks after the funeral his daughter, contacted me Scarlet. She said Karel, please push through with the project. Because ever since my dad got involved with you and he met you I've never seen him so happy anymore. He's really so happy to partake in this project, he liked it. And please in his honor and his name continue the project. And it was I think it was already December. I was like OK yes, I'm going to push through because I didn't want to do it without the consent of his family. Well I started 2015 with a lot of good energy to focus on the project but two weeks later I end up in a coma.

**Jeff** - What?

**Karel** - Oh yeah, the Mexican flu got a hold of me the HN and One virus well I remember at the time was really tired exhausted from all the hard work. And that well I became sick and I still continued working with a burning fever. After one week I was taken into ER with a double pneumonia. I was dehydrated exhausted. And two days later all my organs quit on me. Most my organs failure. They had to put in a coma medically induced coma. After one week they gave up on me. The doctors in the hospital here in Bruges said well he's gone week we cannot help him

anymore. Luckily the university hospital they decided to have a go at me. And they came and took me in the ambulance I had a survival rate of 1 to 10 to survive the transportation to the hospital that was near Brussels. And well I arrived I took that one chance that I had. And well they basically cut me open nine times to save my lungs. It's emergency operations they came to a point where they wanted to transplant my lungs. Because, it was no use trying to fix my own lungs. But I lost 50 pounds at 6 to 7 weeks. So, I was too weak to have a very happy lung transplant. So, after well seven weeks in the hospital living in Brussels, they decided to terminate the treatment. But I was a lost case. After they terminated my treatment normally, I would've died in three minutes or three hours. All of a sudden, my body functions return. And they wake me up a week later. That's when I found out I was no longer in Bruges and that two months have gone by. And well you're alive that was basically the message. I have to say first thought that came to my mind was like; "What? Two months!?! My business! I need to work!" I mean I had orders I had clients waiting for repairs. So, I was highly motivated to start working again. But the doctors told me it would take two to three years of functioning more or less. and I would never be the same. So, I had to just except the facts. but I'm not really good at excepting those kinds of facts. I had to had to learn to eat, drink, talk, walk the whole nine yards. But I manage to do that within half a year, and I was declared totally healed at the end of 2013. A medical world record on my name. And I started working again. I decided to focus on restarting the business again. Some people tried to actually get a hold of my business while I was in a coma, they tried to steal my business. They try to persuade my wife into selling the business to them. And it was not fun to hear that afterwards. But I'm like OK you know what, it's a I don't want to waste too much energy fighting my enemies by picking fights with them. And if I want to go at my enemies, I'll just do a better job myself. That's the best way to punish my enemies. And that's how I started picking up the project again. And finally, the first production models of the Sax4Pax series came about 2019. I think December the first production series we're ready for Sax4Pax saxophones.

**Jeff** - So, just recently just December a few months ago?

**Karel** - Yeah, yeah, because it was a lot of work to put everything to place. And collecting the shells. I had to clean the shells, remove all the iron parts. It was quite a lot of work and also the whole design of the saxophone itself. This is not just an average saxophone. The buttons, the key inlays of the saxophones are made from the wood of the stock of the Lee Enfield rifle from the British army of World War I and II. One of the buttons the biz key, is made out of the shell casing of a Lee Enfield's. Fire those at gun range. There is actually a little button on the neck of the saxophone made out of dirt that I collected from the trenches, soaked in the blood of the fallen. There's a lot of details on the saxophone. The engravings, it all has to do with the wars that have been fought here in Belgium. The idea behind this project the idea is to really say, you know what, yeah, we all have the past, let's try to do something good with the past. And let's try to heal our wounds and let's go from hatred to harmony and make music instead of war. That's what I like to do with Sax4Pax.

**Jeff** - So when you presented the first one, when, you said you have 30., that... have. How was that for you? How is that for people, your supporters and everything?

**Karel** - It was actually quite special. The first person who played the finished Sax4Pax saxophone was actually a young German girl 10 years of age, Anna and the saxophone was for her father. I was finishing up the saxophone as they were here and when I finished it well. I wanted to test blow it. I was like no, no, no, no, Anna, you're the future you have a go with it. And she blew on it and her father was really moved, and emotional. And it was special, to have a German young family playing on these saxophones because, well the two world wars. Germany with the aggressor. But now they had the chance to be the first blow it. It was really special and an honor for me actually to be able to give them that saxophone. But I haven't made a lot of publicity yet abroad because I want to serve the Belgian market first. I don't want to put too much pressure on my shoulders. If I get too many orders in the same time, I mean there's already waiting list. But there are still enough saxophones left. But first yeah, I wanted to really establish the saxophones.

**Jeff** - You got a save one for me I'm saving up my lunch money right now. So, you got a save one for me Karel.

**Karel** - I will I will I will

**Jeff** - It looks so beautiful and there's so much passion in you. You can hear the, you know, I have done quite a bit of research on Adolphe. In preparation for talking to you as well as this podcast is about the saxophone and Adolphe. Adolphe, you have to go there. And you look like him, I would imagine you sound like him. I want there to be a movie about Adolphe Sax and I want you to play Adolphe Sax. If someone approached about that but what would you say I?

**Karel** - I wouldn't mind I would actually be a dream because you know I've always tell the people. I get a lot of lectures and speeches with the groups and people and every time I tell them how much I wish there would be a good movie about the life of Adolphe Sax. Because I mean if you know and read into his life you read into his life. Some of the stories, I mean it's amazing what the guy went through. I mean imagine being in your 70s in that time in an age where people hardly became 50. When you were 50 you were old and he's in his 70s he contracted lip cancer and he survived cancer. We always talk about Chuck Norris. Chuck Norris is the bad ass. No, Adolphe Sax was the bad ass. He was a genuine bad ass. He had a stamina. I mean, he went bankrupt three times. He lost everything. He got up and he pushed through. And the reason for all those bankruptcies were mainly because his competitors always try to sabotage him and steal from him. And try to fight him every time when he filed a patent they tried to fight it. But he never gave up and I admire that. But you know what, it didn't always bring him happy time and he died and never became very rich. He died when he was 79 it's amazing after such a life. His mother never would've guessed that he would've become 12 years of age because even as a little child he went through so many things. He almost drowned, he almost suffocated. He drunk vitriol. I mean he went through so many things. But he lived to seven years of age. He had pensions. Oh my, if you look into the instruments Adolphe Sax built. I mean we all know the saxophone, but he built so much more. if you read into his life. You did it you came to the same conclusion. Let's have a movie about Adolphe Sax. I hope in Hollywood

somebody is listening and tries to persuade this because yeah. I want it to be happening. I don't know if I would be the right guy to play Adolphe because you know what. I am I'm not his I'm not there. I'm not as good as he is.

**Jeff** - Well they would be smart to put you in the film in some way form or fashion somewhere give you a part.

**Karel** - But it would be fun.

**Jeff** - I went to your website and I was looking at one of the videos and you did quite a few videos and a few about you know COVID-19. And you did this one and you held up and Adolphe Sax Beer. I was like Yeah! That's so great!

**Karel** - Well if you play a lot of saxophone you need to hydrate you lose a lot of moisture. So even before my first prototype is ready in 2012, I already had my beer, my Adolphe Sax beer. I was like, whenever I do the press release, I need to be able to present the press with a good beer. You know as Belgians I mean most kids when they're born you get mothers milk well as Belgians, we don't we just start with beer. You know what I mean. For, us beer is as natural as drinking milk. Belgian is world renown for the beer.

**Jeff** - Well, That's true.

**Karel** - I started to brew my own beer I did it in the brewery of a friend of mine. We put together a formula. We use 100% Belgian Hops. And I decided to name it Adolphe. And if you look at the label off of the beer you see of course a cartoon of Adolphe Sax but if you notice on all the photographs of Adolphe Sax he always looks like grumpy. I mean smiling and posing for pictures was not done in that time. You always look serious, but I gave them like a serious look but with a little grin. So, like yeah, I just enjoy this beer. And yeah, I mean this beer has been out there for all those years. I didn't do much with it yet. But it's mainly also a gift to my customers.

**Jeff** - You'd be surprised these craft beers all over the world now or making a splash! So, you know he has a nice grand look about him. And they love beer here in United States you should think about some distribution. I know some people out I'll pass your way.

**Karel** - I'll send some bottles over and you hand them out.

**Jeff** - I will. Do you have anything else you're selling other than beer or was it just the idea for the beer?

**Karel** - It's very tempting to do a lot of other stuff I see a lot of other brands having their own reeds and mouthpieces, but I'm like no, no. I mean if I bring something to the market I want it to be original, I want it to be mine. That's why I mainly focus on the saxophones. The beer is second place it's a very nice second place, but I mainly focus on the saxophones. And I have a

lot of innovations coming up. As I said at the beginning of this interview, I work together with the university. And I do research I'm very critical because, I mean so many people tell me things like oh yeah saxophone need to be made like this. You need to use these resonators. There is a lot of wall nonsense out there. And I always try to approach it as a scientist and be as neutral as possible. And, you know the best judge is your ears. Because I see a lot of people coming up with like, I special ligatures that improve your sounds. And then they showed this graphics and they see a peek at a certain frequency. But you know what, we as humans we cannot hear that. That's beyond our range. So, what good is it if you have a key in a frequency that we, our human ear can not I pick up? So, for me it's, the difference needs to be heard. It doesn't need to come up from a computer screen. And it needs to be valid. It needs to be proven. It needs to work. So whenever, I've tried so many things I experiment with different alloys, but I only kept what I really was convinced of that it worked, and it was actual improvement. I never went along with the latest hypes and stuff. Because that's not what I want to do and I don't think that Adolphe Sax would've done that.

**Jeff** - Go with your gut. Have you, I know it's tough to travel now obviously, but have you thought of doing some tours and showing your work? I mean, back in the day they would have I mean they still do have these presentations were people show their wares and this is what I have. And people come in, you know, hundreds and thousands. And you owning the name Adolphe Sax and if you came here to NAMM I mean you would get a lot of attention.

**Karel** - That's true, that's true. I actually have an open invitation by one of the most important teachers by Berklee Jazz.

**Jeff** - I know now's a tough time... but

**Karel** - It's the Corona thing. But I'm so busy working my ass-off making saxophones. You have to know in 2015 when I got sick of Mexican Flu it was nine years that I didn't take a holiday. I like working that much. I mean who needs a holiday when you're enjoying yourself at work. Whenever I go abroad, I take a little time to stay like, I think it was two years ago I went back-and-forth to New York. I arrived on Friday evening and would return on Monday morning. It was just a quick visit. But I should you're right I should take the time, come over. When I'm over I want to visit NAMM. I want to meet all the important people there. There are so many people doing crazy stuff out there. I really admire some of those people.

**Jeff** - You come there with a saxophone with Adolphe's name on it and your story and who you are, you'd get an awful a lot of attention. You will, there's no if, ands, or butts about it. You really would. But I mean all of that is changing but it will be back. And I you know you should prepare for when things do get back and we can have a crowd. And really because the saxophone is probably most popular in the United States. Ain't no probably, it's most popular in United States.

**Karel** - And I have to say that there are some amazing saxophone players out there. I mean I have some friends out there some crazy saxophone. Really amazing there is a big, I mean

birthplace of jazz is there. That's Ground Zero for jazz I mean. It's the perfect place I need to be there. Now I need to find my time. I actually was a good perspective for the future because I already hired a part-time worker helping me soon. I will hire another helper that will work with me full-time. So, I am I'll have more time on my hands to come over and get to meet everybody there. Visit NAMM, that's indeed the place to be. If you haven't been to NAMM you haven't seen anything.

**Jeff** - That is, that is the place. And When you come you got to let me know. Cause I would love to meet you. We've made these connections through the Internet. And I live in Boston and if you come and you come to Berklee. You have to let me know.

**Karel** - I will, I will. I actually looking forward a lot to go and visit Berklee. Because, everyone that studied. You went to Berklee?

**Jeff** - I did go to Berklee.

**Karel** - Yeah, you did. That's it. It's impressive. The level of education. It's probably mind-blowing. For me I don't play that often anymore. I test play all my saxophones but, every time when a really good player walks into my shop and plays one of my saxophones and plays on it and has a go at it. Every time I have the same thing, I'm like, wow these saxophones are great. And the second thought comes to mind is I need to ask more money for it. It is what it is.

**Jeff** - They're a really good price. And again, a couple of them I saw there that looked really interesting that Dinant 2, looked really, really good as well as the Sax4Pax and but that Dinant 2 looks really beautiful. And I saw the price and it's like these really good affordable saxophones. They looked to be, you know, and you know of course you really want to play it. Sort of have to play it. It's kind of tough these days to get to play the saxophone before you buy it because there's so few stores you know in the world where people can do that. So, if you came here with a few of them at NAMM or other places people... Because if you can get some places over here that would love to sell your saxophone.

**Karel** - I have several people contacting me and asking me to the dealership. That's why I actually started hiring some help. Because I need to scale up my production. The past years I've done it all by myself. While I well I work 70 - 80 - 90 hours a week. But I have a family you know. I want to have some family time too. So that's why hired help. And we're looking into new technology to really be able to produce parts faster, quicker, better. And then I can start setting up dealership abroad. Of course, I want to start in the United States because I want those American players. They're the best.

**Jeff** - Yeah, I'll tell you those two there's probably two or three places maybe four places you can really make some money. Obviously, New York and Boston, being that Berklee is here, New England Conservatory some other schools. New Orleans you probably do very well. Chicago you'll do well. Los Angeles you'll do well. Those big cities have enough musicians and obviously saxophone players, and saxophone lovers. You gut a shop there. I would start in New York it's

the obvious place to start and it would be easy to go to Boston from New York because they are close.

**Karel** - One of my friends is from New Jersey, Mike Mullan. An amazing saxophone player. I remember I was there I think it was oh yeah, October 2012 I went there New York and I went there, and I met Mike. He immediately sold his King Super 20 Silver Bell, Silver Neck to buy one of the first production models of Adolph Sax saxophones. And ever since, he's an amazing player. For me it's important. Business is one thing but I'm a relational guy. I want to be the people that I work with. I want to have a good sense of trust with people that I work with. For me I mean I'm not the dollar comes on the second place. First, I just want to have a good cooperation with people that love saxophone as much as I do. It's not all about business. I mean people the past years have come my business and tried to persuade me into hopping on board with them. They want to invest money in my business. And then people say yeah but everything is for sale. And I'm like no, you came to the wrong guy. No not everything is for sale. If I would've been in it for the money, I would've chosen a different path. I would've done it differently. I'm not in it for the money. I'm in it for the long run I want to enjoy myself and I want to make crazy ass saxophones. I want to make Belgium great again. I want to make Belgium the center of saxophone production again. And where people will know that if you want a really great saxophone and just more than a saxophone, but you get like a story to tell it will be an experience, come to Belgium and get one of the Adolphe Sax saxophones. That's what I want to do. For me that's the most important. I'm like people come in my shop and very often have to tell them hey, hey hold it. This is not a shop this is an adoption agency. And maybe, maybe you'll get to adopt a saxophone. But that's not who I want because, I want to walk this way with you into choosing and finding the right saxophone. And then we go our ways. And we will just try different saxophones. Different set ups with reeds and mouthpieces and ligature's and then when we are both happy, they can buy the saxophone. But I have to say actually I already refused several people. Because these people are just coming in to buy an Adolphe Sax saxophone. But the saxophone didn't work for them. I mean, it's like, I really love Keilwerth Saxophones. German brand, big sound, big nice sound. But the applicature doesn't really work for me. I always have the feeling that my hands are too small to really handle those saxophones well. It doesn't mean Keilwerth is a bad saxophone. On the contrary but for me it doesn't really work. And that's why I am happy there are several brands and makes of saxophones. There's a saxophone for everybody. That doesn't mean my Adolphe Sax will be a good saxophone for you. So, whenever I feel like, no, I don't think this is the best choice for you. I just say no to people. And people might be angry and frustrated but if I explain it why understand and they accept it. Because well playing on a saxophone that looks good OK that's one thing, but it needs to feel good it needs to work for you. If that's not the case well, you will not enjoy it as much. And for me that would be horrible to see my saxophones in a corner collecting dust, and not being played or sold second hand. I don't want to see that. I mean that's why saxophone it's an adoption procedure. You need to be totally in love with your horn at getting up every day and the first thing that needs to come to your mind is I'm getting to play the saxophone again. That's what I want. So, yeah and I know I'm not handling my business the way most people do but that's how I want. And as I am in charge I get to decide.

**Jeff** - That's true it is your business, but I'm just the way you've gone about it and your story. It's similar to Adolphe's in the sense that you've had some people try to take your business, try to, you know, try to slow you down, and then some health issues and your passion. And it's very much like, his story and you put those together and you got history. You know, so, it's remarkable I was so glad to see that you existed. Like the friend who took you in when you knocked on his door, he hugged you because he was glad of the work you're doing, you know. That's what I'm giving you a hug right now, I'm glad of the work you're doing. And people who really love saxophone and grateful for Adolphe for inventing it and you know. So, it's important, the work you're doing is important. And it needs to, you know, when this thing when the world comes back and you're able to you know present your work more out to the world you're going to have great success. I've heard the saxophones played by some YouTube videos and it sounds beautiful. It really does.

**Karel** - And that's the thing, it's all being made with cellphones so it's not professional recordings.

**Jeff** - Exactly. And it sounds, great, it sounds great! You're gonna have great success. I don't see any other way for you and I'm glad to have met you even though it's through the Internet.

**Karel** - Likewise, I've seen what you do on Charlie Parker and wow you nail it. I mean I told you before, you nail it. When I hear you play. Well, the Bird.

**Jeff** - Thank you.

**Karel** - I really appreciate an artist and like I do, you go all the way in what you love and do. That's what I appreciate that. That's what attracts me to people if I see people and meet people that have passion or passionate about something that's the most beautiful thing in life.

**Jeff** - Yeah, yeah, well you know one of the reasons I want to start his podcast was to meet people like you and people who really have a passion for the saxophone. And it's such a unique instrument and you don't know it until you put some time into playing it like when you first when you first touched it up and blew it you know it was like wow. You get that feeling and the only people I get that feeling are the people who played it and put the time in it and understand how it affects the body. You know, so it's so great to talk to someone who has the passion I can hear the passion. I'm so glad to share your story on this podcast. We both can go on for hours. And I'll call you man, I'm gonna be calling you a lot now that I got your number.

**Karel** - Yeah, let's keep in touch.

**Jeff** - Oh, don't worry about we're gonna stay in touch.

**Karel** - But we gonna get to meet soon I guess. The airports are opening up again.

**Jeff** - Exactly And I would love to bring my play to your town. You know what I mean?

**Karel** - Oh yeah, yeah well that would be the parts of it and it's really nice what you're doing on quite a show and it's more than a shower it's been like to think it's. Reviving the Bird.

**Jeff** - Yeah, I'm hoping people feel that it's an experience when they when they see it. and I try to put as much passion into that as I hear you were putting passionate to your saxophones. So, the website again is AdolpheSax.be and sax four pax.com SAX4PAX.com right? I got that right didn't I

**Karel** - Yeah, you got it right.

**Jeff** - Excellent, excellent and Karel, and I'm not gonna try your last name because I know how I won't get it right.

**Karel** - Karel is OK

**Jeff** - Thanks so much Karel thanks so much.

**Karel** - It was really great talking to you.

**Jeff** - You too, you too.

**Karel** - Looking forward to meeting you in the future.

**Jeff** - Yes same here same here and don't you come to the states without letting me know. And I can't get to Belgium without you so I know.

**Karel** - That's it. We'll set something up.

**Jeff** - thanks again and I'll and I'll keep in touch with you and let you know when this podcast comes out.

**Karel** - Great have a nice day

**Jeff** - You too

**Karel** - OK bye-bye

**Jeff** - OK bye

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