



BRANDI DISTERHEFT

FROM THE BUS TO BIRDLAND

BY MATTY BANNOND

Kind words have long-term sticking power. Two decades have drifted past since bassist Brandi Disterheft received a compliment from pianist and fellow Canadian Oscar Peterson during a special event in Toronto that recognized his life and work—but those approving remarks still possess a heartening effect. “I was in my 20s and got picked for an all-star band,” Disterheft says. “In front of all those people, Mr. Peterson said such encouraging things about me. It was like a dream.” Today, those dreamy words adorn Disterheft’s website: “She is what we call *serious*.” This month (Aug. 15-17), Disterheft has the serious honor of anchoring a three-night event at Birdland to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of Peterson’s birth. She’ll be joined by drummer Jim Doxas, with a different guest pianist each night, including Rob Botos, Champion Fulton and Ben Paterson. “It’s an honor to be involved in something with Oscar Peterson’s name,” she says. “My mother often played his records, so I grew up listening to that heart-swinging music.”

Disterheft’s American mother was an accomplished jazz organist and her Canadian father played trumpet before launching a career selling music equipment. They nurtured their daughter’s instrumental talent, while another family member inspired the honeyed vocals that sweeten a handful of tracks on Disterheft’s five albums as a leader: her aunt, Angie Jaree, is a GRAMMY-winning session singer. After childhood in Vancouver, the bassist studied in Toronto and regularly commuted to gigs and sessions in NYC via the overnight Greyhound Bus. On one 14-hour trip, her bass tumbled out of the baggage hold with damage that cost \$5,000 to fix. Such trials and tribulations toughened her up. Then iconic bassist Ron Carter helped Disterheft soften her style. “Perhaps because I’m female, I was trying to prove that I had a big sound and I would play with an iron fist,” she explains. “Mr. Carter taught me to finesse my sound, but without playing in a timid way. He was wonderful.”

Listeners got to hear that finesse on *Debut* (Superfran, 2006), a multifarious record where lullaby-like tracks sit beside fanfare-driven Latin numbers, weepy ballads and free-form explorations. Bassists typically get a lot of phone calls and play music from an extensive variety of traditions; the album reflects Disterheft’s wide-reaching appeal and experience. It also won the prestigious (Canadian) JUNO award for “Traditional Jazz Album of the Year.” Most of the bassist and vocalist’s swinging and boppy output reflects her deep affection for seminal jazz recordings and stand-out figures. Alto saxophonist Vincent Herring played on Disterheft’s third album *Gratitude* (Justin Time, 2012). In turn, she played on Herring’s *Uptown Shuffle* and *Night and Day*. “Brandi is a special talent, full of promise and accomplishments,” Herring says. “The first time I heard her play, I knew she would fit in with a number of my projects. Everyone comes to the same conclusion: she’s a very good musician with a beautiful soul.”

Portinho is another veteran figure who came to that conclusion. The percussionist served as a guide for Disterheft’s journey into Brazilian music during a shared

stint performing every weekend at a steakhouse in midtown New York, with pianist Klaus Mueller. Portinho and Mueller both appear on the bassist’s most recent album release, *Surfboard* (Justin Time, 2020), a trio with three tracks that feature recently-turned nonagenarian, veteran tenor saxophonist George Coleman. “We recorded a song from the ‘60s called ‘Naná’ by Moacir Santos,” Disterheft says. “Those Brazilian harmonies are beautiful.” Legendary drummer Louis Hayes recently joined her, as well, for a new recording project that is slated to hit the shelves, download platforms and streaming services this fall. “It’s a quintet album that brings together a band I’ve been working with quite a lot since the pandemic,” she explains. “We played a lot of my original compositions and it’s gratifying to write music, create it and then bring it to life. I’m singing a little bit and I’ve got the young tenor player Bernell Jones with trumpeter Antoine Drye, pianist Anthony Wonsey and drummer Carmen Intorre Jr. on selected tracks. It goes from hard swinging to really romantic. We also put two pop tunes on there with fun videos. Taylor Swift made a billion dollars, so we can make 20 million for sure...!”

Audiences can get an advanced earful of that forthcoming release by heading to Smalls Jazz Club on the last weekend of this month (or by watching the live stream). With her quartet, Disterheft will perform a few songs from her new album sprinkled into the set list. “That’s the great thing about living in New York City,” she says. “Smalls offers awesome opportunities to play and you can hear the masters there. I heard bassist Buster Williams with his huge sound that took over the room and his harmony goes straight to the moon.” Disterheft now passes on the wisdom she has gathered from jazz masters across the city. Alongside teaching private students, she works for Jazz at Lincoln Center, which includes leading workshops and supporting the award-winning WeBop program that provides early-childhood jazz education. She also visits schools as part of the Louis Armstrong Foundation’s education and outreach activities.

During her three nights at Birdland this month, Disterheft will pay homage to Peterson and connect with contemporaries. “I’m really looking forward to the Oscar Peterson Centennial at Birdland,” says Champion Fulton, the opening night’s pianist. “I’ve always been a big fan of Brandi’s work. We’ve played together in large ensembles, but I’ve always wanted to play with her in a more intimate setting.” Two decades may have drifted past since Disterheft met Peterson in Toronto, but as she finds herself now within all-star groups assembled to honor him, the full-circle moment is almost like something from a dream. And it’s a striking illustration of the impact kind words can make when they arrive from the right person at the right time.

For more info visit brandidisterheft.com. Disterheft is at *Cellar Dog* Aug. 4, *Birdland Theater* Aug. 15-17 (part of “Oscar Peterson at 100: Centennial Celebration”) and *Smalls* Aug. 29-30. See *Calendar*.

Recommended Listening:

- Brandi Disterheft — *Debut* (Superfran, 2006)
- Oliver Jones/Hank Jones — *Pleased To Meet You* (Justin Time, 2008)
- Brandi Disterheft — *Gratitude* (Justin Time, 2012)
- Vincent Herring — *The Uptown Shuffle* (Smoke Sessions, 2013)
- Brandi Disterheft (with Harold Mabern & Joe Farnsworth) — *Blue Canvas* (Justin Time, 2015)
- Brandi Disterheft Trio (with George Coleman) — *Surfboard* (Justin Time, 2019)

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Tuesdays (8/9:30 pm) Weekly Jam Session with Diego Voglino

Wednesdays (8/9:30 pm) Adam Cruz Group (8/6)
Hillai Govreen Quintet (8/13)
Tyrone Allen Quartet (8/20)
Leo Genovese “Matreros” (8/27)

Thursdays (5-7 pm) Happy Hour with Max Light
(8/9:30 pm) Adam Kolker, Jeremy Stratton + guests:
Randy Ingram (8/7), Steve Cardenas (8/14), Marc Copland
and Tom Rainey (8/21), David Berkman (8/28)

Fridays (8/9:30 pm) (5-7 pm) Happy Hour with...
Iris Ornig (8/1), Jayla Chee (8/8),
Stephen Byth (8/15), TBA (8/29)

Saturdays (6-7:30) Adam Kolker Duo Series
(8-9:30 pm) Julieta Eugenio (8/2),
Redshift Trio with Josh Deutsch, Nico Soffiato,
Bram Kincheloe (8/9), Noah Garabedian Quartet (8/16),
TBA (8/23), Roberta Piket Quintet (8/30)

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photo by: Danilo Scarpati

<p>Saturday August 9th, 8pm ELLIOTT SHARP 8 strings guitar and bass clarinet</p> <p>LUCIAN BAN piano</p> <p>MARCO CAPPELLI guitar</p>	<p>Sunday August 10th, 8pm MARCO CAPPELLI ACOUSTIC TRIO Marco Cappelli, classical guitar</p> <p>Ken Filiano, double bass</p> <p>Satoshi Takeishi, percussion</p>	<p>Sunday August 10th, 10pm ITALIAN SURF ACADEMY Marco Cappelli, electric guitar</p> <p>Damon Banks, electric bass</p> <p>Dave Miller, drums</p> <p>SPECIAL GUEST: Denver Butson, poet</p>
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