

Local News

A tribute to keep Oscar Peterson's legacy alive

'Oscar, With Love' project in spotlight at Bravo Niagara! event

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NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE — When Kelly Peterson welcomed a visit from a piano technician into her home several years ago, she never thought it would evolve into a unique legacy for her late husband, Oscar Peterson.

Kelly said the piano tech took the Bosendorfer piano apart, serviced and tuned it. It was a seemingly simple instruction, though, that sparked her to create a tribute project to Oscar, who last touched the keys of the piano prior to his death in 2007.

"The technician said to me, 'It needs to be played — pianos are made to be played,'" recalls Kelly, who as the trustee of Oscar's estate manages and promotes the legacy of her late husband. "The simplest idea seemed like a solo piano recorded in our home and in Oscar's

studio."

Of course, it was a little more complex than she anticipated, but Kelly followed through with her vision, overseeing the release of the recording "Oscar, With Love" to help commemorate the 90th birthday of the jazz piano legend in 2015. The three-CD collection features 36 tracks and includes 180 minutes of music, including never-before-heard compositions by Oscar, performed by world-class jazz pianists on the legend's own piano.

"Making the recording was truly a labour of love for everyone involved," said Kelly. "It was very important to hear some of the music Oscar composed that never ended up being released. There is so much he wrote, but people didn't think of him as a composer."

Each of the artists, she said, shared their love and admiration and respect for Oscar through the recording process and put together a tribute that honours him "perfectly".

It gave her goosebumps, she said, as they made the recordings on Oscar's Bosendorfer in his home studio in Mississauga.

"It transported me back to those moments where I could feel like I was alongside him



Bravo Niagara! will pay tribute to the late Oscar Peterson on Jan. 27, with "An Intimate Look at 'Oscar, With Love'", a concert and film showing at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake that will also include a glimpse into the life of the famed pianist by his wife Kelly and daughter Celine.

Courtesy Photo

again," she said, noting she only ever missed one of Oscar's tours after their marriage — when she gave birth to their daughter Celine.

The project has helped Kelly accomplish an important goal she set out to do after her husband's death.

"It's always been my belief that Oscar's music will outlive all of us," she said. "It's my desire to have this music be very vibrant now and to have other musicians playing this music helps accomplish that. It's been my privilege ever since Oscar passed away to preserve and promote his legacy."

The project will be in the spotlight in Niagara-on-the-Lake later this month when Bravo Niagara! presents the third and final of its winter series events. Dubbed "An Intimate Look at Oscar With Love", the Jan. 27 event will feature a Peterson tribute film at Shaw Festival Theatre

at 6 p.m., followed by a reception and concert featuring one of the tribute album performers, Juno-award winning pianist Robi Botos, at 7:30 p.m. in the Shaw's Festival Studio Theatre.

Botos, who will be joined by the former bassist of Oscar's iconic jazz trio Dave Young, has been described as an Oscar protege.

"Oscar heard him play in 2004 and was quite impressed," said Kelly. "He felt Robi was following in the footsteps with his own voice and incredible touch and depth of musicianship."

In fact, she said, the song played by Botos on the tribute project was a different interpretation of Oscar's music — something she was proud to see result from some of the contributing performers.

"I feel that I have finally found a way to help his desire for his music to be here in a new way,"

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Juno-award winning pianist Robi Botos, who has been described as an Oscar Peterson protege, will join the former bassist of Oscar's iconic jazz trio, Dave Young, for the concert portion of "An Intimate Look at 'Oscar With Love'", presented as part of the Bravo Niagara! winter series.

Courtesy Photo

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she said, noting Oscar was passionate about leaving his musical legacy behind for the future.

Kelly said she and Celine are looking forward to the chance to participate in the Bravo Niagara! event, which will feature a question-and-answer session and some personal stories shared by Celine. It will allow them to follow in the footsteps of the film, which Kelly says provides a "different perspective of Oscar ... the feel of the kind of great man he was".

"People were often surprised with how humble and down to earth he was.

He was probably better known outside of Canada, and revered around the world, but the man behind the music was just an average guy," she said, adding she loves hearing about Oscar through the eyes of her daughter.

The concert will be the first of several "Oscar With Love" performances this year, including performances at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in July as part of Canada 150 celebrations — in which the Bosendorfer will be shipped there for the show, and another in Chicago in April at the Symphony Centre's

Orchestra Hall.

Limited tickets are available for the event, ranging from \$60 for just the concert and reception to \$72 for the film, reception and concert. For more information or tickets, visit <http://www.bravoniagara.org> or call 289-868-9177.

MOLLY JOHNSON PERFORMS JAN. 21

The Bravo Niagara! winter series kicked off last weekend at Peller Estates as Divine Brown and DJ 80 Empire — a project featuring Niagara-on-the-Lake's own Rezza Brothers, Adrian and Lucas — performed in the winery's barrel cellar.

The series continues this weekend, as award-winning Canadian jazz icon Molly Johnson comes to Shaw Festival Theatre on Saturday, Jan. 21.

The Juno-award winning vocalist has performed for Bravo Niagara! before, and organizers are excited to have her taking to the stage this time around at Shaw Festival Theatre.

The performance, which is being deemed by festival organizers as a kickoff to Canada's 150th birthday celebrations, begins at 8 p.m. and will run through to 10 p.m.

Tickets range from \$40 to \$60, or \$30 for those under 30. Tickets are available through the Shaw Festival Box Office by calling 1-800-511-7429 or online at shawfest.com.