



HOW THIS LOCAL BAND IS HITTING ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

ORACLEBLUE



Photographed by Pablo Viafara. Edited by Alexander Tavernier.

Myrtle Beach-based band Oracle Blue is challenging norms on all sides: that a band has to fit exclusively within one genre; that Miles Davis and the Grateful Dead don't fit in the same sentence; or that big talent demands high drama. But notably missing with Oracle Blue is the tension that regularly flanked Fleetwood Mac, or the egomaniacal disputes of Axl Rose with, well, everyone. They are just six people who really, truly love music. One conversation with the group quickly proves they aren't a ragtag group of wannabes — they are the real deal.

Liz Kelley-Tavernier – vocals, guitar + songwriting

JP Taylor – keyboard, trumpet

Zachary Douglas – trumpet, keyboard

Wade McMillan – drummer

Timothy Hardwick – vocals, guitar + songwriting

Mckinley Devilbiss – bass, background vocals



All six of the members' passion for the craft is supplemented by higher education and an impressive résumé of performance experience. The four-year-old ensemble originated at Coastal Carolina University as the CCU Jazz Combo under the direction of Dr. Matthew White, an assistant professor of music at the school. Although they've since graduated, the group's members couldn't get enough of playing together. They are honest-to-goodness music nerds, disguised by trendy hairstyles, self-deprecating humor and a darn good sound. Conversation flows easily, but their natural chemistry shines brightest when they play music.

If they had to categorize themselves, Oracle Blue would fall somewhere in the space of funk, blue-eyed soul and jazz — creating a smorgasbord of sounds to form a genre that is entirely their own. When asked about their favorite artists and musical backgrounds, the bandmates' answers span the far corners of iTunes. From jam bands to indie blues, classical jazz to pop/rock, it's hard to pin down any one — or five — musical influences for Oracle Blue's collective sound. And that's a positive thing.

"The more we can include everyone's different influences to create a soup of whatever sound we can make together, the better the writing is going to be," explains Mckinley Devilbiss, who plays bass and sings background vocals.

In addition to penning and playing original songs, the band often performs covers, too. Liz Kelley-Tavernier, the band's vocalist, guitarist and songwriter, says the group enjoys the fluidity and diversity of its repertoire. "We love to take songs that we like or songs that are popular right now and arrange them to incorporate our influences and be more of our style," she says.



Keyboard and trumpet player JP Taylor notes that the group's mash-up of musical tastes works in harmony.

"We all come from different backgrounds. I've always liked jazz a lot — it's always been my go-to genre. But I've also been really into hip-hop and electronic — and at one point," he chuckles, "heavy metal."

The group concedes with laughter.

"I grew up playing guitar," says guitarist and vocalist Tim Hardwick. "My dad listened to a lot of Eric Clapton and Peter Green — that was guitar music to me. Then, going to school and meeting these people playing classical guitar — it was a completely different universe. It's been a really cool growing experience."

"I like the heavy, expressive element of music, but I also like the sensual, intimate side, too," JP says, "and I feel like that's what we're trying to achieve: a balance of those two things."

Drummer Wade McMillan chimes in, saying, "I think the jazz part of it, for us, is pushing boundaries of what is perceived to be the norm."

Oracle Blue rocked the HTC Annual Meeting on August 8 — this featured entertainment event was the hit of the night!



From exhilarating dance sets to on-stage stories not suitable for print, the band laughs as they relive their most memorable moments together. And those experiences aren't by any means limited to the Grand Strand. Not too long ago, the band was honored with an invitation to play the Montreux Jazz Festival in Europe.

"The university helped us with fundraising to help cover expenses," says Liz. "We've received so much community support — we really couldn't have done it without the help of donors from the Myrtle Beach and Horry County area. We're so grateful."

"I also think that studying jazz has helped us with improvisation — not necessarily within a certain style or genre, but just the ability across the board to create and compose on the spot, and interact with each other while we're playing music," says Liz.

According to the band, that's where the most excitement happens during a show.

"That's my favorite part — when somebody in the group does something unexpected," claims trumpet and keyboard player Zach Douglas. "Anything I'm not ready for — that makes it super exciting."

"It's a musical conversation," explains Liz, "and you don't always know exactly what's going to happen, but you enjoy interacting with one another."

"Well, I like it best when people dance!" says JP with a grin.

"Yeah! We were playing the other night and there was a bunch of little kids dancing," says Liz. "To me, that makes it super fun because, at that age, they don't have any hesitations yet and they're just kind of experiencing the joy of music. It's really pure."

The others nod vigorously and start rattling off genuine shout-outs to everyone who's propelled them to where they are today: their professors, directors and other supporters at Coastal Carolina; WAVE 104.1 radio personality Scott Mann; local booker Scott Byrd; a slew of venue owners along the coast; and "anyone that's ever come out to a show."

After being well received on their 2016 European tour, the band put energy into recording an all-original, 4-track EP — drop date TBD. They hope to hit the road again soon, and continue to build a regional audience in Charleston and Wilmington. In the meantime, they'll continue to perform locally at a variety of events and venues ranging from restaurants to music festivals to private functions. Look for a sample of Oracle Blue's music on their website, where you can also keep tabs on upcoming shows and inquire about bookings.

A world tour? A Grammy? Only time will tell what's in store for this bunch. For now, they'll keep playing music, keep writing songs and keep the people dancing. Keep up with them at www.oracleblueband.com, and be sure to find the band on Facebook.

