



February 23, 2015

HAPPENINGS

Debbie Harry on Four Decades of Blondie

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The singer Debbie Harry, best known as the frontwoman of Blondie, will perform at the 25th Annual Tibet House Benefit Concert in March and has an upcoming residency at the Café Carlyle.
Alexander Thompson

On March 5, Carnegie Hall will host Tibet House's **25th Annual Benefit Concert**, whose ongoing aim is to preserve the awareness of Tibetan culture around the world. This year's event has a lineup bursting with talent to match the organization's quarter-century existence, with performances from the composer Philip Glass and the rock band the Flaming Lips. Perhaps most exciting, however, will be the appearance of the legendary troika of rock goddesses Laurie Anderson, Patti Smith and the Blondie frontwoman Debbie Harry. The latter of the trio, still going strong at 69, also has **an upcoming run** at

<http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/23/debbie-harry-four-decades-of-blondie/>



February 23, 2015

the posh Café Carlyle, dozens of blocks north of the lower Manhattan landscape she's been synonymous with for the past 40 years. Harry talked with T about what we can expect from her uptown persona, how she braves the frigid New York winter and why she thinks she became a music and style icon.

Q.

What do you have lined up to perform at the Tibet House gig?

A.

I'm not exactly sure yet. At their previous benefits, I've done two or three songs. If I had to choose, I'd do a standard Blondie. I'm thinking "**Heart of Glass.**" It's kind of appropriate for the benefit.

How so?

Because it's about love and lost love and there's definitely a loss that Tibetans are suffering. The song's about getting beyond that loss, and Tibetans can fully appreciate that sentiment. Beyond that, I'll probably do something that I'm rehearsing for the Carlyle run. Whatever's tightest.

Are you, Laurie and Patti friends?

I don't think we're best friends, but we've known each other for many years. We're definitely associates and I love them both. They're both stunning artists and great writers.

If they asked the three of you to do a song together, which would you choose?

I have no idea. We'd have to choose a cover.

Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman?**"**

No, that one would never come into my head. I think you should be our musical director.

What can we expect from you at the Carlyle?

I'm pulling songs from my solo albums, plus one or two cover songs I'd like to keep a surprise for the time being. Primarily I'll do songs I don't do with Blondie. Definitely more romantic, ballady songs, but not jazz classics, either. I'm doing a couple songs written by Roy Nathanson from **the Jazz Passengers**. I'm working on the show with Blondie's **Matt Katz-Bohen**. I'll do a really terrific version of "**In Love with Love**" and "**French Kissin' (in the USA)**." And I'll have some guest artists jumping up there.



February 23, 2015

What will the mood be? The Carlyle is very posh and uptown for a downtown rocker like yourself.

It'll be prettier than a Blondie show, not as raucous and more laid-back, romantic, thoughtful.

Will you wear vintage pieces from your beloved, the late **Stephen Sprouse?**

Funny you say that, I was just in my closet last night looking at some of his stuff and thinking, "God, that'd be fun to wear." I want to bring a downtown vibe to the Carlyle. I'm not really trying to pass myself off as a jazz chanteuse. I really want to be myself.

How are you getting through this brutal New York winter?

I wear a lot of layers! I have black lined leather boots with a waterproof rubber sole that I got in France years ago. Unfortunately they're starting to go, so I have another pair, Red Wings that I put a really thick lining in. For a coat I have a sort of sleeping bag I could probably wear into the Arctic.

What about winter food?

I made a nice, big chili yesterday — three kinds of beans, onions, garlic, jalapeños, tomato sauce. Sometimes vegetarian, sometimes with turkey. So far today I've made a protein shake with goji powder, chia seeds, a protein supplement and coconut water. I also had a couple bites of egg salad and I'm just about to have a real salad for lunch.

I read a **fascinating quote where you wondered, "Am I making a fool of myself, jumping around on stage, singing these songs from 40 years ago that have nothing to do with my emotional life or anything to do with my social life as they once did? Some of them, however, do have a certain amount of truth in them, so I can live with that." What classic Blondie song has the most resonance for you today?**

It changes from day to day. But what's not in that quote is dealing with the process of getting older and wanting to be realistic and not pretend that I'm something I'm not. But "Heart of Glass" and "**Rapture**" still stand up for me. It's just a matter of updating them musically. That helps a lot.

You've been called the Marilyn Monroe of the past 40 years. Why do you think you became an icon?

Partially, I think it was just having that photogenic kind of face. Also, I was there doing something at a time that was the beginning of an era of style, a switchover from the hippie period into the real intercontinental, international. The styles of the world sort of



February 23, 2015

merged, and I was in the right place at the right time doing the right things. Whether you want to attribute that to great genius or a stroke of luck, it's up to you.

Debbie Harry will play the Café Carlyle from March 24 to April 4, Tuesday through Saturday at 8:45 p.m. and Friday at 8:45 p.m. and 10:45 p.m., rosewoodhotels.com; the Tibet House Benefit Concert takes place March 5 at 7:30 p.m., carnegiehall.com.

This interview has been edited and condensed.