Cello, I Love You!

Santa Ana's Carter Dewberry is devoted to her instrument, sex change and all

| By Kinney Littlefield | Photography by David Tosti |

Admittedly, unconventional musician Carter Dewberry has an uncommon craving for her longtime companion, the curvy Furse cello she calls Amber. "I can do things with her that are just weird," says Dewberry, 33, who makes her Amber-passion public July 25 at Santa Ana's Yost Theater to mark the release of her eclectic new CD, *Origins*. "I can pound on her," Dewberry says of her stringed soul mate. "My moods are expressed on her. I use my cello as percussion. I can get noises with my bow that sound really raucous." Amping the evening's energy is Dewberry's mixed-media repertoire, which weaves classical, jazz and world music with electronic drum beats, a DJ, a strolling didgeridoo player, streaming video and filmed interview segments with the cellist. "It's all about offering people as many different ways to connect with the music as possible," Dewberry says. "It's about breaking down boundaries and showing the limitless possibilities of my instrument."

STRING THEORY Cellist Carter Dewberry is stuck on Amber.

A committed musical activist, Dewberry, who lives in Santa Ana, founded and is president of the board of the L.A.-based Definiens Project, which explores nontraditional ways to help contemporary audiences bond with classical music performance. Currently a member of the Peter Sprague String Consort, she played cello on the soundtrack of the hit Showtime cable series, *The Tudors*, as well as other soundtracks, and has been a soloist with the San Fernando Valley and Battle Creek, Mich., symphony orchestras. Her sexy looks belie her smarts. She holds a doctorate in musical arts from UCLA, plus a first-degree black belt in tae kwon do. Her cello jones began at age eight, when Dewberry saw Lori Singer play the instrument on the '80s TV show, *Fame*. Later, as a teenager, she developed such painful tendonitis that doctors advised her to give up her instrument. She couldn't. And when she finished high school she hooked up with Amber, a graduation gift.

Since then Dewberry has given Amber a sex change. She used to think of her cello as a nameless male. But four years ago Dewberry started craving a less technical orientation and "a more introspective, feminine approach, playing more from emotions and not from the head." Now Dewberry spends hours every day alone with Amber of the female persuasion in the Santa Ana recording studio built by her fiancé, Dennis Lluy, who operates the Yost Theater. "I'm always quote 'locked up in my studio,'" Dewberry says. "I practice techniques and learn pieces and improvise. I get transported a lot. Playing alone in my studio in the middle of the night is so incredible." So is Dewberry's most romantic cello fantasy. She dreams of playing a Bach cello suite at the top of a mountain on a windy, blue-sky day. "I'm either alone or with Dennis, and I've carried my cello up the mountain myself," Dewberry says. The soulful sound of the cello "just speaks to my heart," she adds. "I am not me without my instrument. We're very close." R

Origins *CD release concert by cellist Carter Dewberry, 8PM, July 25, Yost Theater, 307 N. Spurgeon St., Santa Ana. 888.862.9573, yosttheater.com and carterdewberry.com.*