

All About Jazz

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Clairdee: A Love Letter to Lena

By **Dan Bilawsky**

April 22, 2020



A fixture on the Bay Area jazz scene, [Clairdee](#) has established herself as a self-assured singer and an artist who's never content in repeating an idea. Her first three albums move from the studio to the holidays to the stage, demonstrating a high level of comfort in disparate settings and seasons. This fourth project—a tribute to [Lena Horne](#), realized after a decade of thought on the matter—will likely extend that reputation while marking her as a strong conceptualist.

Working closely with pianist/arranger [Jon Herbst](#), who helped shape the music and produce the album, Clairdee delivers a set that remains fresh by foregoing some of Horne's biggest hits, embracing the honoree's words and history, and wearing an attractive gloss in varied shades. Never garish yet always glowing, the production puts a positive spin on smooth ideals while also proving sophisticated in nature. Clairdee and a cast of twenty musicians charm with their direct yet contemporary approach, renowned actress and director Margo Hall delivers interspersed spoken word passages highlighting Horne quotes and truths, and the finished work speaks equally well of the featured, the fêted, and those who follow in the footsteps of the righteous by standing up for themselves and civil rights.

Whether giving "Old Devil Moon" an attractively-textured sheen, exploring the underexposed "I Got A Name," dipping into jazz-inflected spiritual territory with "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," or lightening the mood with a grooving "I Want To Be Happy," Clairdee reflects positively on both her own craft and the path(s) paved by Lena Horne. Equally comfortable working the smart curves of [Billy Strayhorn](#)'s "Something to Live for" in a string-enhanced setting and giving off upbeat calls to activism on [Marcus McLaurine](#)'s "Stand Up," Clairdee finds a fair amount to share about life in Horne's time and in our own. *A Love Letter to Lena* isn't merely a tribute to an artist from our past. It's a statement about giving voice to what's desperately needed in the present.

Track Listing: Old Devil Moon; Home (spoken interlude); I Got A Name; Maybe; Hollywood (spoken interlude); Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child; Seminar with Drinks (spoken interlude); I Want to Be Happy; Soul Mates (spoken interlude); Something To Live For; I'm Free (spoken interlude); Believe in Yourself; The Movement (spoken interlude); Stand Up.

Personnel: [Clairdee](#): vocalist; [Jon Herbst](#): piano; [Ron Belcher](#): bass; [Doug Miller](#): bass; [Deszon Claiborne](#): drums; [Lance Dresser](#): drums; [Johnny Hoy](#): guitar; [Dave Bell](#): guitar; [Mario Guarneri](#): trumpet; [Charles McNeal](#): saxophone, tenor; [Emily Onderdonk](#): viola; [Ashling Cole](#): vocalist; [Bryan Dyer](#): vocalist; [Tony Lindsay](#): vocalist. Margo Hall: narrator; Paul Hale: cello; Philip Santos: violin; Kenny Washington: vocals; Janice Maxie-Reid: vocals; Zoe Ellis: vocals; Regina Carter: violinist.