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Clairdee’s “A Love Letter to Lena” is smooth, smart jazz

By **Dodie Miller-Gould**

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Singer Clairdee honors Lena Horne on her fourth recording as a leader, “A Love Letter to Lena.” The recording will be available March 6, 2020. With guest vocalists, a spoken word actress and most of all, a smooth jazz sound, Clairdee plays up the principles of Horne that became those she clung to from childhood. The result is a recording that fulfills not just from good-sounding music, but with unexpected heartfelt sentiments.



About Clairdee The veteran singer has been a veteran of the San Francisco jazz scene for 25 years. She has also performed in concert halls, nightclubs and at festivals around the US.

Clairdee’s parents introduced her to the music of Horne when she was just four years old. The performer’s qualities of intelligence, dignity, talent and willingness to fight for what’s right were ingrained in Clairdee, and stuck with her into adulthood.

Clairdee has led her own band and performed with other well-known musicians. She has three other releases as a leader. Clairdee came to know Horne’s music through her parents. When her mother passed away in 2007, the lessons that were imparted from her remained. Then, when the 2016 election occurred, Clairdee knew that she had to do something meaningful. The result is a recording that captures the work of Horne, and the ideas of creating identity and standing up for principles.

The sound of “A Love Letter to Lena” by Clairdee The overall soundscape is smooth jazz. The instrumental portion of the music never overwhelms the mellifluous voice of Clairdee. In fact, the two aspects seem to support each other. This can be heard beautifully on songs like “Old Devil Moon.” Clairdee’s phrasing is playful and her expressiveness finds its way to listeners by virtue of her forthright performance style. It is engaging and beautiful.

“I Got A Name,” is a surprise on the recording, because some audiences might not realize that Horne recorded a version of the Jim Croce classic in 1975. Here, it is infused with Gospel influences, gentle, soulful harmonies and a piano riff that sounds stolen from Sunday morning. In the hands of Clairdee, listeners can hear the song’s application to the ideologies often adopted by groups of people who have been oppressed. “Moving ahead so life won’t pass me by,” is a strong sentiment, even when it sung in gorgeous harmony.

One of the nice touches of the recording that makes it sound more like a public radio program than a CD, is the interspersed of an actress as Horne, telling about an aspect of the singer, actress and activist’s life. Interested listeners can learn about Horne’s biography in her own words.

Clairdee has taken the tribute album one step further. By amplifying the musical performances with notes from the artist to be honored, she not only entertains audiences, she teaches them. That does not always happen in any music genre. “A Love Letter to Lena” certainly shows Clairdee’s appreciation of Horne. It shows through in every note, every word.