

All About Jazz

"Clairdee displays her vast and subtle range of vocal colors and flair... 'A Love Letter to Lena' offers a perfect balance of great music and message, delivered by a fine singer and ensembles. It is a terrific performance and an involving, thought-provoking production."

Clairdee: A Love Letter to Lena

By Nicholas F. Mondello

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Revered decades after her passing, [Lena Horne](#) has remained an icon in the realms of music, stage & screen, and civil rights activism. With *A Love Letter to Lena*, San Francisco-based vocalist [Clairdee](#) assumes the task of saluting Horne by way of selections from [Billy Strayhorn](#) and other great American composers. And the inclusion of narration and quotes from Horne adds a special perspective and further poignancy to this fine musical effort.

"Old Devil Moon," originally recorded by Horne as a Latin feature, opens things with a hip-grooved arrangement above which Clairdee invokes vocal magic. The late Jim Croce's pop hit "I Got a Name," covered straight, and following commentary relative to Horne's difficult early days, is a perfect selection for Clairdee to superbly express Horne's self-assured attitude. The infrequently-recorded "Maybe," written by Billy Strayhorn (a Pittsburgh friend of Horne's) gets a contemporized arrangement as Clairdee delivers smoothly, and Charles McNeal plays a soulful sax solo.

The inclusion of narrated Horne quotes—delivered by actress Margo Hall—is a brilliant production choice which dovetails emotionally head-on with the ensuing selection. For example, after "Horne" speaks of her encounters with Hollywood racism, Clairdee exudes both despair and hope on "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" over John Herbst's piano. The track is dark and dramatic without being overly melancholy and depressing. It hits a hard, emotional belly blow.

"I Want to Be Happy" is a hip take on the old novelty. It is reharmonized and delivered in a samba-like groove. It is marvelously upbeat and sparks, along with Clairdee, superbly effervescent over the party-like percussive rhythm bed. It is a highlight track. "Soulmates"—a spoken interlude telling of Lena's deep personal and professional relationship with Billy Strayhorn—leads into a lush take on "Something to Live For." Here, as elsewhere, Clairdee displays her vast and subtle range of vocal colors and flair with a line. "Stand Up," a speak-sung soul groove closes the session offering confidence and musical motivation for better, more equitable days ahead.

A Love Letter to Lena offers a perfect balance of great music and message, delivered by a fine singer and ensembles. It is a terrific performance and an involving, thought-provoking production.

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.