

Clairdee, a 21st Century Jazz Vocalist, Educator, Activist

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Soulful, swinging, and stylish, the music of San Francisco-based jazz singer Clairdee epitomizes jazz's empowering imperative. More than a masterly interpreter of lyrics with a lustrous, velvety tone, she embodies the tradition's twinned legacy of standing for social justice with glamor and guts. Deeply informed by the music's departed masters, Clairdee puts a personal stamp on whatever she sings, a gift aptly described by the inimitable Nancy Wilson. "In the tradition of all great vocalists," Wilson said of Clairdee, "she infuses each song with her own unique style while always remaining true to the song itself."

She covers a lot of stylistic ground on her latest project, which celebrates the iconic star Lena Horne, one of the 20th century's most consequent performers. Released in the winter of 2020, her critically hailed album *A Love Letter to Lena* is a deeply personal tribute to the barrier-shattering African-American actress, singer, nightclub entertainer, World War II pin-up, and civil rights activist who died in 2010 at the age of 92.

"She meant so much to me in so many different ways," Clairdee says. "The example she set, the role model that she was for many African Americans was very powerful. I learned a lot about what I do and how I present myself on stage just by watching her. She was always dressed impeccably, completely professional, despite all the discrimination and mistreatment."

A 2018 recipient of the Bay Area Jazz and Blues Artist Lifetime Achievement Award, Clairdee has a long track record as a passionate advocate for music education. She is a collegiate professor of Jazz Voice at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and has taught at the University of California Berkeley Jazz Department, and Diablo Valley College.

Since moving to the Bay Area in 1986, she's performed almost every style of music, from R&B and cabaret to country and soul. But in the mid-90s she decided to focus on jazz, honing a singular sound while working with jazz luminaries such as trumpeter Eddie Henderson, saxophonist John Handy and pianist Roland Hanna. She gained national attention when legendary bassist, manager and NEA Jazz Master John Levy built a show around her and guitarist/vocalist Henry Johnson.

Whether she's celebrating Lena Horne or delivering a carefully honed program of standards, her aim is the same. "My mission," Clairdee says, "is to engage, uplift and build community through music —creating narrative that inspires beyond the stage."

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