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## Clairdee inspires with A Love Letter To Lena

By **Pop Magazine (Berlin)**

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To be truly inspired is an experience many crave for. To be moved to the point of inspired expression is a feat worthy of admiration and acclaim. For jazz singer Clairdee it was her youthful captivation by a woman who demonstrated remarkable prowess as a vocalist, actress, and civil rights activist that transformed her life and started her on a journey to music. “A Love Letter To Lena,” the latest record by San Francisco based Clairdee, is an exquisite collection of songs paying homage to the late Lena Horne, adorned with sincerity, musical artistry, and heartfelt emotion in every soulful note.

Clairdee’s veneration for Horne has been blossoming ever since she was four years old. Her introduction to the multipotentialite came through her parents who themselves admired not just Lena the talented singer, but Lena the intelligent, passionate woman. For Clairdee, this album is therefore a tribute not only to Horne but especially to her parents and the like-minded souls instrumental in and impacted by the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, in which Horne herself participated. Though considerations for this project began back in 2009, Clairdee’s efforts to further immortalize the wonderful work of a woman who fought for equal rights in America couldn’t be more aptly timed. This of course in light of the current resurgence of national racially charged discussion, protests and riots sparked by the senseless murder of George Floyd, an African-American man, by police in Minneapolis two weeks ago.

Even as a passionate advocate herself, particularly for music education, Clairdee has cemented herself as one of the staples on the contemporary jazz scene. After 25 years of performing and several years of working as a professor of music, the seasoned singer has still managed to expand her identity as a musical visionary and creative conceptualist with her new project. “A Love Letter to Lena” sidesteps a new-century interpretation of Horne’s biggest hits to treat listeners to a carefully crafted setlist which paints an intimate portrait of the life and conviction of the late artist. Clairdee’s thrilling vocals and spirited tones offer much to be explored and enjoyed with each song.

With the help of a cast of over twenty musicians including pianist and arranger John Herbst, songs like “Old Devil Moon” and “I Got A Name” offer attractive rhythmic textures that invite and soothe. The reflective tune “I Want To Be Happy” is gleefully revitalized with effervescent lead vocals and backing harmony. Featured too are tracks originally played by Billy Strayhorn,

Horne's close friend, including the poignant "Something To Live For" which showcases Clairdee's dynamic range and is given new pulse with a sublime violin accompaniment by Regina Carter.

As if the arrangements weren't powerful enough, the album is also punctuated by brilliantly voiced narrations of Lena Horne quotes. Such inclusions succeed in masterfully dovetailing selections such as the emotionally weighty "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child" which follows an interlude of Horne's description of her encounters with racism in Hollywood. Matching the dramatic nature of such a track is the album-closing "Stand Up", a spoken-sung rally cry to engage in meaningful activism in today's sociocultural and sociopolitical climate. The use of impassioned excerpts of speeches met by a host of captivating voices drive the message of action and hope home.

"A Love Letter to Lena" is reflective, emotional, uplifting and inspiring as much as it is inspired. Clairdee's vision and patience in creating this record is evident and nothing short of exceptional. Where unity, solidarity and strength is needed across the peoples of today, this album offers a snapshot of the resilience that came before us and the convictions that can help us move forward together. *Clairdee - A Love Letter To Lena* is a wonderful tribute to Lena Horne that takes on a life of its own. This music is a celebration of life and the career of one of the greatest entertainers to grace this planet. Don't miss out on this one.

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