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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 14, 2020

### MEDIA INQUIRIES/REVIEW COPIES:

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**ELEGANT, SOULFUL VOCALIST CLAIRDEE**  
**HONORS THE MUSIC AND SPIRIT OF LENA HORNE WITH**  
***A LOVE LETTER TO LENA***  
**Available March 6, 2020 on Declare Music**

Jazz singer **CLAIRDEE** has admired Lena Horne since she was four years old. Her mother and father instilled in her their admiration for Horne's intelligence, dignity, talent, and willingness to fight for what's right – qualities they wanted to see in all of their eight children. Clairdee pays homage to Horne on her newest project, ***A LOVE LETTER TO LENA***, a spirited and inspiring album that integrates inventive arrangements of songs by Billy Strayhorn and contemporary composers with Clairdee's compelling storytelling.

A mainstay on the San Francisco jazz scene, Clairdee has been performing for over 25 years in concert halls, festivals and nightclubs from Monterey, Edinburgh, Tokyo, Bangkok, Toronto, Paris, Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia, to New York, New Hampshire, San Francisco and points in between. In addition to leading her world-class touring band, she has performed with some of America's most notable jazz masters, including Dick Hyman, Bucky Pizzarelli, Houston Person, Cyrus Chestnut, Ken Peplowski, and the late Nancy Wilson. Clairdee's previous recordings as a leader, ***Music Moves***, ***This Christmas***, and ***Destination Moon***, all received critical acclaim and helped cement her reputation as one of the top singers on the scene today.

Clairdee received the *Bay Area Jazz and Blues Artist Lifetime Achievement Award* in 2018 for her ongoing commitment to the community. A passionate advocate for music education, she is a part-time professor of Jazz Voice at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and a member of the Artist Advisory Committee and active mentor in the Bay Area-based non-profit Jazz in the Neighborhood. She is also a long-time teaching artist with the San Francisco Symphony's education department.

Clairdee began thinking seriously about putting together a very special project to honor Horne back in 2009. "The 2016 election helped me decide how I wanted to approach the Lena project. I didn't want it to be merely a tribute album of her greatest hits. My mother passed in 2007, and I wanted the album to reflect my parents' hopes for their children through the lens of Lena's efforts for civil rights and equality. I also wanted to include a few songs that people may not be so familiar with."

Clairdee chose her repertoire and then called on pianist/arranger **JON HERBST** to help her arrange and produce the album. Herbst had also co-produced *This Christmas*. Clairdee spent three years shaping the project for maximum effect with interludes of narration and quotes by Horne marvelously voiced by **MARGO HALL**, an actress/director/playwright whose stage work includes roles in productions of August Wilson's *Fences* and *Gem of the Ocean*. "I'd already sent her the script with notes on each section describing the mood I wanted to convey," Clairdee explains. "When Margo got to the studio, I had her listen to a few songs to get a feel for the project then she did her thing!"

Clairdee also brought on board for **A LOVE LETTER TO LENA** some of the top musicians in Northern California, including Herbst on piano and keyboard, **RON BELCHER** and **DOUG MILLER** on bass, **DESZON CLAIBORNE** and **LANCE DRESSER** on drums, **JOHN HOY** and **DAVE BELL** on guitar, **MARIO GUARNERI** on trumpet, and **CHARLES MCNEAL** on tenor sax. She's also backed on several tunes by singers **ASHLING COLE**, **BRYAN DYER**, and **ZOE ELLIS**, who are members of the a cappella ensemble SoVoSò, a spinoff from Bobby McFerrin's Voicestra. **A LOVE LETTER TO LENA** features several musical guests, including violinist **REGINA CARTER**, a friend whom Clairdee met backstage at Nancy Wilson's 70th Birthday Concert at the Hollywood Bowl, and vocalists **TONY LINDSAY**, **JANICE MAXIE-REID**, and **KENNY WASHINGTON**.

The album opens with "Old Devil Moon," arranged to mirror the instrumentation of the classic George Shearing Quintet of piano, guitar, vibes, bass and drums. Clairdee is backed by the three members from SoVoSò. "Jon and I considered me doing all of the backgrounds myself," explains Clairdee. "But I decided I wanted other vocal textures – male and female. Many of these songs are about community and I wanted that reflected in the vocal palate as well."

Horne did a version of "I Got A Name" in 1975. It was first released in 1973 in memory of singer Jim Croce just a day after he died in a plane crash. The lyrics resonated with Clairdee, especially when she sings "... and I carry it with me like my daddy did," which made her think of her father who died at 48 from lung cancer when she was just 12.

Billy Strayhorn and Horne were dear friends, and he wrote "Maybe" just for her. "I honor her arrangement in the intro...then we give it a lil' kick!" says Clairdee. Horne sang the Negro spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," on a 1941 recording backed by a full orchestra. Clairdee taps into the song's deep sadness accompanied only by Herbst's soulful piano. The album includes a modernized, spirited version of "I Want to Be Happy." "Several of the songs on this project are very weighty. This is the one where we get the thang smokin'," says Clairdee "I came up with the idea for the vocalized 'horns' and beatboxing, then Jon and I buffed it into a party on wax."

"Something to Live For" is another Strayhorn tune. Clairdee's rendition masterfully conveys the longing and melancholy of the lyric that Strayhorn composed the year after he graduated from high school. The tune features Regina Carter's superb violin work. Horne sang "Believe in Yourself" in the motion picture version of "The Wiz" in which she played Glinda The Good Witch. Clairdee sings this over a gentle New Orleans second line march rhythm.

The album closes with "Stand Up," written by Clairdee's long-time friend Marcus McLaurine with lyrics by Keva Singletary Youngblood. The song is Clairdee's declaration that through involvement and activism we can all work for positive change. Guest vocalists Tony Lindsay, Janice Maxie-Reid and Kenny Washington join Clairdee, and excerpts from speeches by fiery New Jersey State Senator Cory Booker bring the message home.

"This album is not only my way of saying thank you to Lena for how she touched the lives of me and my family, it is a way for me to honor my parents' legacy and those of the millions of women and men that fought for civil rights. The lessons of their lives are resoundingly relevant right now. It is up to us to keep up the work. This is my 21st century call to acknowledgement and action."

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**A LOVE LETTER TO LENA** will be available in stores and online everywhere on March 6, 2020.

**Online:** [clairdee.com](http://clairdee.com) | [facebook.com/Clairdee](https://facebook.com/Clairdee) | [twitter.com/Clairdee](https://twitter.com/Clairdee) | [Instagram.com/clairdee](https://Instagram.com/clairdee)