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Lauren Sevian: Bliss



By **PAUL RAUCH**
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Since joining the Mingus Big Band in 2003, baritone saxophonist [Lauren Sevian](#) has been opening eyes in the saxophone world, especially in the exclusive club that includes those dedicated primarily to the bari. Her style more resembles that of modern tenor players such as [Donny McCaslin](#) and [Mark Turner](#), while retaining the pure sound and articulation one might expect from a true baritone master. She as well has been a powerful role model for female jazz musicians and the current movement to achieve gender equality in jazz.

With her new release *Bliss* (Posi-Tone, 2018), Sevian has assembled a notable cast for nine of her original compositions, and one from alto saxophonist [Alexa Tarantino](#). The two saxophonists are joined by a world class rhythm section that includes bassist [Christian McBride](#), pianist [Robert Rodriguez](#), and drummer [E.J. Strickland](#).

On the opening salvo, "Triple Water," the listener is immediately struck by Sevian's bold, penetrating tonality. Her marvelous technique has an identifiable bop sensibility accentuating a modern approach that is broadened by her front line partner, alto saxophonist Tarantino. Whether playing within harmonized melodic structure or soloing, the two saxophonists have a communicative compatibility that sets this record apart from most. McBride, not one to sit on the sidelines, provides not only strong foundational playing, but brilliant soloing as well. This opening track states definitively that McBride, Rodriguez, and Strickland aren't just along for

the ride.

The title track sheds light on Sevia's more ethereal side, expressing this elegant melody with stylish, lush, romantic phrasing. Her voicings are vocal in nature, and accompanied as such by Rodriguez, playing harmonies sparingly, supportively. Sevia's composition has a meditative feel to it, her atmospheric bursts of melodic energy relaying a sense of warm contentment. She plays with an emotional sensibility so rarely heard on the baritone.

"Lamb and Bunny" is unabashedly bebop, with Sevia's playing evoking images of bop/hard bop baritone masters [Pepper Adams](#) and [Gary Smulyan](#). While she plainly demonstrates her superb articulation and thick tonality, Sevia's sense of timing and cadence, her melodic imagery in her soloing is what makes one believe she has firmly grasped the identity of being an important voice, an inevitable generational mentor for the baritone saxophone. She doesn't see the obstacles so many attribute to the instrument, and is unafraid to venture down untrodden musical byways.

Alto saxophonist Tarantino, a noted leader herself, adds a touch of color and intrigue to this recording that keeps the listener attached in a sense of anticipation. She doesn't fall into the Cannonball trap, or closely resemble anything remotely Parkeresque. She certainly has those classic players at the base of her musical vocabulary, but plays with an edge of originality. Throughout *Bliss*, she adds brilliant soloing, culminating in a joyous two saxophone romp of "Lamb and Bunny."

The closing piece, "Minimal Moves," again highlights the two saxophone front line. The baritone, and alto fit together seamlessly playing the head in, and opening up to exquisite soloing that is fresh, inspired, and original, supported by a top shelf trio that plays not behind, but through the music in a spirited, communal sense.

Sevia has the resume to be the next big thing in the baritone world. Perhaps she already is. Unquestionably, she is adding different colors to the legacy of the instrument. On *Bliss*, she adds to her own legacy in splendid fashion

Track Listing: Triple Water; Square One; Bliss; Bluesishness; Goldies Chance; Miss Lady; Lamb and Bunny; In The Loop; Evergreen; Minimal Moves.

Personnel: Lauren Sevia: baritone saxophone; Alexa Tarantino: alto saxophone; Robert Rodriguez: piano; Christian McBride: bass; E.J. Strickland: drums.

Title: [Bliss](#) | Year Released: 2019 | Record Label: [Posi-Tone Records](#)

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