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Alexa Tarantino: *Clarity* (Posi-Tone)

A review of the saxophonist's second album

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The cover of *Clarity* by Alexa Tarantino

I first noticed Alexa Tarantino at the Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy in 2012. Ryan Truesdell had brought 26 students from the Eastman School of Music to perform his *Gil Evans Project*. Tarantino was not one of the orchestra's featured soloists, but Truesdell told me she had quickly picked up several new reed instruments because the project needed them, including bassoon. She had just turned 20.

Fast forward eight years. Tarantino now has a bachelor's degree from Eastman and a master's from Juilliard, and lights up rooms when she solos. On her second album, *Clarity*, she plays alto and soprano saxophones, flute and alto flute. The broad timbral palette is intriguing for a quartet record.

She opens on flute with a flawless rendering of "Through," her own gradually intensifying modal piece. She sings "Gregory Is Here" on soprano saxophone, spilling ecstatic variations on one of Horace Silver's most alluring themes. On alto saxophone, she portrays the wistful melody of Luis Demetrio's "La Puerta" in a single graceful gesture that feels effortless.

Superior technique enables her to sound unhurried at any tempo, and chops also allow her to relax into her first priority: melody. The only well-known tune here is the last track, "My Ship." Who knew that Kurt Weill's iconic song was meant for alto flute? Tarantino lavishes that instrument's rich, sensuous sonorities upon Weill's haunting melody. (The solos of pianist Steven Feifke and bassist Joe Martin are also rapt.)

She is a straight-ahead mainstream player who will continue to grow, but there is no need to wait for her future. Based on the last track here, Alexa Tarantino's ship has sailed.

Preview, buy or download *Clarity* on Amazon!

Alexa Tarantino Leads Charge for a More Inclusive Jazz Scene