

# REEDIST ALEXA TARANTINO FLICKERS & SPARKS ON FORMIDABLE 'FIREFLY' LP (ALBUM REVIEW)

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*Firefly* is multi-reedist **Alexa Tarantino's** third album for the Posi-tone label, following her excellent 2020 *Clarity* and 2018's *Winds of Change*. This writer put *Clarity* on the year's best list for another outlet. As per the case with most releases from Posi-Tone, Tarantino (who plays alto & soprano saxophones, flute, alto flute & clarinet) works with vibraphonist **Behn Gillece**, who's *Still Doing Our Thing* we covered just last month with this same rhythm section – pianist **Art Hirahara**, bassist **Boris Kozlov**, and drummer **Rudy Royston**. Each supporting band member contributed a composition and Tarantino composed five. The two covers are from one of her main heroes, Wayne Shorter. Throughout the album, Tarantino aims to present a musical message of poise, joy, and hope that shines brightly into the darkness through these pandemic shrouded times, a leap forward in Tarantino's compositional progress.

Keep in mind if Tarantino's name is new to you, she has many more credible admirers than just this writer. Wynton Marsalis is quoted, "*Alexa is a one-woman wrecking crew, an indomitable force for expression, education, and absolute excellence.*" The album begins with Hirahara's "Spider's Dance," so named due to the pianist's research on the origins of the leader's last name. The dance refers to the mating dance of the Peacock spider. We hear glistening turns from the composer and Gillece as Tarantino plays gorgeously on alto. The reflective "Mindful Moments," by Gillece, has Tarantino on alto flute in a lovely flowing piece that reminds the leader of a still body of water. Thus, she kept the melody still and slow-paced while the harmonies of the band provide the movement underneath the melody. We get the energetic post-bop in Royston's "Move of the Spirit" with Tarantino soaring on soprano. The first of the two Shorter compositions is "Iris," with the leader expressively playing his haunting melody on alto as Gillece and Hirahara comp sensitively.

The centerpiece of the album is its second half, Tarantino's "A Moment in Time" suite (along with interjections from Boris Kozlov and Wayne Shorter) designed to depict an artist's mind, specifically during quarantine. "Daybreak" signifies "morning" in the artist's world, the feeling of calm and peace before the inspiration strikes. "Surge Fughetta" is a wonderful introduction to "Surge Capacity", composed by Boris Kozlov who wrote this fugue for alto flute, vibraphone, and bass, highlighting some of my compositional themes in the suite and sounding completely different from anything else on the album. "Surge Capacity" represents the moment when the inspiration strikes, or the work begins, whether inspired or not. Tarantino certainly conveys bursting inspiration though in her soaring alto solo, answered vigorously first by Hirahara, then Royston. The playful "La Donna Nel Giardino – The Lady in the Garden" is the spirit of freedom and independence connoted by the leader on her free-spirited flute.

Changing it up, with Hirahara on Rhodes, is the frenzied "Rootless Ruthlessness," reflecting the artist's angst as he/she contemplates how their creation will be received. Tarantino is in free-blowing mode on both alto and clarinet. "Lady Day" from Wayne Shorter intervenes as a reflective pause with her emotive alto, as it is not part of the suite. "Violet Sky" represents the artist recharging for the next surge of inspiration or creativity, a return to the happy place where we stated in "Daybreak" although this is in a ballad mode, representing "evening" in the cycle of a day as the composer imagined the changing hues of a slow sunset over the ocean.

Finally "The Firefly Code" has mesmerizing turns from Gillece and finds Tarantino fittingly back on the flute. It also features Royston's most extensive solo and an abrupt ending as that flicker of light extinguished in a blink. It's that spark of light and hope to reemerge stronger and brighter coming out of the pandemic. With her creativity, versatility, and the many gorgeous passages that flow through these pieces, Tarantino is already an early candidate for a "Best Of" year-end list again.