

# STEP TEMPEST

CREATIVE MUSIC SHOULD CHALLENGE US, MAKE US THINK AND MOVE US FORWARD. MUSIC CAN MAKE ONE'S LIFE BETTER AND FULLER, ONE OF LIFE'S GREATEST PLEASURES.

THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2021

## Springing and Swinging!

One of the joys of Spring (for some of us) is opening the windows, sitting outside, and listening to music. Here are three viable candidates for backyard (or indoor) enjoyment.



Photo: Anna Yatskevich

Saxophonist, flutist, composer, and arranger **Alexa Tarantino** is a busy musician. She plays with DIVA! Jazz Orchestra, with Arturo O'Farrill & His Latin- Jazz Orchestra, with the Steven Feifke Big Band, with vocalist Cecile McLorin Salvant, and others. Ms. Tarantino is adept on soprano and alto saxophones, flute, alto flute, and clarinet who serves her well in her various musical assignments.

She's also an educator serving on the Faculty of Jazz at Lincoln Center as well as the founder and director of the Rockport Jazz Workshop (Rockport, Ma). Posi-Tone Records producer **Marc Free** has posited Ms. Tarantino in his "curated" groups such as **Lioness**, **Works for Me**, and **Something Blue** plus paired her with baritone saxophonist Lauren Sevian. She's issued two CDs as a leader for Posi-Tone and has been a featured soloist in several ensembles.



The third album under her name, "**Firefly**", finds the young lady in the company of **Behn Gillece** (vibraphone), **Art Hirahara** (piano, Fender Rhodes), **Boris Kozlov** (bass), and **Rudy Royston** (drums and percussion). The four gentlemen are Free's choice for his "Lockdown" group as they have become (along with

drummer **Donald Edwards**) his rhythm section during the pandemic recording sessions. All but two of the 12 tracks on the disk are

originals by the leader and group members with a pair of Wayne Shorter tunes ("**Iris**" and "**Lady Day**") filling out the program. The album opens with the pianist's "**Spider's Dance**", a medium-tempo tune with a sweet melody for alto sax and the comforting vibes providing a soft cushion for the song. Gillece contributes the next piece, "**Mindful Moments**" which finds the leader on flute and Hirahara on Rhodes. There's a gentle quality to both of these tracks with the latter rising on the easy push from the bass and drums plus the sweet combination of Rhodes, vibes and flute.

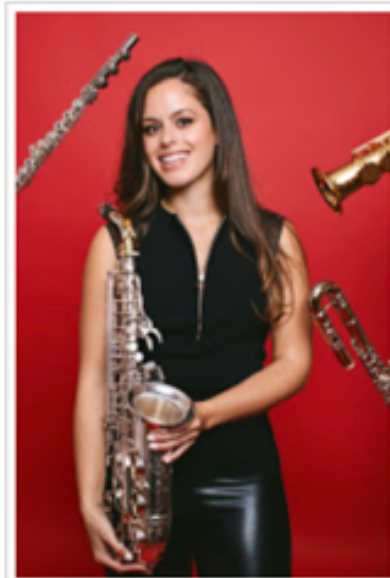


Photo: Anna Yatskevich

Ms. Tarantino's piece, "**Daybreak**", has the funky feel of Marvin Gaye's "**What's Goin' On**" with the insistent nature of the Motown classic. Kozlov and Royston do a fine job of making sure the music has a groove and always moves forward. "**Surge Capacity**" leaps out of the speakers on top of rapid "walking" bass lines and frolicking drums. Ms. Tarantino and pianist Hirahara really get fired-up when it's their time to solo plus they enter into a delightful "trading fours" with Royston before all is said and done. Rhodes and bass introduce the powerful "**Rootless**

**Ruthlessness**"; when the band enters, the music scurries forward propelled by the rampaging drums and Kozlov's furious bass lines. When the alto sax solo begins, the band has dropped into slow-motion with Royston all over his drums, Hirahara running his hands up and down the Rhodes, and the bassist sending urgent musical messages. Soon, the music is at break-neck speed and rushing to its climax.

Ms. Tarantino caresses Wayne Shorter's melody on "**Lady Day**", the lovely ballad evoking Billie Holiday's unique way of presenting a melody. Kozlov's lovely bowed bass solo is a highlight as is the leader's ever-so-sweet alto solo. Shorter's "**Iris**" is also a ballad for alto sax and features an impressionistic piano solo, lovely colors from Gillece, and the intelligent work of the bassist and drummer.

*"Firefly"* closes with *"The Firefly Code"*, another medium-tempo piece that is dedicated to the resilience of people as well as musicians since the pandemic began. The sound of the flute supported by the vibes feels comforting plus there is a surprising drum solo that raises the intensity level; listen for the "surprise" ending! Overall, *"Firefly"* is an aural treat on which **Alexa Tarantino** shares the spotlight with her four-piece band. She is generous in sharing the spotlight, the songs do not dawdle with only a pair over six minutes, and the sound quality is clear and cool. Enjoy!

For more information, go to <https://alexatarantino.com/>.