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Azar Lawrence: Prayer for My Ancestors & Speak The Word
 Azar Lawrence - Published: November 7, 2009

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Azar Lawrence
Prayer for My Ancestors
 Furthermore
 2009

Azar Lawrence
Speak the Word
 Zarman Productions
 2009

The tenor and soprano saxophonist [Azar Lawrence](#) should be known to all by his seminal work with pianist [McCoy Tyner](#), especially on the double LP set *Enlightenment*, which is one of the most powerful recordings of the '70s. The two modern CDs reviewed here display a saxophonist with no less power and skill but perhaps an organically broader pallet of expression. Between *Prayer for My Ancestors* and *Speak the Word* there are beautiful ballads, lyrical bossa novas, songs sung in Spanish, songs from Africa featuring gorgeous kora (African lute) playing and of course, blazing modal jazz. Every track on both of these CDs features a master saxophonist, blowing expressively clear and strong solos throughout.

For the listeners that love that '70s modal jazz sound, *Prayer for My Ancestors* might be the "must-have" CD of these two releases. The core quartet of Lawrence, pianist Nate Morgan, bassist Henry Franklin and drummer [Alphonse Mouzon](#) (with [Roy McCurdy](#) on "Swinging in Exile" instead of Mouzon) is relentlessly energetic and deeply expressive. "Open Sesame" begins with a brief tenor sax invocation over piano and percussion tremolos swirling around before the drums kick in the swinging groove. Franklin's quarter notes drive Mouzon and Morgan to place powerful rhythmic accents under Lawrence's passionate tenor flight. Morgan's solo, while possibly influenced by Tyner, is very impressive and a sincerely unique and powerful musical statement. Franklin's solo is also beautiful and leads perfectly back to the final statement of the melody. "Thokole" is quite striking for a number of reasons: the opening sound of the kora and acoustic guitar sonically turn away from the powerful jazz sound of the opening tracks, displaying a totally different texture. Ibrahima Ba's vocals are no less powerful but with a genuinely touching sense of beauty; Lawrence's soprano sax makes this performance an honest and heartfelt fusion of American jazz and African

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when the night is new

traditional music. "The Baker's Daughter" turns up the voltage considerably with the addition of Nolan Shaheed's intensely virtuosic trumpet. This tune also features a drum solo by Mouzon, who also powered the bands of McCoy Tyner as well as **Larry Coryell**'s **Eleventh House** and Weather Report. "Ode to Pharoah" is a gentle, lyrical piece while "Swinging in Exile" features some very hot tenor soloing. Every track on this CD hits the target; there are no dead spots.

Speak the Word might be a little more self-conscious in its attempt to be stylistically diverse, but is also a very direct musical statement from a very capable and honest saxophonist. "Revelations" is a great tune to begin a CD with because, while true to Lawrence's modal jazz roots, it's accessible enough to welcome anyone in. A truly beautiful track, this time Lawrence revels on soprano saxophone with great support from Morgan once more on piano, Trevor Ware (bass) and Fritz Wise (drums). Tyner's "Aisha" receives a stunning rendition with Morgan's captivating solo being totally free of Tyner-isms that a lesser pianist might abuse in a misguided attempt at "tribute." "Vestida de Solea (Dressed in Solitude)" features acoustic guitar (uncredited) and vocals in Spanish, but also happens to feature some evocative soprano sax soloing by Lawrence.

Tracks and Personnel

Prayer for My Ancestors

Tracks: Open Sesame; Under Tanzainan Skies; Thokole; *Prayer for My Ancestors*; The Baker's Daughter; Swinging In Exile; Ode to Pharoah; Linda G..

Personnel: Azar Lawrence: tenor and soprano saxophones; Nolan Shaheed: trumpet Nate Morgan: piano; Henry Franklin: bass; Alphonse Mouzon: drums; Roy McCurdy: drums; Tony Duma: bass; Regae Clark: percussion; Ibrahima Ba: guitar and vocals; Amadou Fall: kora.

Speak the Word

Tracks: Revelations; L.A. Bossa; Luxury; You Make Me Feel Brand New; *Speak the Word*; Aisha; Vestida de Solea (Dressed in Solitude); Vestida de Solea (Dressed in Solitude) (version 2).

Personnel: Azar Lawrence: tenor and soprano saxophones; Nate Morgan: piano; Trevor Ware: bass; Fritz Wise: drums.

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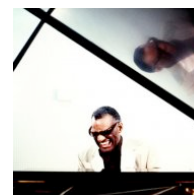
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