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Artist: AZAR LAWRENCE QUARTET

Title: Prayer for My Ancestors

Label: Furthermore 2 Country: USA

Format: CD Status: AVAILABLE \$16.00

Description: Featuring Azar Lawrence on tenor & soprano saxes, Nate Morgan on piano, Henry Franklin on bass and Alphonse Mouzon on drums plus guests Nolan Shaheed on trumpet, Tony Dumas on bass, Amadou Fall on kora, Ibrahima Ba on guitar & voice and Roy McCurdy & Reagae Clark on drums & percussion. I was pleased to hear from the great Azar Lawrence, whom I heard with the amazing McCoy Tyner Band at the Village Vanguard during the seventies. Besides McCoy, Azar recorded a couple of fine solo offerings way back and then seemed to disappear from the public's view. For this fine disc he has gathered some other LA-based musicians that we should recognize like drummer Alphonse Mouzon, who played powerful drums with Larry Coryell's 11th House. Both Nate Morgan and Henry Franklin have recorded for the Nimbus West label and have been associated with Horace Tapscott. Drummer Roy McCurdy worked with Cannonball Adderley for many years during the sixties.

Not so strangely enough, this music has a wonderful, spiritual, McCoy/Trane-like sound. "Open Sesame" is first and it is indeed a perfect, passionate opening piece. This is a marvelous quartet, each member perfect in their specific roles. Although this sound has been around since the early sixties, it still sounds fresh, spirited today, nearly fifty years later. Pianist Nate Morgan takes a solo, sparkling the keys magically while great rhythm team soars underneath.

Acoustic bassist Henry Franklin takes the first a number of amazing bass solos that are quite astonishing. "Under Tanzanian Skies" features Azar on his superb, mystical soprano sax, the melody is eastern sounding and most memorable. Nate Morgan also takes a fine, sparkling piano solo. Although a departure in terms of sound, "Thokole" features the voice & acoustic guitar of Ibrahima Ra and the precious kora of Amadou Fall. Azar's soprano fits just right with the kora and sunny melody that rings true and is lovely.

The title track sounds like one of those sublime, spiritual ballads that are found on later Trane albums. Trumpeter Rasheed Shaheed takes a fine solo on "The Baker's Daughter" as does Nate Morgan on piano. "Swinging in Exile" has one of those marvelous, instantly memorable themes that you can never forget and while "Ode to a Pharoah" features another elegant, peaceful song with Azar on pure-sounding soprano. Though and through, this wonderful disc sounds like a long lost gem from an earlier and more spiritual era. - Bruce Lee Gallanter, Downtown Music Gallery

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