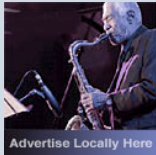








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Azar Lawrence: Cookin' at the Jazz Bakery
[Azar Lawrence](#) - Published: December 15, 2007

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By [Chuck Koton](#)

Azar Lawrence Quartet
 Jazz Bakery
 Culver City, CA
 November 25, 2007

For those jazz fans who have been wondering where Azar Lawrence has been since the late 70s, there is good news: He is alive and well and burnin' up clubs in the L.A. area again. After a too long detour out of jazz radar range, Lawrence, an extraordinary tenor and soprano saxophonist, who seemed to emerge out of nowhere to a front-line role in the bands of Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, and Miles Davis at the tender age of 20, is returning to the jazz scene. Good news, indeed! His quartet, with long-time friend Nate Morgan on piano, Trevor Ware on bass, and Fritz Wise on drums, played two blistering sets at the Jazz Bakery in Culver City, California.

During the last couple of years, Lawrence has dedicated himself to the music of John Coltrane, a powerful influence on his life and music, and that influence was evident in the selection of music he played all night. Coltrane's sound and spirit came through in the opening piece, an original composition titled "Night of Revelations," also the title of his new CD to be released in 2008. Lawrence played the soprano with dexterity and intensity, clearly revealing the inner flame of Coltrane's spirit still burnin' bright and hot. Local piano great Nate Morgan's fast runs and powerful chords also revealed the depth of his connection to Coltrane's music. Lawrence then slowed down the tempo and demonstrated his powerful tenor sound on the Coltrane composition, "Spiritual." The heart-felt, solemn tones instantly ushered the audience into a peaceful, meditative state.

Later in the set, a very obliging Lawrence responded to an audience request for Coltrane's "Bessie's Blues." Time after time, Lawrence would drop a hint of the theme before launching into chorus after chorus of blues exploration. Morgan, propulsive and explosive on the piano, tore into the music with total abandon, while Ware slapped and plucked the bass and Wise beat the drums, driving the band relentlessly. Lawrence then took a long, searing solo that he wove seamlessly into the Coltrane opus, "A Love Supreme." The audience applauded and shouted excitedly as Lawrence played on and on, feelin' the spirit and blowin' for a nearly 90 minute set. You don't get that every night.

After a very short break, the band was back on the stage, steamin' and workin' their way through more Coltrane material. They played "Impressions" at a furious pace. Lawrence, leanin' back, tenor held high above his head, was possessed by the energy of his muse. The rhythm section then took off on an extended excursion of their own through jazz time and space. Morgan's fingers flew across the keys,

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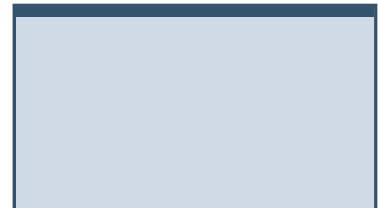
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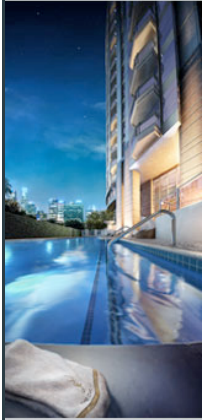


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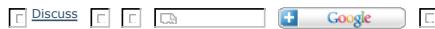
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nearly poundin' the ivories black and blue. Ware, at times rockin' the bass in his arms in a passionate embrace, at other times gettin' rough with it, but the love was still there.

Then a sudden change of pace. After a furious ending to "Impressions," the band played one of the classic ballad recordings of the master, "Say It (Over and Over Again). Beautiful! The band finished the set playing "My Favorite Things" and "Afro-Blue," raising the audience to new emotional heights.

Azar Lawrence and his quartet made it perfectly clear that jazz, like classical music, has a rich history and tradition which, when performed by master musicians, deserves to be heard and celebrated as often as possible. To the often asked question: Do we really need another Coltrane or Bird or Monk festival? The answer is a very loud yes.

[Azar Lawrence at All About Jazz.](#)
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