

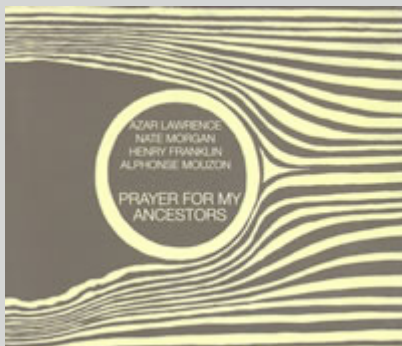
## **Moment's Notice**

Recent CDs Briefly Reviewed  
(continued)

Azar Lawrence

**Prayer for My Ancestors**

Furthermore 002



Azar Lawrence had his ticket punched while he was still a teenager. The saxophonist's relatively short stint with McCoy Tyner in the early 1970s yielded a truly enduring performance in "Walk Sprit, Talk Sprit." The LP side-long conclusion to the titanic Montreaux festival performance released as *Enlightenment* (Milestone), the muscular blues variant epitomized the pianist's reassertion of jazz as quest subsequent to his work with John Coltrane, one that, while more prosaic than Coltrane's revelatory music, was well suited to the times. Tyner's music exuded the strength and resolve that consolidates after a period of intense innovation, and he had few conduits that expressed these virtues more cogently than Lawrence on "Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit." Although he went on to lead three sturdy albums for Milestone and contribute to several notable albums by Miles Davis, Woody Shaw and others, Lawrence was drawn to more lucrative work with Earth, Wind and Fire, Phyllis Hyman and others during the 1980s before self-induced hardships knocked him off the scene for nearly a decade, during which his saxophonist was as likely to be in the pawnshop as not.

It has been a long climb back, but a successful one, as evidenced by *Prayer for My Ancestors*. Lawrence's playing on both tenor and soprano is immediately persuasive. There's a time capsule quality to some of the material, particularly the surging calls to the ramparts and the sunnier melodies, the latter reminders of Lawrence's LA roots; this is reinforced by the presence of two musicians indelibly associated with the '70s – drummer Alphonse Mouzon, who originally referred Lawrence to Tyner, and bassist Henry Franklin, whose Black Jazz albums are worth revisiting (pianist Nate Morgan rounds out the quartet). However, a piece like "Thokole," its effervescent Gambian lilt reinforced by singer and guitarist Ibrahima Ba and kora player Amadou Fall, would be something of an anachronism on a '70s LP. But, it gives the current album a richer, faceted bearing, which is also reinforced by walk-ons by trumpeter Nolan Shaheed on "The

Baker's Daughter," a cooker reminiscent of Freddie Hubbard and Joe Henderson's '70s workouts, and drummer Ron McCurdy, whose old-school stoking on "Swinging in Exile" ignites some of Lawrence and Morgan's most inspired work.

Jazz needs to retrieve as many Azar Lawrences as possible, mature, tested musicians who have, for whatever reason, receded into the woodwork for way too long. *Prayer for My Ancestors* is proof of that.

–Bill Shoemaker