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CD/LP/Track Review

Lena Bloch: Feathery (2014)

By [DAN MCCLENAGHAN](#), Published: March 16, 2014

Russian-born tenor saxophonist [Lena Bloch](#) carries a cool burning torch for the music of saxophonist [Warne Marsh](#) and the [Lennie Tristano](#) school of jazz. For *Feathery*, her debut CD a leader, Bloch has assembled a quartet that can rival the loose and interactive and spontaneous ensembles of alto saxophonist [Lee Konitz](#)—a Tristano acolyte and Bloch's friend and mentor.



Like the marvelous Konitz outing, *Live at Birdland* (ECM Record, 2011), where the saxophonist was joined by top notch players—pianist [Brad Mehldau](#), bassist [Charlie Haden](#) and drummer [Paul Motian](#)—Bloch has enlisted a team of superb in-the-moment instrumentalists who keep things loose and fluid, walking a line between the free side of jazz and the more mainstream mode.

Bloch opens with her original, "Hi-Lee," a tribute to Konitz. The intro, a minute-long duet from from bassist [Cameron Brown](#) and drummer [Billy Mintz](#), is pure poetry. The bass line's vivacious bounce is underlain by the whisper of orchestral coloration, an effervescent wash of brush and cymbal splash that Bloch slips into with a seductive and understated tone, with sinuous lines that are given a bright tang by Dave Miller's glowing single note accompaniments.

Songwriting duties are spread around. Bassist Brown contributes the eleven minute-plus "Baby Suite," a rambling tune that begins as a tone poem and gels into hard-swinging, beautiful groove. "Rubato," a vibrant group improvisation, comes from guitarist Miller's pen, and Bloch offers up "Farewell to Arms," a forlorn, late-night feel, with the leader's tenor sounding especially dark-hued and introspective.

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"Beautiful You," composed by Billy Mintz, served as the title tune of the excellent-but-overlooked 2004 [John Gross/Billy Mintz duet recording](#) on Origin Records. It sounds here like a haunting love letter to an extraordinary someone special, full of tenderness and deeply considered adoration.

Debuts are rarely this assured. The band is first rate, as spontaneous and fresh as it could be, the leader has a clear vision, and the compelling music shines a light on a fresh side of the Lennie Tristano side of jazz.

Track Listing: Hi-Lee; Rubato; Baby Suite; Starry-Eyed; Marshmallow; Farewell to Arms; Featherbed; Beautiful You; Hi-Lee (reprise).

Personnel: Lena Bloch: tenor saxophone; Dave Miller: guitar; Cameron Brown: bass; Billy Mintz: drums.

Record Label: Thirteenth Note Records

Style: [Modern Jazz](#)

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