



Saxophonist/Composer STEVE SLAGLE
New Album, *BALLADS: INTO THE HEART OF IT*
Available February 18, 2022 on Panorama Records

Featuring: Steve Slagle (alto & soprano saxophone, arrangements, producer), **Bruce Barth** (piano), **Ugonna Okegwo** (bass), **Jason Tiemann** (drums), **Richard Sussman** (synth orchestration & drum programming tks 1, 4 & 9), & **Special Guest - Randy Brecker** (trumpet, tks 3, 5 & 10)

"A stunning bouquet of ballads from Steve, an altoist with a storied career . . . but it is abundantly clear this isn't just your basic ballads session." – **Dan Bilawsky** (from the album's liner notes)

"Riding a slick, whipsaw groove, 'We Release' casually calls back to a mainstream jazz sound from the 1970s, while serving as a proud opening shot for the saxophonist Steve Slagle's new album, 'Nascentia.' Now 69, he composed and recorded all the material during the coronavirus pandemic, providing him a project and a jolt of energy amid trying times. An unerring optimism of spirit is palpable throughout, as he's joined here by a number of fellow jazz veterans: Jeremy Pelt on trumpet, Clark Gayton on trombone, Bruce Barth on piano, Ugonna Okegwo on bass and Jason Tiemann on drums." – **Giovanni Russonello, The New York Times**

"a purely sanguine set . . . a firm indication of strength gained through experience. Over more than four decades of top-tier performances in myriad settings, both birth and rebirth have repeatedly resounded in this artist's story." – **Dan Bilawsky, JazzTimes Magazine (Overdue Ovation)**

"Nascentia is a world where anything we imagine and truly believe in comes into existence, with a potential for greatness." – **Michael Ambrosino, 33ThirdJazz**

"This is the kind of ensemble you wish you could go out and hear tonight. There's an omnipresent, incredibly welcoming, straight-ahead but modern soulfulness to this entire session." – **Jon W. Poses, Columbia Daily Tribune**

"Steve Slagle is a warrior, fierce but gentle at times as he creates on his alto sax and flute. One body, all soul." – **Gary Walker, WBGO**

"Harmonically sophisticated, rhythmically aggressive, and sporting a biting tone, Slagle definitely plays Manhattan Alto." – **Kevin Whitehead**

With saxophonist/composer **Steve Slagle** you can expect the unexpected. From his early days on the NYC scene which he joined in the mid-70s (almost instantly joining the fray at the highest level with the likes of Machito And His Afro-Cubans, Steve Kuhn, Lionel Hampton, Charlie Haden, The Mingus Big Band, Carla Bley, and many others), Slagle has always been an artist up for new challenges and horizons. This holds true even after more than twenty albums as a leader, and forty years of creating music on stages and in studios around the world with many of the finest musicians of this era.

For artists, the impact of the sudden isolation and inability to work brought on by the global pandemic manifested itself in myriad ways, one of which was influencing many, including **saxophonist/composer Steve Slagle**, to create with a fervour. As Slagle stated, "In the worst of times, sometimes the best music comes out of you." This past April-2021 Slagle

released the critically-acclaimed, *Nascentia*, and hot on the heels of this album we have another testament to the superlative level of his creative output, a true first for Slagle in a stunning bouquet of ballads, *Ballads: Into The Heart Of It*, to be released on Panorama Records on February 18, 2022. The album features special guest **Randy Brecker**, pianist **Bruce Barth**, bassist **Ugonna Okegwo**, drummer **Jason Tiemann** and **Richard Sussman**, who provides synth orchestrations and drum programming to great effect on three selections.

Into The Heart Of It opens with Bill Evans and Miles Davis' "**Blue In Green**," and Slagle renders this iconic composition anew, wringing every bit of emotion from the melody with a minimalist approach. Accompanied by longtime friend and colleague Richard Sussman's orchestrations and Okegwo, Slagle is completely exposed, his opening phrase a cry for humanity, a sonic prayer for the earth. Next up is Slagle's take on Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's, "**Le Sucrier Velours (The Queen's Suite)**," a gem from Duke's oeuvre, originally released in '76, and again on *Live At The Whitney* (recorded in '72 and released in '95, on Impulse!). We're getting a clear picture now that this is no ordinary ballads album, and it was designed that way. "I really ruminated over this," says Slagle, "and I find it interesting to take on the challenge of trying to maintain one mood or texture across an entire program. But I didn't want this to be a traditional ballads record where everything sounds the same. And as much as I love many of them, I definitely wasn't looking to recreate any of the classic ballads albums that I, and many people, grew up listening to. So, there are a number of originals here, and some classics. But I wouldn't touch those classics if I wasn't going to try things differently. At this point I can't help but impart my own slant on the music we play."

The album continues with Monk's "**Reflections**," and special guest Randy Brecker opens the tune with his famous burnished tone. Between Slagle and Brecker sharing the melody you can hear what many decades in the trenches truly sounds like – and listen to these guys on these changes – the crème de la crème . . . "**My One And Only Love**" is up next, and the framework designed by Slagle and Richard Sussman once again exposes Slagle, allowing him to establish a high level of intimacy with the melody, and allowing us, the listener, to share in this closeness and really hear what the saxophonist has to say about this iconic tune. Other highlights on the album include one of the prettiest melodies in the program, Slagle's "**The Heart Of It**" (again featuring Randy Brecker), and Slagle's take on Stevie Wonder's "**Kiss Lonely Goodbye**." This is a good time to mention the contributions of pianist Bruce Barth, who demonstrates on this track, and the entire album, why he is one of the most sought-after and respected artists to have ever touched a piano. On "**Si, See**" Slagle displays his mastery as a composer with a simple melodic line which conveys so much emotion and carries so much weight (the melody notes being, C, A, E, C, A) . . . how can a melody cause you to wonder about the world and ruminate about any number of other important topics . . . The album's last three selections are, "**If you Could See Me Now**," Slagle's tribute to some very important women in his life with "**The Four Margarets**" (a truly lovely and compelling tone-poem by Slagle, polished, framed and ensconced in velvet by Sussman, and worth the price of admission on its own!), which was the first tune completed, and the catalyst for the rest of the album. After it all, Slagle drops the heated "**Big Mac**" as a bonus, making the final tally, "nine ballads and a burner." Written with Randy Brecker in mind, and nodding to the important "Macs" in the leader's musical life (i.e. McCoy Tyner, Andy McKee, Jackie McLean), it signals a new dawn on the horizon. Ever forward for Steve Slagle.

Ballads: Into The Heart Of It:

1 – Blue In Green (5:09), 2 – Le Sucrier Velours (Queen's Suite) (7:32), 3 – Reflections (8:37), 4 – My One And Only Love (3:51), 5 – The Heart Of It (8:36), 6 – Kiss Lonely Goodbye (5:01), 7 – Si, See (6:29), 8 – If You Could See Me Now (7:35) 9 – The Four Margarets (3:52), Bonus Track – "Big Mack" (6:50)

Please Visit:

www.SteveSlagleMusic.com

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