



# BASSNOTES

ANGELES

## Angeline Saris Heart On A Platter

BY JON D'AURIA

### IT'S A DIFFICULT TASK TO

categorize the playing style of Angeline Saris, especially considering the first handful of tracks on the debut album from

her rhythm section duo, Angeles, titled *Tight Lips*. The songs jump from a Parliament funk-styled opener, to a dub reggae groove, to a salsa burner, followed by a Marcus Miller-esque slap-funk, into a smooth jazz ballad. The album goes on to gallivant all over the map stylistically—but it does so authentically, thanks to Saris' years of being an accompanying player to a wide spread of heavy-hitting musicians (Narda Michael Walden, Carlos Santana, Ernest Ranglin) and her long tenure as a bass educator. Considering

her lifetime of exploring music, it's only natural that when the Bay Area native linked up with drummer Lex Razon, their collaboration would encapsulate every sonic bit of jet setting that has sculpted her.

Following suit of her bass influencers Pino Palladino, Larry Graham, James Jamerson, and John Paul Jones—whose playing she knows intimately from her seven-year stint in the all-female Led Zeppelin outfit Zepparella—Saris employs her



slapping, tapping, chordal, and muted-plucking techniques to conjure a plethora of tones on *Tight Lips*. And given her freedom in being the only stringed player in a duo format, she includes healthy doses of envelope filters, octavers, fuzzes, and phasers to complete her sound. Her vibe on the album is that of a musician finally creating her own musical identity, after years of playing other people's material—and it's a sound that suits her well.

#### How did Angelex first form?

It all started from Lex and me getting together once or twice a month to woodshed and work on our chops. I would always bring in my Zoom H4 digital recorder to track those sessions, and when I listened back, I realized we had a lot of great ideas that naturally came together. We decided to take some of them into a nice studio and lay them down to see how it came out, and that's how the stems for four or five of the tracks came about. It all came from the creative process of jamming together for about five years.

#### The album covers a lot of genres stylistically. How did you approach them all authentically?

Lex and I have both spent many years being hired guns for players and bands in many different genres, and we're both educators, so between those two vehicles we've learned a lot about many different styles of music. I've been in funk bands, rock groups, I've done pop music, I've been in hip-hop groups, so you take all of those influences over time and it comes out innately in the writing process.

#### How do you typically come up your bass lines?

They come in different forms. With "Top Down," I had just gotten my Marleaux Consat Soprano bass, and I hopped out of bed the next morning and sat on the ground in my jammies, and that bass line just came out then and there. Ideas arrive through the pipeline in different ways, but it's best when they just come to me. "Tight Lips" came to me as a whole piece. Sometimes it can be a drum beat that inspires me, where I'll listen until I react to something or hear a bass line within it.

#### You use slapping and strumming throughout the album. How do you decide which technique to use where?

It's never a conscious decision beforehand to use specific techniques; I always listen to a part and hear a specific technique that I know I should employ. I use slapping on "Top Down," "Dirty Cycle," and the outro of "Six Eight," where I do some double-thumbing because I'm a huge Larry Graham fan. I use palm-muting all over the album; I use a sponge on the bridge of my bass for a few songs; I use a lot of chords, as they're one of my favorite things to do on bass. Whatever the song called for, I did it.

#### What kind of tone were you going for?

My sound varied quite a bit. The constant factor is I

wanted my bass to be big throughout. Even talking about it right now, I'm making a terrible bass face [laughs]. I used a lot of fuzz, overdrive, envelope filter, and octaver. It was fun to experiment with sounds in the studio and create nasty tones.

#### Do you enjoy the freedom of being in a duo?

I love it! I was putting together my pedalboard this week, and I was able to throw whatever I wanted on there, which isn't always the case with other projects. And I have so much space to fill up or leave open. That gives me freedom when we're writing, because I don't have to focus on anyone else throwing in key changes or going into different chord progressions. Those are all up to me.

#### What did you learn from this process?

I learned that what I listen to and what I create can be very different. I really appreciate Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller, and heavy players like Thundercat and Ida Nielsen, but when I go to write, I tend to come up with more J-Dilla-like pocket grooves. This process helped me learn who I am as an artist and what my identity is on my instrument. I've been trained for so long to learn other people's music that I didn't know my musical self that well. This process opened all of that up. It can be scary, like serving your heart on a silver platter with a fork and knife.

#### You play electric upright with Ernest Ranglin. How does that change your approach?

I'm more reductive; I don't have the same skill set on the upright that I do on the electric, so I play less. And the overall sound inspires me to play differently, in the same way that picking up a fretless or 5-string bass would conjure different feels. It helps me to stay sharp and focused during the gigs, because the upright doesn't come as naturally to me as electric bass, and I like it for that reason.

#### When did you first start playing bass?

I started on steel drums in 6th grade and really took to it—especially the bass versions of them. Then I played the clarinet for three years, and my teacher at the time saw that I wasn't interested in it, and he could sense that he needed to engage me more, so he asked me to join the jazz band and pick up the bass. I immediately fell in love with it and studied privately for a year with a local jazz teacher, and I haven't stopped since.

#### What resonates with you about the instrument?

I love everything about the bass. It's the great connector between rhythm and melody; there's no other instrument with that role. It's a supportive function and it's not the lead—I especially like that. Also it's low, soft, and warm, and it can be the glue that holds it all together and grounds everything. It's heart wrenching and beautiful when you play chords and soft passages, and it can also be fierce and nasty. It's a very visceral musical element. **BP**

## i INFO

LISTEN



Angelex, *Tight Lips*  
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EQUIP

**Bass** Fender American Deluxe Jazz Bass, Fender Elite Jazz Bass, Fender Precision Bass, Warwick Triumph Electric Upright, Marleaux Consat Soprano bass

**Rig** Fender Super Bassman Pro 300-watt head, Fender Bassman Pro 810

**Pedals** MXR Phase 100, MXR Bass Envelope Filter, MXR M300 Reverb, Boss OC-2, Boss SYB-5

**Strings** GHS Boomers Medium