

SuperSax Me

By

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Back in the early 1970s bassist [Buddy Clark](#) and saxophonist [Med Flory](#) conceived a brilliant idea: to form a group (primarily a reed section with rhythm) that would use orchestrated arrangements of saxophonist [Charlie Parker](#)'s transcendent bop solos as the basis for its music. As for a name, nothing less than SuperSax would suffice. The nine-piece group made its debut in 1972 and was an immediate hit with US audiences on the West Coast and fans around the world. SuperSax produced a dozen well-received albums and earned a Grammy award in 1974 for Best Performance by a Jazz Group. Besides its co-founders, the SuperSax alumni roster embodies such well-known names as [Bill Perkins](#), [Warne Marsh](#), [Conte Candoli](#), [Jack Nimitz](#), [Frank Rosolino](#), [Lanny Morgan](#), [Jake Hanna](#), [Lou Levy](#), [Carl Fontana](#), [Blue Mitchell](#) and [Jay Migliori](#). After Clark left the group in 1975, Flory soldiered on, playing and recording with SuperSax into the late 1990s.

Fast-forward to 2010, when Santa Fe-based drummer [Cal Haines](#) had an ingenious idea of his own: why couldn't there be a renewed version of SuperSax in New Mexico? Inspired by the thought, Haines set about unearthing the talent needed to stock such a precision-oriented group and found that, yes, there were enough first-class musicians (especially saxophonists) in the state to make the SuperSax concept a reality. Haines recruited five of the best to wrestle with Parker's finger-busting solos, and enlisted pianist [Bert Dalton](#) and bassist [Michael Glynn](#) to round out the rhythm section. Adding a ninth member to the ensemble was both a no-brainer and a stroke of genius: no less than trumpeter [Bobby Shew](#), a world-renowned soloist and section player who returned to his native New Mexico from California about four years ago.

Following several grueling rehearsals all systems were go, and in May 2011, with Flory's blessing (he even shared a few charts), SuperSax New Mexico made its debut with a concert in Santa Fe. After a second performance, this one in Los Alamos, the group was ready for "prime time," arriving in Albuquerque on December 1 for a one-night stand at The Outpost Performing Space, a "must-see" concert that was sold out well in advance. Besides Shew and the rhythm section, SuperSax boasted a front line of altos [Arlen Asher](#) and [Dave Anderson](#), tenors [Lee Taylor](#) and Kanoa Kaluhiwa, and baritone Glenn Kostur. From the outset (a fast-paced "Blue 'n Boogie") it was clear they had their work cut out for them, but the "saxophone quintet" didn't disappoint, rigorously harnessing Bird's irrepressible flights in a two-set narrative that encompassed a baker's dozen themes. In the first, "Boogie" was followed in order by "Just Friends," "Confirmation," "Groovin' High," "If I Should Lose You," "Now's the Time" and "A Night in Tunisia." Shew, Dalton and Glynn handled the solo work until late in the set, at which point Taylor framed a sharp and crowd-pleasing solo on "Now's the Time" and Kostur and Kaluhiwa followed suit on "Tunisia."

The second set opened with the relatively self-controlled "Cool Blues," which was followed by "Star Eyes," "Lover Man" (a laid-back showcase for Shew and Asher), "Salt Peanuts," "Parker's

Mood" and "Bebop." The saxophones had their moments, with Anderson soloing sharply on "Star Eyes," Kostur on "Bebop," while Shew was his usual perceptive and unflappable self (muted on "Cool Blues"). In the end, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that SuperSax had lived up to its name, or that Haines' idea was not only sound but greatly appreciated, as evidenced by the prolonged and enthusiastic standing ovation that crowned the second set. An encore performance in the offing? Let us hope so.