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Donna Lee Saxophone Quartet Four Odd (Zivaldo)

by [Chris Kelsey](#)
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When is a saxophone quartet not a saxophone quartet? When they use a rhythm section... which is what the Donna Lee Saxophone Quartet (Zdenko Ivanusic, alto and soprano; Andrej Henigman, alto; Vanja Ilekovic, tenor; Ales Susa, bari, clarinet, and flute) does on the first four cuts here. Not a big problem, except that the group executes better as a foursome.

As opposed to the free jazz approach often taken by sax quartets, the band takes a mostly straight-ahead approach, covering such jazz classics as Charles Mingus' "Boogie Stop Shuffle", Wayne Shorter's "Footprints", and Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life". They also run down Steve Coleman's "Wights Waits for Weights" and some attractive originals (most of them written by Ivanusic).

The cuts with bass, drums, and guitar are energetic and creative enough, but the swing is a bit wooden, and the saxes tend to overblow. As a quartet they engage in more of the timbral and dynamic subtleties that make help make the four-sax concept most effective. Ivanusic's tunes are fresh, his arrangements inventive, and his orchestrations tightly and skillfully voiced. The soloists are a bit ungainly at times, but refreshingly unaffected. The band plays together extremely well; obviously a great deal of time went into the preparation of this music. This isn't world-class—considering the standard set by World Saxophone Quartet, Julius Hemphill, and ROVA—but it's interesting and fun.

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