

RALPH LALAMA'S EQUIPMENT

Tenor Sax - Selmer Mark VI (serial number 131882) with a Francois Louis graphite material mouthpiece, Francois Louis ligature, Francois Louis 4½ and Roberto medium 4½ reeds

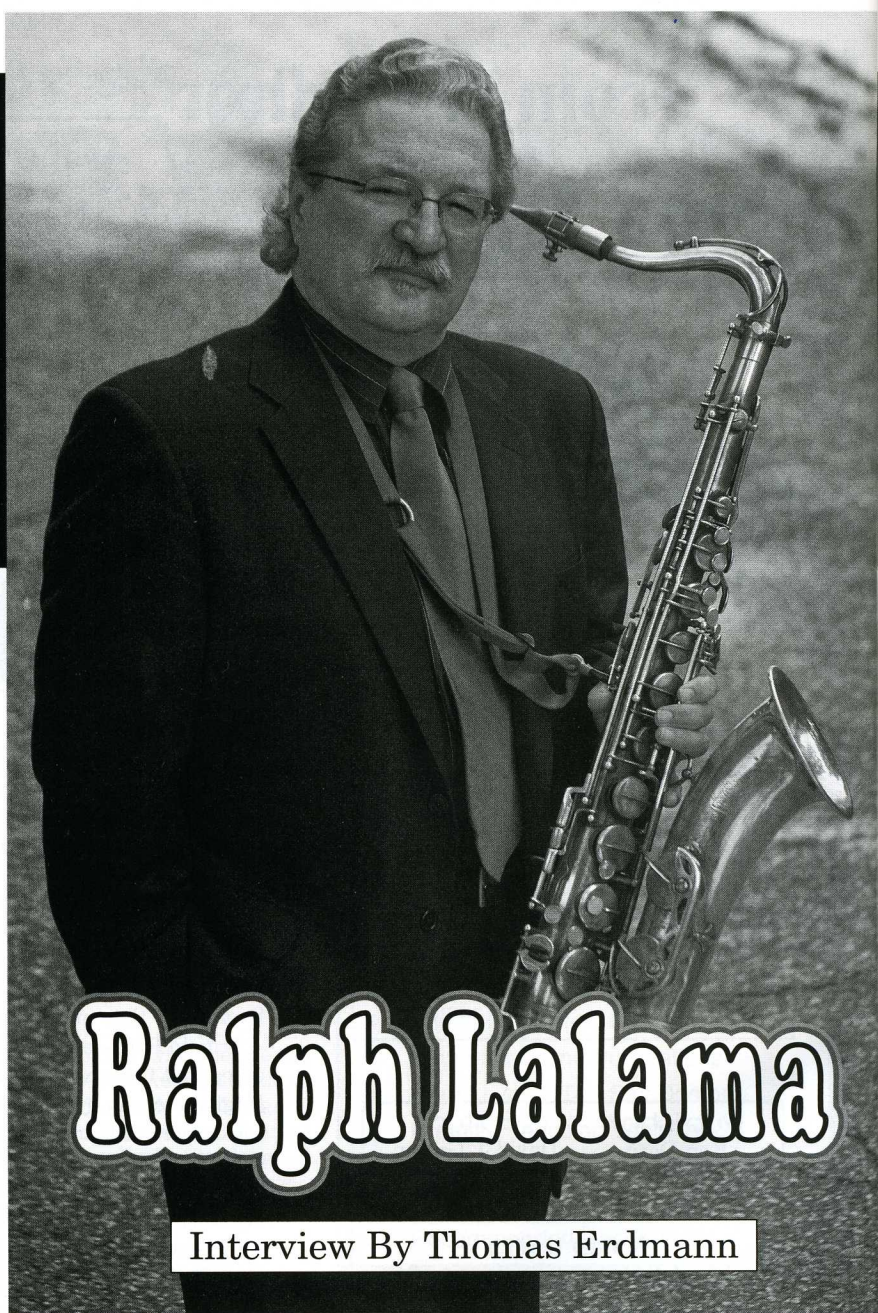
Clarinet - Buffet Crampon (serial number 108783) with a Morgan J-P mouthpiece and Vandoren 3 reeds

Flute - Sankyo Etude (serial number 77956) with a silver head joint

Whether you are a normal person and the sky above you is blue, or if you work for a company where the normal laws of physics don't apply and the sky above you is magenta, the following fact is anyway going to be true; Ralph Lalama is the undisputed king of big band tenor saxophonists at the beginning of the 21st century. The list of big band leaders who have expressly called for his tenor saxophone playing in their groups is astounding. They include not just household names like Woody Herman and Buddy Rich, but also Thad Jones and Mel Lewis, Jon Faddis' Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, Bill Kirchner, and Joe Lovano, to name just a few.

Lalama was born in West Aliquippa, Pennsylvania to parents who were also musicians; his father a drummer, mother a singer, and interestingly enough his brother, David, is a professional jazz pianist and currently the Head of Jazz Studies at Hofstra University. Starting on the clarinet at the age of nine, and saxophone at the age of 14, it wasn't long before Lalama was playing professionally. He was so young for his earliest gigs his father had to drive him. While his schooling has been mostly on the road with bands like those listed above, he does have a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Youngstown State University. In addition, you can't develop the breadth of knowledge Lalama has without getting serious about studying on your own, reading everything you can get your hands on, and using ears intensely to transcribe solos and understand artists. Today he brings that knowledge to others by teaching at both the State University of New York (SUNY) at Purchase and New York University, as well as having a large number of private students. How he keeps his schedule is anyone's guess. In addition to teaching Lalama works every Monday night as a regular and featured soloist in the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, and almost every other night somewhere in New York. Reading his itinerary, which is posted on his website, is tiring enough as it is; imagine trying to live it.

The critics, as well they should, love Lalama. Zan Stewart in *Downbeat* wrote, "(Lalama's) melodies are authoritative and warmly melodic, his time drummer-sure. In other words, a first-class jazz soloist." It almost goes without saying, but Stewart included Lalama's *Feelin' and Dealin'* CD on his list of "CDs To Die For" in a 2004 issue of *Stereophile*. In a concert review the *New York Post* said, "Lalama romped." Yet, the quotes you read the most are how underappreciated Lalama is. *New York*



Ralph Lalama

Interview By Thomas Erdmann

Newsday said, "The Music World is laced with extraordinary players, like tenor saxophonist Ralph Lalama, who are deficient only in the area of high visibility." *The New Yorker* said, "Pianist (Pete) Malinverni and tenor saxophonist Lalama are two of the most terrifically talented and unrecognized jazzmen in New York," and Gary Giddens in *The Village Voice* wrote, "Lalama... operates beyond the radar of the record business for reasons that have nothing to do with music." Let's allow this article to stand as the beginning of the end for that train of thought. Lalama is a monster and everyone in New York knows it. It's time now for the rest of the world to catch on.

You started, initially, on clarinet before picking up the saxophone. My grandfather gave me my first one. It was a Penzel-Meuller.

A number of great saxophonists started on clarinet and some other great saxophonists who didn't start on sax have told me they go to the clarinet when they want to work on their technique. Do you have any feelings regarding using the clarinet to help saxophonists with technique?

Totally. I think those who start on clarinet have a distinct

