

# JAZZ

May 1, 2019  
By Michael Roberts

## A Horn Beloved: On His Latest Outing, Scott Robinson Spotlights His Trusty Tenor Sax



Tenormore, the vibrant new album by saxophonist Scott Robinson, is the story of a beautiful friendship between a man and his horn. The 1924 silver Conn he plays on the session has been with him since he was a high schooler, but the relationship's roots stretch back even further.

Around age 10, Robinson recalls, "I was visiting my grandparents in New Hampshire, and one day I heard this amazing sound coming from the other end of the house. I came running and there was my grandfather, playing this 1927 Conn alto sax. As I stared at him wide-eyed, he asked, 'Do you like that?' I said, 'Yeah!' And he said, 'It's yours.'"

Several years later, in 1975, the teenage Robinson spotted the Conn tenor at an antique store and thought, "Wow. It's just like my alto, but bigger." It was also \$77.50 plus \$3.10 tax — a huge sum for him. It took months to scrape the cash together, and in the interim the instrument was stolen from the antique store and subsequently recovered, only making his eventual purchase sweeter. In his words, "I was meant to have that horn."



Over the decades that followed, Robinson became a collector of rare and unusual instruments. “If you want a certain sound, you have to get a seven-foot saxophone,” he notes. “So I have a seven-foot saxophone.” But when he decided to base his latest recording on a classic quartet configuration, he knew the Conn tenor would be at the project’s heart.

Robinson assembled a stellar cast for *Tenormore*, led by drummer Dennis Mackrel, bassist Martin Wind and pianist Helen Sung. But on the opener, an unexpectedly touching rendition of The Beatles’ “And I Love Her,” it’s just Robinson on his tenor, keening the familiar melody at the top of his range. “It was a risky strategy to start an album that way,” he concedes. “But I decided to do it almost as an announcement that this was not going to be your typical tenor-and-rhythm-section jazz album.”

True enough. Robinson and company transform the chestnut “Put on a Happy Face” into a deeply somber meditation and stretch out on the dauntingly complex title track, which he feared was an experiment gone wrong. “I had a sort of crisis while writing it,” he reveals. “I thought, ‘This is horrible.’ But when I connected all the dots, it flowed and sounded completely organic. I was tickled to death.”

Then there’s “The Weaver,” a beguiling tribute to his wife Sharon Robinson, a musician turned mathematician who contributes flute to the track. “She and I go back even farther than I do with the tenor,” he emphasizes. “I’ve known her since sixth grade.”

Lucky thing. Otherwise, she might get jealous.

