



ERIC ALEXANDER with *Strings*

David Hazeltine

John Webber

Joe Farnsworth

Orchestral arrangements and conducting by

Dave Rivello



1. **GENTLY** 6:32
(E. Alexander) (Skeef Music) BMI
2. **DREAMSVILLE** 5:09
(H. Mancini) (Northridge Music) ASCAP
3. **SOME OTHER TIME** 5:34
(L. Bernstein) (Leonard Bernstein Music Pub.) ASCAP
4. **LONELY WOMAN** 6:57
(H. Silver) (Ecaroh Music) ASCAP
5. **SLOW, HOT WIND** 6:21
(H. Mancini / N. Gimbel) (Northridge Music / Words West, LLC) ASCAP
6. **THE THRILL IS GONE** 5:52
(L. Brown / R. Henderson) (Chappell & Co. / Ray Henderson Music Co.) ASCAP

ERIC ALEXANDER tenor saxophone

DAVID HAZELTINE piano

JOHN WEBBER bass

JOE FARNSWORTH drums

with Strings

Featuring a string orchestra of violins, 2 violas
and 2 cellos with flute and French horn

DAVE RIVELLO conductor and arranger

Executive Producer: Diane Armesto

*Recorded at Systems Two Recording Studio, Brooklyn, NY in December, 2011 & January, 2012
and engineered by Max Ross*

*Recorded at The Studios at Linden Oaks, Rochester, NY in August, 2012 & March, 2013
and engineered by Tim Hull*

*Mastered by Michael Marciano, Systems Two Recording Studio, Long Island, NY
Recording produced by Diane Armesto*

Photography by Roberto Cifarelli

Design by Keiji Obata, Littlefield & Company

There's both an upside and a downside to being a supremely accomplished musician. Take Eric Alexander as a case in point. Alexander's prowess on the tenor saxophone, his unimpeachable virtuosity and technical skill, is obvious to anyone who has paid attention to his fluent and stirring work over the past three decades. His reputation as a hard blowing jazz gladiator has stood him well with fellow musicians and loyal listeners. Admired and enjoyed for his exceptional powers, Alexander is a model of mainstream jazz expertise.

Yet proficiency can often obscure gifts for lyricism and openly expressive offerings, gifts that Alexander also has in abundance. Take heed of his ballad playing throughout the years and you will instantly hear a musician committed to unvarnished beauty and narrative flow. Alexander can tell a story with an open heart and a clear head. Which is why a "with strings" project is a natural for him. A long time in coming, this recording shines a light on Alexander's lyrical nature as an interpreter and improviser of ballads and mid-tempo performances. And far from sacrificed, his technical command of his horn is apparent in each fully committed note he plays. With an expert rhythm team comprised of familiar associates behind him—and, in the case of the skillful pianist David Hazeltine, sharing judicious solo spots—Alexander is encouraged to reveal an important aspect of his musical personality that can be too often overlooked.

"A strings project has always a dream of mine," says Alexander, "and thanks to a wonderful person, Diane Armesto, it came true." Based in upstate New York, this "angel" is a singer and jazz enthusiast who may also be the world's number one Eric Alexander fan. After collaborating with the saxophonist on one of her own vocal projects, Armesto took Alexander's dream seriously and eventually made it happen. Commissioning arranger Dave Rivello to compose charts that employed her specific musical scheme of strings, French horn and flute, Armesto was able to couch Alexander and his cohorts in sympathetic tonal colors. Rivello's scores are models of

discernment; never cloying, their subtle inventiveness enriches the quartet's vision.

Alexander refers to the selection of tunes as an example of "unearthed gems," in keeping with his desire to continually explore hidden-in-plain-sight repertoire that has been unwisely overlooked. The album's sole original, his lovely "Gently" fits in perfectly with the other selections, its undulating melody calling out for future standard status. "Dreamsville," originally written for the classic TV series *Peter Gunn*, is one of two selections composed by Henry Mancini—it was brought to Alexander's attention through a recording by the magisterial Sarah Vaughan. More familiar may be Leonard Bernstein's "Some Other Time," composed for the 1944 musical "On the Town." The performance, with its stirring saxophone coda, is a fine example of how Alexander can invest a poignant melody with all the expressiveness it deserves and then take it in other directions by way of a forceful improvisation.

Horace Silver's gorgeous melody "Lonely Woman" was originally heard on his 1965 album *Lonely Woman*; Alexander and Hazeltine offer inspiring turns that practically plead for the revival of this overlooked treasure. "Slow, Hot Wind," another Mancini tune that Vaughan buffed to greatness, brings out the swinging ease of projection and invention that Alexander devotees have come to depend on. As indelibly performed by Chet Baker, "The Thrill is Gone" (not to be confused with the B.B. King blues hit) is a long time Alexander favorite; his improvisation displays his vaunted instrumental agility while maintaining the song's starkly expressive nature.

"I wanted to get straight into the beauty of a song, always putting the melody first," Alexander states about his expressed intentions for the album. "Improvisations are the icing on the cake." With the fruition of this dream project Alexander has again succeeded in proving that his long obvious gifts as a player are equaled by his respect for the gift of song.

—Steve Futterman writes about jazz for *The New Yorker*



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