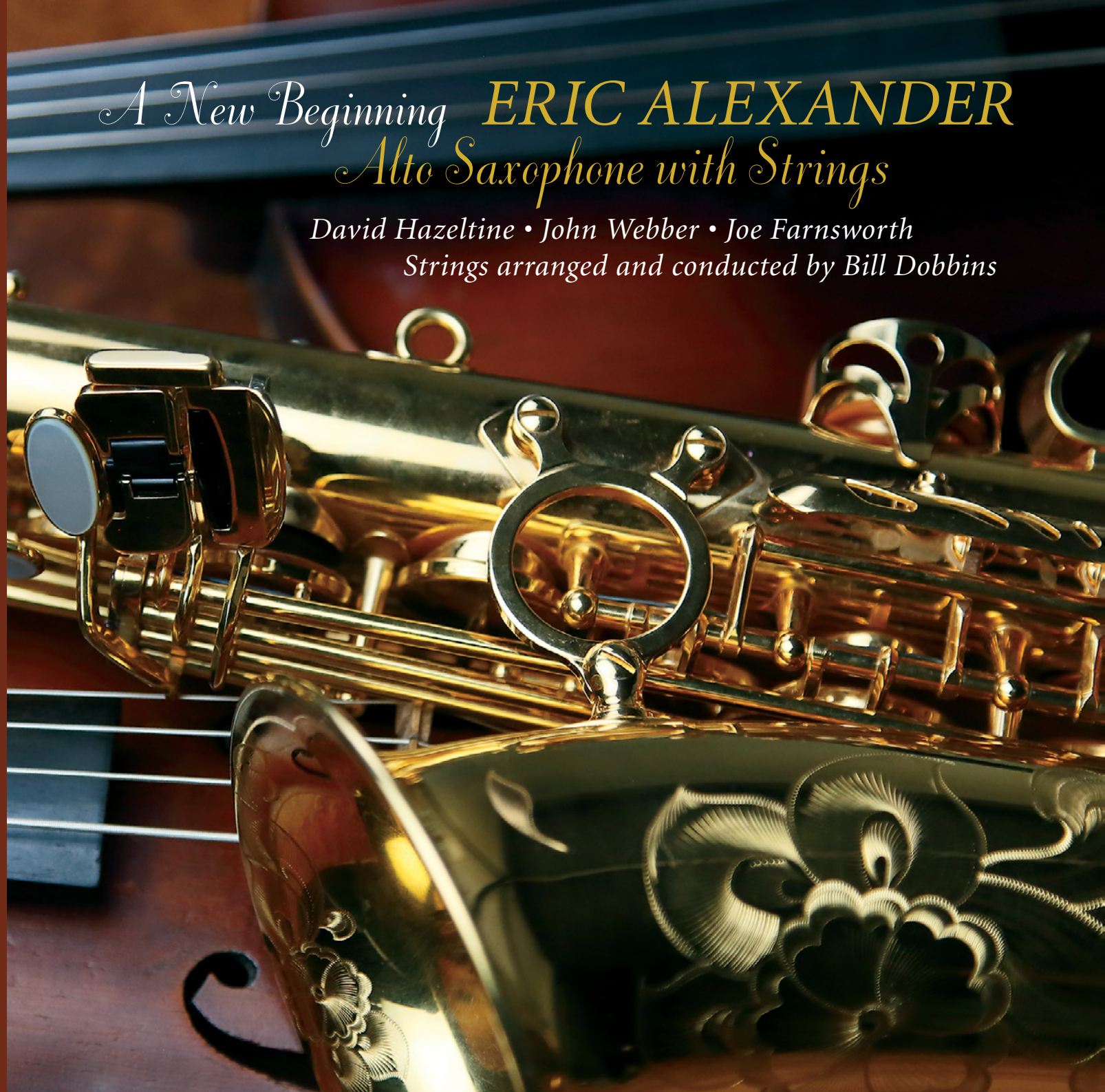


HIGHNOTE
RECORDS INC.

A New Beginning **ERIC ALEXANDER**
Alto Saxophone with Strings

David Hazeltine • John Webber • Joe Farnsworth

Strings arranged and conducted by Bill Dobbins





1. **BLUES FOR DIANE** 4:44
(Eric Alexander) (Skeef Music) BMI
2. **EMBRACEABLE YOU** 5:42
(George & Ira Gershwin) (WC Music Corp.) ASCAP
3. **ALL MY TOMORROWS** 4:56
(Sammy Cahn / Jimmy Van Heusen)
(Maraville Music) ASCAP
4. **MAYBE SEPTEMBER** 7:20
(Ray Evans / Jay Livingston / Percy Faith)
(SONY / ATV Harmony) ASCAP
5. **TO LOVE AND BE LOVED** 4:55
(Sammy Cahn / Jimmy Van Heusen)
(Maraville Music) ASCAP
6. **ANITA** 3:46
(Eric Alexander) (Skeef Music) BMI
7. **SHE WAS TOO GOOD TO ME** 4:46
(Richard Rodgers / Lorenz Hart)
(Warner Bros. Inc. / Williamson Music) ASCAP
8. **TOO LATE NOW** 5:41
(Alan Jay Lerner / Burton Lane)
(Chappell & Co. / Primary Wave Songs) ASCAP
9. **BLUES FOR DIANE (Alternate Take)** 6:47
(Eric Alexander) (Skeef Music) BMI

ERIC ALEXANDER *alto saxophone*

DAVID HAZELTINE *piano*

JOHN WEBBER *bass*

JOE FARNSWORTH *drums*

String arrangements and conducting by

BILL DOBBINS *(tracks 2 – 8 only)*

Executive Producer: Diane Armesto

Co-Executive Producer: John Bennett

Recording session produced by Diane Armesto

*Eric Alexander Quartet recorded at Van Gelder Recording
Studio, Englewood Cliffs, NJ on August 28, 2021*

Engineered by Maureen Sickler

Mixed by Chris Sulit, Trading 8s Recording Studio, Paramus, NJ

*Strings recorded at The Studios at Linden Oaks, Rochester, NY
on December 14, 2021*

Engineered and mixed by Tim Hull

*Project mastered by David Darlington, Bass Hit Recording
Studio, New York, NY*

Photography & design by Keiji Obata, Littlefield & Company



As difficult times often beget new beginnings, the COVID-19 quagmire gave birth to alto saxophonist Eric Alexander. To some that may not seem like a newsworthy matter, but for the initiated it's the stuff of headlines. Alexander, an inveterate tenor at the apex of the scene for more than three decades, put the alto away in his teen years and never looked back. "I had not touched it, even in private, other than to honk one note and say, 'I give up,'" he confesses. "I spent so many years just honing my embouchure and my sound on tenor, so when I would pick up the alto it just felt wrong. But there was such a dearth of opportunities to play during the pandemic, so I started to work on it. And then I just thought, 'It's not that hard and I want to make this better.'"

Successfully pitching the idea of using his second saxophone-with-strings project as a debut on alto, Alexander hit the woodshed and came out swinging. The results are quite simply astounding. Working with the rhythm section from *Eric Alexander with Strings* (HighNote HCD 7330)—pianist David Hazeltine, bassist John Webber and drummer Joe Farnsworth—and adding ace string arrangements from Bill Dobbins, this altoist delivers one revelatory performance after another.

Bookending the album with two different takes on his own "Blues for Diane," Alexander gives thanks to Executive Producer Diane Armesto. "It's very difficult for me to put into words how much I appreciate her dedication to these projects," he shares. "Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I would have a chance to play with strings. She facilitated these projects with her enthusiasm and was really tuned in to all of the details, so she deserves a lot of credit." A study in similarities and differences, both versions feature the same catchy head—"a quick muse from heaven," as Alexander puts it—but vary slightly in design. The only performances without strings, they highlight the incredible bond(s) linking four longtime collaborators.

The seven tracks between those points play as master

classes in interpretation. "Embraceable You," with a string setup offering heightened expectations, shifts from home pace to double time and back. "All My Tomorrows" nods to Frank Sinatra and spotlights Hazeltine's sophisticated soloing. "Maybe September," tied to Tony Bennett, moves in more ways than one, with Farnsworth's late game, rhumbaesque adornments. And "To Love and Be Loved"—a favorite of Alexander's father, which the saxophonist played for him shortly before his passing—sings to life's great purpose. Gifting another original with the tender "Anita," Alexander presents a heartfelt tribute to a woman who brought light and kindness into his life. Then he enters bossa nova territory for "She Was Too Good to Me" before blending thoughts of Nancy Wilson and Judy Garland on "Too Late Now," a serenade and swinger ushered in by Webber's engaging pizzicato work.

Alexander's enthusiasm for this project and its Great American Songbook inclusions is completely off the charts—the very mention of each chestnut receives the same, emphatic, "Oh, that's the best!"—and the importance of familiarity with lyrics remains paramount to his instrumental execution. And as for how his approach differs on this newly adopted ax, the saxophonist is quite clear: "On alto you have to abide by God's natural law of truth and beauty. That horn is the litmus test. It's so much harder to play than tenor because there's no margin for error. So the most important thing was to hit the bullseye with the purity of that horn. That's what I was working to achieve."

—Dan Bilawsky

This recording is the result of a far-fetched idea that met with some open-minded people who were willing to take a chance. Barney Fields and Diane Armesto were keen to make a second strings CD after the success of *Eric Alexander with*



Strings (HighNote HCD 7330). I had been playing around with the alto during the down time of the pandemic, and floated the unlikely idea of entering the studio with that horn. Well, careful what you wish for (as they say in the business)! Barney's response was "Go for it." Diane had already contacted Bill Dobbins. I haven't dedicated myself to preparing for a session with this type of intensity in my career. Add to the mix some gems of the American Popular Songbook, the solid quartet of David Hazeltine, Joe Farnsworth, and John Webber, the wonderful orchestral arrangements of Bill Dobbins — and you've got what you're listening to. I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity and the challenges to pull this off. I'm so pleased with what we've done. I hope the listeners will feel the same.

—Eric Alexander


The music known as American jazz is the deepest and most broadly expressive musical language that has evolved in the last century and a half. It incorporates elements from European, African, and American cultures as heard in genres including blues, ragtime, the American songbook, gospel music, and European classical music. It is, in fact, the result of a uniquely organic fusion that came about as these diverse musical streams interacted with each other and influenced each other. The great jazz pianist and educator, Barry Harris, liked to refer to this rich American heritage as "THE MUSIC", and he could cite the specific sources of melodic phrases and harmonic progressions, whether they came from J.S. Bach and Frederic Chopin or Coleman Hawkins and Charlie Parker.

Eric Alexander, David Hazeltine, John Webber, and Joe Farnsworth have been playing together for many years. As a result of their love and respect for this musical language and its past masters, they have a very special way of interacting

and conversing with each other. The rhythm section's close attention to balancing a wide dynamic range always supports the soloist, while enabling each musician to participate in the shaping of every gesture as the music unfolds. Because their playing is always an unpredictable group venture, they have been one of my favorite bands since I first heard them. Although I always associated Eric with the tenor saxophone, his playing on the alto on this recording is a revelation. I hope he continues to use it as yet another vehicle for his creative artistry. Naturally, I was delighted to be invited to write the string arrangements for the occasion.

While I usually compose and arrange before a particular group gets together to record, so that they are interacting with what I've written, I have occasionally been asked to add arrangements for additional instruments to small group recordings that are already complete in themselves. In the present case, I simply tried to allow the arrangements to develop naturally as the quartet's playing moved along, supporting their lead in an unobtrusive but attentive manner, sometimes further developing one of their ideas when spaces were left. Fortunately, this group's playing is so relaxed and mature, they are perfectly at ease to let the music breathe. As I felt that the two takes of Eric's original blues were best left to the quartet's enthusiastic and infectious groove, my introduction to "Embraceable You" serves as a transition to the well-chosen, lesser known repertoire from the American songbook, along with Eric's poignant ballad, "Anita". Of course, with such a great string section on hand, the introductions also gave me some opportunities to initiate a few musical ideas of my own in a way that sets up the first entrance by Eric or the band. This album is a musical endeavor of love and appreciation from all participants, and I'm very happy that you, the listener, can enjoy our collaboration.

—Bill Dobbins



© ©2023 HIGHNOTE RECORDS, INC.

WARNING: Unauthorized reproduction of
this recording is prohibited by Federal Law
and subject to criminal prosecution.

HIGHNOTE
RECORDS, INC.

For a free catalog write:
HIGHNOTE RECORDS, INC.
106 West 71st Street, New York, NY 10023
WWW.JAZZDEPOT.COM