

Eric Alexander Grant Stewart
David Hazeltine John Webber Joe Farnsworth
Reeds and Deeds
Tenor Time



Criss Cross Jazz 1332

Criss 1332 CD

TENOR TIME REEDS and DEEDS

1. **OMICRON**
(D. Byrd) 8.27
2. **CRYING BLUES**
(E. Harris) 7.03
3. **TENDERLY**
(W. Gross) 6.49
4. **MAKE SOMEONE HAPPY**
(J. Styne) 8.47
5. **AMSTERDAM AFTER DARK**
(G. Coleman) 9.46
6. **ISN'T IT A LOVELY DAY**
(I. Berlin) 6.21
7. **R & D BOSSA**
(D. Hazeltine) 7.21
8. **RISE 'N' SHINE**
(V. Youmans) 5.47

TOTAL TIME: 60.52

ERIC ALEXANDER tenor sax
GRANT STEWART tenor sax
DAVID HAZELTINE piano
JOHN WEBBER bass
JOE FARNSWORTH drums

Produced by Gerry Teekens
Recording Engineer: Michael Marciano
Mixing: Max Bolleman
Mastering: The Masters
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Tenor Time

Saxophonists **Eric Alexander** and **Grant Stewart** know all about the value of partnership, as their consistently fulfilling work under the **Reeds and Deeds** banner makes clear. It's part of a rich tradition of two-tenor pairings in jazz — deep and focused, informed by something beyond cutting-contest dynamics and showmanship.

Tenor Time is the third **Reeds and Deeds** outing, following up **Wailin'** [Criss 1258] and **Cookin'** [Criss 1283]. And that's the tip of the iceberg — Eric Alexander has appeared on over 30 Criss Cross titles either as a sideman or leader, dating back to 1992. Grant Stewart, with his copious vocabulary and heavier, darker-hued tenor sound, can trace his Criss Cross lineage back to 1992 as well. As individuals, these are two of the most accomplished and compelling tenor voices in the idiom today.

"We have a lot of similar influences," Grant offers. "Eric has more of a certain period of Trane in his playing, and a heavy George Coleman influence. I have a heavy Sonny Rollins influence. But we were both influenced by Dexter and Stitt and Bird." Alexander concurs and adds more wrinkles: "We are both coming out of the bebop language, but Grant from the Hawkins/Rollins side and I'm more from the Young/Gordon/Coltrane side. Grant is more likely to make use of quotes and motivic development and I'm more likely to play some things

that one would associate with modal and free jazz."

What unites them is a deep connection to the older masters of the music. Grant is quick to mention his experience with great drummers: Jimmy Cobb, Bobby Durham and Roy McCurdy among them. Eric draws on formative experiences with George Coleman, Charles Earland, John Hicks and others, and maintains an ongoing bond with piano great Harold Mabern (a **Reeds and Deeds** rhythm section member on various international tours).

Another key to **Reeds and Deeds'** success is the rest of the band on **Tenor Time**: pianist **David Hazeltine**, bassist **John Webber** and drummer **Joe Farnsworth** make their second appearance on an R & D date. These vibrant, rock-solid players, among the most sought-after straightahead jazz musicians in New York, are all well represented individually in the **Criss Cross** library, and they happen to be Eric's colleagues in the present incarnation of **One for All** (a supergroup sextet with its own history on **Criss Cross** dating back to 1999). Hazeltine plays a double role as consummate accompanist and co-soloist, breaking up the dominant tenor sound.

"It's basically Eric's rhythm section," Grant says, "though I've

worked with them all in different settings. It's such a great band — you can't really go wrong." Eric notes how musicians of this caliber "play for you, not with you. That's a foreign concept to a lot of young players, but an essential one if we're going to be able to do our thing. Grant and I need space, but also creativity from [the band]."

And creativity is what they get. There's a sense of motivated swing and drive on these eight pieces, each perfectly chosen to highlight the co-leaders' simpatico as melodic interpreters and improvisers.

Omicron is a Donald Byrd composition that leads off Whims of Chambers, the classic 1956 album by bass legend Paul Chambers. Given that the tenor saxophonist on that recording is a fellow named John Coltrane, the inclusion of this *Woody n' You* variant makes perfect sense. "I called this one," says Grant, "because it's a [progression] we've all played on forever, and it's good to let loose on." Eric adds, "I've always felt it's a real challenge to play all of those half-diminished chords back to back." Their version retains the Latin tinge — and bass solo on the bridge — of the original, but increases the tempo. The two horns play steady unisons in lower and higher registers before breaking out into their respective statements (Eric, then Grant). It's just this sort of effortless blend of timbres,

and flair for instinctive, off-the-cuff arrangements, that we hear throughout the album.

Cryin' Blues, by Eddie Harris, has a laid-back, almost rock-like feel with twisty syncopation in the turnaround. Grant solos first, deep in the pocket; Eric takes an edgier, more multiphonic route and a broken-up rhythmic approach, at least initially. Hazeltine's solo features crisp, perfectly placed double-time lines and two choruses framed by classic hard-bop backgrounds from the saxes. "I suggested this tune," says Eric. "Eddie Harris came up with all of these funky tunes before anyone really knew what funk was. He was a borderline genius."

Eric's ballad feature comes with a twist: It's a duo with Hazeltine on **Tenderly**, the 1946 standard, and it gives us a sense of the warmth and blues feeling underlying Eric's more biting tone and angular ideas. Eric and David begin the piece rubato but ease into tempo, maintaining a slow 4/4 (the song was originally a waltz). "David and I really enjoy playing duos," Eric says. "We've explored that setting many times on gigs, and it was good for variety on this session."

Jule Styne's **Make Someone Happy**, from the 1960 Broadway production Do Re Mi, suits Eric and Grant well as a midtempo

cooker, with piquant harmonizations and obbligato on the head. "I've been playing this one for the last year or so," Grant remarks. "I've always loved the Tony Bennett-Bill Evans duo version." The form is 40 bars: 16 and 16 with an eight-bar melodic tag. Grant swings authoritatively out of a stop-time break, threading melodies throughout his complex line playing (catch the surprise quote from Rollins' Freedom Suite about midway through the first chorus). Hazeltine offers two focused choruses and then yields to Alexander, who takes a busier and more fragmented rhythmic approach.

Amsterdam is an alluring melody by George Coleman, "my favorite tenor man in the world today and a tremendous human being," says Eric. "Grant, however, was the one who suggested it for the date." "We played it on the road in Japan," Grant explains, adding: "It's a fun tune to blow over, in E flat minor — you don't play that many tunes in E flat minor." Again the two tenors apportion the melody with an ear toward timbral variance and nuance. Following solos by Grant and then Eric, Hazeltine uncannily seizes on the propulsive, Latin-tinged rhythm to go McCoy Tyner-esque for about four bars, quoting subtly from *A Love Supreme*. Coltrane's influence rears its head, but this time from the piano bench.

Grant chooses Irving Berlin's **Isn't It a Lovely Day** as a ballad

feature, omitting the opening verse. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong have a famous version, although according to Grant, "there's a Billie Holiday version that I used to listen to all the time." Farnsworth's brushes, Webber's patient walking, Hazeltine's sophisticated harmonic touches, Grant's way with that hair-raising cadence in the 14th bar, not to mention his soulful cadenza — this is how it's done at slow tempos.

Hazeltine reportedly wrote **R & D Bossa** just a day before the date. The pace is upbeat and there's a wealth of harmonic movement. The A section has a certain familial resemblance to the Horace Silver classic *Nica's Dream*. "Dave writes great tunes," says Stewart. "All of his pieces have a nice hook and he writes great melodies." Eric, Grant and the composer all have their say, and the two horns blow softly and simultaneously on the outro.

Rise 'n' Shine is a raging swinger from Coltrane's 1958 Prestige classic Settin' the Pace, and here it becomes the closest thing to an outright tenor duel we'll hear from **Reeds and Deeds**. But even if the pressure is on right away, with a round of trading eights, then fours and even twos, you can't afford to look over your shoulder and think about the other guy. "At that tempo, you're just thinking survival," Grant quips. But everyone makes it through — Grant peels off after the trading

with a few stand-alone choruses, followed by Eric and then out. The abrupt downbeat at the end says it loud and clear: That's a wrap.

David R. Adler
New York, January 2011