

Eric Alexander - Revival Of The Fittest (2009)

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01. *Revival* 02. *My Grown-Up Christmas List* 03. *The Island* 04. *Too Late Fall Back Baby*
05. *Love-Wise* 06. *Blues For Phineas* 07. *You Must Believe In Spring* 08. *Yasashiku(Gently)*
Eric Alexander (Tenor sax) Harold Mabern (Piano) Nat Reeves (Bass) Joe Farnsworth (Drums)

It isn't hard to understand why Eric Alexander has employed acoustic pianist Harold Mabern on more than a few of his albums. The big-toned tenor saxophonist has enjoyed a strong rapport with his former teacher, and that rapport is very much in evidence on *Revival of the Fittest*. Alexander employs Mabern on almost every song on this 2009 recording; the exception is Alexander's contemplative "Yasashiku (Gently)," which finds Alexander performing a tenor/piano duet with Mike LeDonne. But Alexander features Mabern on every other track, and the two of them form a cohesive acoustic quartet with bassist Nat Reeves and drummer Joe Farnsworth. One has high expectations when Alexander and Mabern get together; they don't let us down on a hard bop/post-bop CD that ranges from inspired performances of George Coleman's "Revival," Ivan Lins' "The Island," and Michel Legrand's "You Must Believe in Spring" to two Mabern pieces that the pianist previously recorded on albums of his own (the driving "Too Late Fall Back Baby" and the Phineas Newborn, Jr.-dedicated "Blues for Phineas"). Ballads have long been one of Alexander's strong points, and he reminds us how expressive a ballad player he can be on Marvin Fisher's "Love-Wise" (which Nat King Cole made famous with a Nelson Riddle-arranged recording in 1958). Alexander's performance of "Love-Wise" recalls John Coltrane's hard bop period of the late '50s, when he was recording for Prestige; Trane gave us some delightfully lyrical recordings of ballads during his pre-Atlantic period (including "Stardust," "Lush Life," and "Invitation"), and Alexander acknowledges Prestige-era Trane on "Love-Wise" but does so without allowing his own personality to become obscured. *Revival of the Fittest* is yet another example of how rewarding an Alexander album can be when Mabern is on board. ---Alex Henderson, Rovi

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