



DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

Since 1934

JIM HALL

ALL ACROSS THE CITY—Concord Jazz 384: *Beau-Fleur*; *Bemsha Swing*; *Young One*; *R.E.M.*; *State*; *All Across The City*; *Drop Shot*; *Something Tells Me*; *Big Blues*.

Personnel: Hall, guitar; Gil Goldstein, keyboards; Steve LaSpina, bass; Terry Clarke, drums.

★ ★ ★

JOSHUA BREAKSTONE

SELF-PORTRAIT IN SWING—Contemporary 14050: *Self-Portrait in Swing*; *Count Your Blessings*; *Will You Still Be Mine*; *Some Enchanted Evening*; *If Ever I Would Leave You*; *Don't Take Your Love From Me*.

Personnel: Breakstone, guitar; Kenny Barron, piano; Dennis Irwin, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

★ ★ ★

Jim Hall takes off in several directions in this varied album of mostly unfamiliar tunes, save for Monk's "Bemsha Swing." It's a thoroughly pretty collection, especially side two, with Gil Goldstein discreetly wrapping Hall in all manner of velvety backgrounds—voices, strings, you name it—through the magic of the modern keyboard. On "Drop Shot" there is even some presumably ersatz vibraphone, which blends nicely with Hall's quirky melody.

Hall's guitar is typically lean. You rarely hear anything more hurried than eighth notes, and double-time runs turn up about as often as total eclipses of the moon. The more showy stuff comes from the fine work of bassist Steve LaSpina and Goldstein in his piano mode. There's some nice, though nervous, interplay when Goldstein and Hall go one-on-one for a chorus on "Bemsha." They dance around each other, like a couple of guys who've been forced to share the same bed and are afraid of accidental contact, least it be misinterpreted.

"R.E.M." is a zig-zagging little original, meaning "rapid eye movement." It has several moods. There's the playful theme, then an open-ended free interval full of swaws in the

wind, and even some old-fashioned finger-snapping swing playing. Each is fine enough on its own terms; what's lacking is the glue to hold it together as one piece.

The controlling mood of the album is slow, spacious, lyrical, and a bit lagging; this, not withstanding a mid-line swinger like "Big Blues" and a couple of eccentric charmers.

There is no shortage of young, knock-out jazz guitarists about us these days. And Joshua Breakstone is among the best of them. *Self-Portrait* gets his latest album of the same name off to the booting start with some hard-driving playing from the leader's guitar and Kenny Barron's piano. The interaction never falters, although after listening to quartet albums for a lot of years, I tend to sigh a long sigh nowadays at the obligatory trading of eights and fours with the drummer.

But Breakstone and Barron are no purveyors of clichés in their playing. The two bring some wonderfully fresh perspectives to "Some Enchanted Evening," playing it at a medium-fast tempo. Even a piano-lounge warhorse like "Will You Still Be Mine" manages to take flight once it gets past the rather ordinary stop-time arrangement of the first chorus. And on "Don't Take Your Love From Me," Breakstone slides obliquely, almost accidentally, into an unexpected but thoroughly logical quote from "Last Time I Saw Paris."

The selections don't on the surface suggest any great potential for improvisation. The fact that Breakstone and Barron demonstrate otherwise, however, makes this an album worth a quiet hearing. It has the solid, civilized center of mature bebop from the '80s. (reviewed on LP)

—John McDonough