

## 2/05 interview appearing on jazzguitarlife.com

Joshua Breakstone is an inspiring and very busy working jazz guitar player out of New York City who shares with us in great detail what it takes to be a working professional and also some glimpses of what it's like when you become one. A truly gifted player and a wonderful read!

JazzGuitarLife.com Interview with Joshua Breakstone: This interview was conducted via telephone February, 2005. Check out his website at [www.joshuabreakstone.com](http://www.joshuabreakstone.com)

JGL: Hi Joshua and welcome to jazzguitarlife.com. I have been an admirer of your playing and music since I first heard your debut album in 1981 titled "Wonderful". Before we get current, can you talk a bit about that album...

JB: Sure. You're from Montreal? Well that record and the next one record were done on a Canadian label, Sonora, (Sonora Records), and that's the label of saxophonist Glen Hall. He's great...he's originally from Winnipeg but has been living in the Toronto area for years....

JGL: Oh yeah. He's the guy you originally recorded with?

JB: Yeah, on my very first record date. (ed.note: The Book of the Heart in 1979).

JGL: Did you record in Toronto?

JB: No. We actually recorded in New York. His recording was also done in New York and it was the first time I was ever in a recording studio. I had gone to Berklee for a couple of terms and that's where I met Glen. So he calls me up one night and says "I'm gonna do some recording and I'd like you to play on a few of the pieces on the recording." I said "great man..." Then he says "Can I come stay at your place?" "Sure" I said. So he came down and we were having the best time. The night before the recording, which was at nine in the morning at Generation Studios in mid-town, we stayed up until like three or four in the morning, then woke up at seven am and went to the date. I don't know why, but I never asked him who was going to be on the record date with us. So we were at Generation studios waiting for the people to open up the studio and Billy Hart shows up, who I had played with before, and JoAnne Brackeen, who I had seen around a little bit. So I'm talking to Billy and I asked him "what are you here for?" And he's like "I got a record date." And I said "You too? Cool, so do I." And so we go into the studio and there's just one studio. I figured there was going to be a bunch of studios but that was it. So it turns out that we are all playing on the same date. And that was the first time I had ever been in a recording studio with some heavy players like Glen, Billy, JoAnne, and Cecil McBee. It was unbelievable.

JGL: Cool...

JB: Yeah...then we did the other two, which were also done in New York. There was a bunch of people after me to record for quite a long time. The funny thing about that is, I came up with all these people who knew that they wanted to make

it in music and that music was a big part of their lives but I wasn't one of those people. I was just playing guitar because I thought it was fun. I always had this feeling that there would be something else that I would end up doing even though I never knew exactly what that was. And it's crazy but I still have that feeling today...lol...if there was something else that was really, really interesting that came up, that would be take me in another direction, I would probably do it.

JGL: Interesting...what do you think that would be?

JB: It's funny, but just today I went into this place in New York called Guernsey's Auction House. Did you hear about the jazz auction they just had...

JGL: Yes I did.

JB: Well these are the guys that ran the jazz auction and I went over there because I had gone to the auction site where you could see all the things that were up for auction and it was amazing. I originally bought a catalogue and then a friend in Florida wanted one so I went to Guernsey's offices, not the auction site, but the actual offices and there stacked up in piles, in cases, were instruments labelled "Charlie Parker's Horn", "John Coltrane's Soprano"...lol...just all stacked up..."Elvin Jones' Drums". So anyway, I was talking to these guys at Guernsey's and I really thought, "God, it would be great to work in a place like this". They do all kinds of auctions, and all kinds of interesting things come through their offices all the time. It would be amazing. So it's always been kind of like that and years ago I never really took it that seriously, even for recording. Then I was given the opportunity to record with anybody that I wanted to. I had already been playing a little bit with Barry Harris so I knew I wanted to play with Barry. And of course Leroy Williams who had been playing with Barry for a number of years. Leroy and Barry are the best combination ever and of course I love Leroy anyway. My first choice for bass player was George Duvivier who I really wanted on the date. So I call people back and say "listen, I can get Barry Harris." And they say "ok, get Barry Harris". Then I say "Leroy Williams", who was not very expensive, so they say fine, "Leroy Williams". But then it was getting pretty much the whole budget. So when I began talking about George Duvivier there was a problem. So we haggled back and forth and I was waiting for them to get back to me, and it just went on and on and on. Then after a few months I get a call...and I had just seen George Duvivier playing up at the West End with Betty Carter and had spoken with him a couple of weeks before...so I get a call and they say "ok, go ahead, get Duvivier, do a recording." So I call up George...now George Duvivier when he passed away was not a young guy, he must have been close to 80 or so and he was one of those musicians who still lived at home...so his mother answers the phone and I ask for "George" and it was the day that George had died. Which is why Earl Sauls, who I had played with a ton back then and who I still play with a lot, is on the record. So that's the story of all those early years.

JGL: So then with the next record "Four Over Four Equals One" you recorded with Kenny Barron. It seems like you were following some kind of theme with having some very heavy piano players on your recordings...

JB: I had been doing a lot of playing with piano players and when I did the record with Barry I had already been playing with Barry. When I did the record with Kenny I had never played with Kenny. But Kenny was somebody who I had

loved listening to. And Kenny back then, and it's hard to fathom, but Kenny was just some other guy. He was not yet a well-known piano player, and I remember when I mentioned that I would like to bring Kenny to the date, they were like "well we would really rather you got someone with a name." But we ended up doing that record with Kenny anyway. We, and Jim Anderson, our engineer, recorded at Nola Studios, which had horrible equipment. And I was very nervous because Nola had booked another band right after us and there was no time to change schedules or anything. We had four hours, one to five, but at five o'clock another band had to be in the studio so we had even less time. There was no room for error, and we were a group that had never played together and had no rehearsal. Upon getting into the studio we found out that we couldn't record because one of the modules on the board was broken. So Jim left and they sent out for some other piece. At three-thirty this new thing was installed and we did that record in an hour-and-a-half...lol...and there were a bunch of extra tracks on the CD with an hour of time. So we spent an hour-and-a-half of recording time and we got an hour of music.

JGL: That's really great. So you basically blew right through the tunes one after the other?

JB: Yeah...

JGL: Were you just calling tunes? I don't remember if you had any originals on that date...

JB: There were a few original tunes but they weren't that difficult. We had charts and it was very straight ahead so that wasn't a problem. And Kenny, well he's been on seven or eight recordings with me since and literally speaking, there's not one thing that Kenny has ever played, on any take, of any song, on any record date, that has been less than absolutely incredible. From great to incredible, that's Kenny Barron, every time. He's just amazing! And that allows you to be so relaxed 'cause you don't have to worry about somebody else's abilities. You only have to worry about yourself.

JGL: Did you guys play live as well to support the album?

JB: We didn't do a tour for the record or anything like that but we did a lot of playing together.

JGL: Speaking of great players. Your bio mentions that you had played with Emily Remler. Could you talk a bit about your association with Emily? She has been one of my favourite players ever since I first heard her back in the early 80's...

JB: Well, I forget exactly how I met Emily but I do remember that she called me up one day, she had just moved to New York from New Orleans, and she was living on the Upper West Side and she wanted to play. Emily was always very eager to play with a lot of different people so she was always having sessions and trying to get together with people. She was really great about that. So we got together and started playing and we became friends. I would play a bunch at her place or she would make it out to Jersey and then we got a gig, a week playing at the Blue Note with three guitarists: Emily, me, and Barney Kessel.

JGL: Wow!

JB: Yeah...it was great. It was one of the first really big gigs that I had and we each played with our own group. It was really interesting and it was my first chance to meet Barney Kessel. And that was right when Emily hooked up with Larry Coryell and I think that may have been the first time I met Larry although I'm not sure. I have so many memories of that week.

JGL: What was it like meeting Barney Kessel?

JB: Well, outside the US I hear the comment that Barney and I are the guitar players on Contemporary Records, I think in this way, people kind of group us together. For me, he's the greatest of all guitar players when you consider the level of his playing not only on his own recordings, but also on his recordings with Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Coleman Hawkins, Sonny Rollins, Billie Holiday, Benny Carter, Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, and many many more. But getting back to Emily. I was playing in a group, I played a lot in a group with another guitar player Harry Leahy...

JGL: Oh wow...I love Harry...

JB: Yeah...that was a great experience for me. Harry and Billy Hart were in that group and then Harry went with Phil Woods' group so Emily came in and played a lot of those gigs and we were playing around New Jersey, and we played here and there, it was a lot of fun. I was doing work in Providence for the Rhode Island Conservatory of Music and they were having an annual jazz weekend with seminars, and private teaching, and playing in a club. Emily came up with me to that so we hung out at that point and then I would just see her every so often and we didn't really keep in touch that much. After she passed away I got a call from Marty Ashby a guitar player who was the Director of Performing Arts at the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild in Pittsburgh. They had a concert, which I think was part of the jazz festival there, for Emily. I was almost surprised that I was invited to play at this concert. I mean I thought it was very nice but I wasn't that close to Emily but I went out and played and it was a really nice event. I met her family, her mother and her sister and got a chance to fly out there with Leni Stern and that's pretty much the whole summary about me and Emily.

JGL: Cool...let's get a little current and talk a bit about your latest CD's "A Jamais" and "Memoire". How did these two projects come about and how was it that you ended up in Paris to record them?

JB: Well, I recorded twice before for Capri Records and I am also married to a French woman in fact we ended up buying a small house in the South of France which had been owned at one point by my wife's grandmother and then inherited by her father. So we would spend time in the South of France and I started doing some festivals, meeting musicians and just playing. When I mentioned to Tom Burns, the owner of Capri Records about playing with Louis Petrucciani (bass player) he was very interested and asked if I would consider recording. It was the perfect idea for me because I just love Louis and I wanted to spend a little more time in France so we organized a recording session over in France and that's how "A Jamais" came about. Then the following year we decided that we wanted to do another with the same group but for a bunch of reasons we ended up at the last

minute having to make a change concerning the drummer. So what we have is just two years in a row of recording sessions done...actually not in Paris but way down south in Southern France in this little town called Valflaunesse about half an hour away from the big town of Montpellier. So we had this studio in the middle of nowhere but it's really a good place. It's been an interesting experience playing with European musicians and also to be playing with Louis who is just a great musician.

JGL: How did you hook up with Louis?

JB: How I hooked with Louis was that I was invited...there's a very famous music school in Montpellier called Jams...what is really remarkable about this place is that it is owned and operated by the teachers who are all professional musicians. It's really cool. They have a performance space and regular classes that go all day long and all week long...so anyway, I was invited to Jams to do a presentation and I presented on my concept of improvisation. It was a very interesting experience for me because it was an hour or an hour and a half all in French...lol...so I had to write everything out in French and speak it...lol. In any case, at Jams, after I had finished, they invited me to stay for dinner, which sounded great, and they had a band playing that night and that's where I met Louis because he was in the band playing that night. So it was just really one of those lucky occurrences.

JGL: Had he known you or of you prior to that first time?

JB: No. That was the first time. I had met his brother Michelle (piano) once or twice...I used to play at this place on the Upper West Side...I don't remember if Michelle was living around there at the time, but he used to come into this place I played at...they had a terrace...and he would be there quite a bit. Now I never hung out with him or spent a lot of time with him but we would say hello and he was very, very nice.

JGL: Ok...so that's the French connection...now, what was your impression of European musicians?

JB: That's a really hard question. First of all, I don't know that much about European musicians, I must confess. I mean I have played a lot in England and a certain amount in France, and I've played around Europe, but...if you had asked me about Japanese musicians...I go to Japan a lot...I've been going to Japan twice a year for the past fifteen years.

JGL: Really?! Wow...

JB: Yeah yeah. I do a ton of playing in Japan and usually pretty long tours. Actually I am ready to leave on the third of April again...but...let me just speak about the thoughts I have about musicians who are not Americans because any place you go, including the United States, there are musicians who are just fabulous, and then there are musicians who are very good and musicians who are technically gifted, there are all kinds of musicians you know. I think it's difficult...I grew up in New York in this environment. I mean I heard Miles when I was a little kid at the Vanguard, then I would hear Art Framer at Boomers, Barry Harris at Bradleys. Every night it was somebody else...Tommy Flanagan

over here and the Mel Lewis-Thad Jones big bands, Pepper Adams and all those guys, Joe Farrell and everyone else. I grew up in this area and it was like automatic, this is like my language, it has been ingrained in me. I mean I came up with Rock and Roll music when I was a teenager but I already had heard jazz although the music hadn't grabbed me yet. In a certain way this is very innate.

Jazz music is like an innate language and was somewhere deep inside of me...I've been hearing this all my life. And we are American and we hear things on the radio. We hear Frank Sinatra singing "Come Fly With Me" or all the standards and its just part of our language and so I think it's difficult for foreign musicians to really get it. There are musicians who are very technically gifted and can really approximate...they can play everything...but with jazz...you know...it's that feeling that is really hard to get and even in the United States now...playing time, and getting a rhythm section to play together has become a very rare thing. I have this philosophy and I'll try to shorten it to make time. The things that make music expressive... for example, people use to say, "Charlie Parker is really saying it..." or "Lester Young is really saying it..." There are all these metaphors, verbal metaphors "saying it" or "Clifford Brown is telling a story", all these sayings, it's like finally I think I got it. And what it is, is that a lot of the expressive qualities that we use in speaking when applied to music make music very, very expressive. I mean that literally. When we speak, if we have a phrase that goes up we don't have to go to speech school to know that our voice is going to come down and if we speak down we know it's coming up, it's a balance. We do this naturally; we have a natural sense of dynamics with our voice. Yet we don't have this on our instruments, especially on guitar, which is not related to...we're not blowing into it, it's not relating to our breath or vocal mechanisms. And if we're talking, if we're good speakers, if we're interesting, we are using a combination like musical notes in a fashion. Some are 16th's or 32nd notes and then we get these long notes. So the note values have a balance, a dynamic to them. We have places where we are talking and we have spaces where we are not, where there is space. And really great speakers understand the use of space as the most effective dynamic of all. It creates a vacuum and when you're playing music it's the same thing. When you leave space people want to know what's coming next. So all these things, the dynamics of the voice, and language are extremely important. I've always had a sneaking suspicion that being able to speak English has a lot to do with understanding jazz.

JGL: Interesting...

JB: I think you can appreciate it and I think you can understand it emotionally, but to play it, I think it relates to how English is spoken...I mean, that whole connection with the voice is a very, very deep connection for communicating. We play all this stuff and we learn all these tunes but all we are trying is to express something unique, to come up with our own way of saying something...

JGL: Our own voice...

JB: Yeah! Right...exactly. And there it is...another vocal metaphor...our own voice. So that's one thought I have about non-English speaking musicians and jazz. And yet, you have some musicians from other countries that play so great. Some people just get it.

JGL: Lol...I think that's the bottom line...do you get it!?

JB: Yeah. I'm trying to get it myself...lol...

JGL: Well I think you got it...lol...From hearing your playing I am always impressed how your phrasing and improvising communicates, there's that word again, your musical intentions where I can almost hear the thought process of what you are playing and about to play, much like Jim Hall's musical sensibilities.

JB: Thank you for that. What that's about...you know, I do a lot of teaching and I try and get my students to number one, have control over what they play, so that you are not just playing stuff, not just filling time. Man, people were always saying "yeah, he's telling a story, telling a story..." I don't see or hear any story. It was always so ridiculous to me. And then one day I sort of got it. It's a start and a finish. I tell my students, it doesn't matter what you play so much. But it really matters what you do with the things you do play. And that is the driving force of how I play. I mean I hear some people play and they have this incredible vocabulary, they can play so many things but they're not really doing it for me, they're not really saying anything to me. For me, hearing people playing out their ideas, that's doing it for me, that's great music.

JGL: Do you remember that one moment where you became conscious of your playing developing in that way? Or was it something that you became aware of over time?

JB: Over time...definitely over time. When I was really young I did some playing with Warne Marsh and he was a big influence in my developing of ideas. Hearing somebody who is the ultimate developer of material, that really influenced me. And there have been times when I sort of had gotten away from that, but then when I rediscovered that...and now it's just how I play...but in the past, and even now when I come back to that, that's when music becomes really exciting for me. Music becomes thrilling because there are so many things that you can do, there's so many places you can go with the music, there's so many new things that you can play all the time if you just go for it, and not worry about what to play so much but play things that you can develop and let that thing lead you to the next idea or don't let it lead you. Do something new and let that lead you on, that's the thrill of improvisation to me.

JGL: Most definitely. It's that mystery of not knowing what is coming up, not knowing where that last note is going to take you, yet there is still that intrinsic knowledge that enables you to carry on from one note to the next given the context...

JB: Yeah, it definitely is context. Because when you play with other musicians like a great drummer or a great trumpet player, or like Kenny Barron. Oh man, when you play with Kenny Barron it's like he can hear everything. I would play something and he would hear it and take it over, reharmonize it. I would play something and let him finish it, then I would start with something new and finish something he started. It was the dialogue that we would come up with. I mean you start out playing your own stuff but it's the musicians you are playing with that establish what you play and how you phrase on any given night.

JGL: I liked the way you said that...that's excellent...now if we could travel back in time again to the early days. When did you first start playing guitar?

JB: I started playing guitar when I was about 14 or 15 and there was a rock group in my high school, Moon Unit, and they were playing around the area, in New Jersey. Something happened to their guitar player, either he got grounded or he couldn't come to rehearsals anymore, but whatever it was, somebody told them that I played guitar. They came to me and said "Listen, we have a group and rehearse every Saturday. Why don't you come and audition for the group, you could be the guitar player. You play right?" And I said "hmmmm...yeah..." lol. So I went home, this must have been on a Monday or Tuesday, and I begged my father for a guitar. He took me to the music store in town and bought me this most horrible red electric guitar and amp set and I sat there everyday just practicing and practicing and practicing and just to show you how "great" this group was, by Saturday I got the gig...lol. But this group became very big in that area and we worked all the time and we had offers to actually record. We became managed by this musician who wrote a lot of scores for Broadway, Sheldon Harnick, and he did a show called "1776" while he managed us which one a lot of awards. He wrote a lot of Broadway stuff and it was pretty good and it was good experience. Actually it was a little different because it was guitar, bass, drums, organ, and a guy that played flute and saxophone. It was really different...

JGL: What year was this around...

JB: Must have been around '69...

JGL: Ok, so that was definitely during the acid rock days...

JB: Yeah...

JGL: You said that you needed to practice incessantly for that week to get the gig with that band, but you must have had some experience playing guitar before that...no?

JB: Not really...my older sister had a guitar that I messed around with a little bit but not too much. But shortly after that I started taking lessons from Sal Salvador...

JGL: Ok, there's a little jump from rock...

JB: Yeah...I was very serious about wanting to learn how to play the guitar and my sister had a very good friend who was playing with Buddy Rich' band in the saxophone section. He gave me a couple of numbers to call and I hooked up with Sal Salvador. That was a fabulous experience.

JGL: I can imagine. At that time was it just a yearning to learn guitar or were you getting into jazz at that point...

JB: Yeah...I was starting to get into jazz and I just wanted to learn how to play right and to read. Basically I just wanted to learn everything I could...but yes, I was interested in jazz around that time. The thing that really turned me around and made me interested in jazz was hearing Lee Morgan' "Search for the New Land" record with Grant Green. The funny thing was that I hated Grant Green. I thought "Oh man, this guy can't play"...lol...I mean, it wasn't because of Grant Green, it was because of Lee Morgan. It was the first time that I had heard

anything so exciting and I just loved Lee Morgan. I couldn't understand what it was but I just loved it.

JGL: Cool...Lee Morgan's the man...

JB: Yeah!

JGL: Ok, how long did you end up studying with Sal Salvador for?

JB: Well it was kind of on and off but definitely over a year and he was a great teacher who gave me a strong background with all kinds of different books. I use to go there with eleven, twelve, sometimes thirteen books every week and I would have to do one thing out of each book. There was Arbans trumpet book, and George Van Eps guitar book, a mallet book, and Lenny Niehaus' Saxophone books. Of course Sal Salvador wrote a method book too so we used that as well...all these different books like Johnny Smith books...it was an incredible grounding. And then he became my really good friend and really went out of his way to try and help me years later. He was a really sweet guy and he actually hooked me up with Carl Barney the guitar maker and Carl Barney gave me a guitar, which surprised me, as a result of Sal Salvador's recommending me and when Sal passed away they had the memorial service, as they do here. Usually when musicians die they have a memorial service at this church in mid-town called St. Peter's and I played at Sal' memorial service.

JGL: Did you both ever have a chance to play professionally?

JB: No...we really didn't. But he was really great, always encouraging. I only studied with him for a short time but every now and then I would give him a call or I would run into him someplace and he was like "I'm so proud of you..." He would always say the nicest things and everyone knew that I was his student. And he used to teach with Barry Galbraith, who is one of my all-time favourite guitar players, Alan Hanlon, and a couple of other guys, basically a group of killer guitar players.

JGL: I can imagine. At the time that Lee Morgan turned you on to jazz, were there any guitar players that you were into as much either in jazz or in general?

JB: Well don't forget, I was coming from rock and my sister worked at the Fillmore East, so I use to go for free and attend as many shows as I wanted to. I mean I used to hear so much...I was really crazy about Jimi Hendrix...in fact I saw Jimi Hendrix over a hundred times. I saw Jimi with the Band of Gypsies. I was at that New Years Eve record that they did. I went to all that stuff. Frank Zappa I just loved. And I got to meet most of those guys. My sister knew all these people so when I was really young I went to a Richie Havens recording session, we had Joni Mitchell stay at our house, and there's a ton of stories..lol. But as much as I loved these guys it was really saxophone players for me. It took me awhile to appreciate jazz guitar. I guess I heard Wes, and there were things about Wes that I could appreciate but it wasn't as exciting to me as Lee Morgan, who was first, then Charlie Parker, and Sonny Stitt, those kind of people.

JGL: Were you finding at that time that jazz guitar was limited?

JB: Not limited, it just wasn't exciting to me like the way those other instruments were to me. I mean, you listen to Lee Morgan with Art Blakey and everyone playing and you start to sweat man. I remember hearing the Wes version of "Body and Soul" where he doubles up the time and I remember loving that and thinking that a lot of the things he was playing were really pretty. I started getting into it at that time but the guy who I really liked was Kenny Burrell. I have listened to a lot of music but not that many guitar players. Although I did listen a lot to Pat Martino and actually I have listened to most guys. It's funny, I remember right when I had my first or second record out, I was driving across Florida late at night and I was listening to the radio picking up a jazz station in the distance, and I heard this music and I thought "whoa, they're playing me!" I couldn't believe it... anyway, it turns out that it was Jimmy Raney..lol. Later on I did get to meet Jimmy Raney and I did get to hear a little bit of Jimmy Raney and I always thought that Jimmy Raney was the guitar player that I sounded like the most although I haven't exactly heard that from too many people throughout the course of my life. I always thought his playing was similar to my concept of playing...

JGL: Because the guys he was listening to were similar to the cats you were listening to?

JB: Probably. He was just a great guy... There was one time when I was playing in Louisville and some friends said "hey, were gonna get Jimmy Raney to come down and hear you". So they would say that and then he would never show up. Then one night I'm playing, and I'm playing better than I have ever played in my life and towards the end of the set I happen to look down into the audience and there's Jimmy Raney sitting right in front of me. So after the set I sit with him and we're talking, and he's very sweet, and I ask him "so what did you think of the music?" And he says, "well, to tell you the truth..." and tells me about his hearing problem. Actually his hearing problem wasn't deafness, it was a nerve. When this nerve became inflamed he couldn't hear right and then it would clear up for a few days every month he told me and then he'd be able to hear fine, absolutely perfect, but then he could feel it coming on and then he'd have a lot of problems with his ears. So he told me that he couldn't hear anything, the sound coming from the band sounded like static to him. But he heard my records and actually had some of my recordings and he knew in detail what I was playing. He would tell me things like "on this recording you use a quote which was great because thirty-five years ago I was in this club and George Barnes played the same quote." I mean he really knew my stuff...

JGL: That's like a compliment and a half...

JB: Yeah...it surprised me you know...

JGL: Any other memorable moments from your career?

JB: I don't know...there are just so many things...it's too hard...I got so many...

JGL: One thing I am interested in finding out about from you is what's up with all those tribute albums you have done? Stuff like "Walk Don't Run", "I Wanna Hold Your Hand", "Oh! Darling", "Remembering Grant Green", the Monk album, the Bud Powell album...

JB: That started when I signed with King Records. I've been very lucky. I did my first two records with Sonora and then I immediately got signed with Contemporary under Fantasy Records, for a four records-four year deal and then just before that contract expired I was in Japan travelling and there was a guitar AR guy for King records which is the largest record company in Japan who I had met at the Blue Note when I did that three guitar gig I mentioned earlier. I didn't remember meeting him but he assured me that we did and so while I was in Japan he asked me to join him for lunch at King Records. So I met with him and we spent pretty much the whole day together, from around 11:45 in the afternoon to 5:30. So he walks me to the elevator we shake hands and I get on the elevator and just as the doors are about to close I realize that I have to say one more thing to him. So I hit the open button and walk down the hall to find King Records. The doors were locked because the business day was over so somebody had to open the doors for me and I ask them if they could get him and they bring him over and I said "I just want to mention to you, in case you are ever interested in the future, my contract with Fantasy is running out officially July 1st and if you are ever interested in doing some recording please keep me in mind." The guy grabs me and pulls me inside the door...lol...brings over a guy from the legal department and in less than half an hour we had a contract that was post dated and so I went from four years and four records with Fantasy to four years and four records with King.

JGL: Cool...

JB: Yeah...to get back to your question...the Japanese labels are into theme records and that's what they wanted me to do. I had specific dates when I had to deliver each one of those records and I was waiting and waiting and waiting to figure out what they would allow me to do for the first record and a couple of weeks before this record is to be made he says to me that he proposes that I do the music of the Ventures which turned out to be "Walk Don't Run". I said "forget it!" I was living in Cincinnati at that point and I thought "you know what...f\*\*k this guy, I don't care about the money, I don't care about the contract, I don't care about anything. I'm not doing it, there's no way...and I wrote this fax, this horrible fax and I put it in the fax machine and I didn't send it. I waited until the next day. Then I took it and I ripped it up and I wrote another fax saying, "I'm not inclined to do this but please explain what your ideas are." He wrote back saying "I sense that you are not pleased with this concept but please be aware that you can pick any song they have ever recorded. Please research this. You can say yes you'll do the record or you can say no and it will be fine either way." So I started looking at what they had recorded and it was all these great tunes from "Caravan" to "Slaughter on 10th Avenue" to, well of course "Walk Don't Run" the Johnny Smith tune. In fact, they recorded it wrong. The way it was written, it was a Johnny Smith line over "Softy As In A Morning Sunrise". So we recorded these tunes the same way I have recorded every theme record where I would play the melodies right and then play them so they meant something to me, I had to play them my way. So I did that and then the next record was the Grant Green record I think and then I did two records of Beatles songs for them, which really turned out great.

JGL: It's funny because a friend of mine, when I mentioned to him that I received some CD's from you, said that he knew of you because of your Beatles and Ventures theme albums, and he even owns your Ventures CD. And he's not a fan of jazz guitar in any way...but he knows you. So you added a lot of credibility to

my site...lol...

JB: Lol...the Beatles were like the big records that I did and they were never released in the United States...only released in Japan and other parts of the world but not in the US or Canada. So that's where the themed records came from. When I finished my contract with King I started doing some recording for Jamey Aebersold and he just loved the idea of themed records and one of his whole attractions towards me was that I could do that kind of thing. I really wasn't into the whole idea of themed records but we started on this idea of doing music of piano players, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, and then the third one, it was like a triumvirate, with these three guys hanging out together, visiting each other's homes, it was Bud Powell, Monk, and Elmo Hope and even though Elmo is like the least commercially viable I would love to get around to Elmo Hope sometime. Although Jamey Aebersold is not doing too much recording on Double Time right now so I don't know if that's going to happen.

JGL: I hope it does some day. I thank you for talking about the themed records thing because I was always under the impression that you were just a fan of those artists and wanted to put your personal stamp on those tunes?

JB: Nah...you know, recording for me is like, well you know, some people record to approximate a live session, you bring a few tunes and you just play hard. But for me, recording is like a whole other world from what I do in clubs. It's about presenting some things that I find meaningful to myself or that I find beautiful. You try and communicate what you feel is special about a tune or something that you love to other people. And having the "confines" of someone's music like Grant Green is fine with me. It's interesting...I have never loved doing records because it takes me away from other things that I am doing or thinking about doing but having a theme kind of makes it interesting and challenging. I learn stuff as I research what Grant played or wrote or what Bud played...tunes of Bud's that I used to play years ago or tunes of his that I never played. So it's kind of interesting for me as well.

JGL: Have you found that even though some of these albums have not been released in North America, when you go to Japan or Europe that they know you from these albums? And are expected to play tunes from these albums? Have they made you more popular over there?

JB: You mean the theme albums or just my recordings in general?

JGL: Well, I guess the theme albums...

JB: Well the Beatles albums are huge in Japan. Nearly my whole audience knows my Beatles albums and I would have to play some tunes from them. I had a thing happen when I came out with the Beatles albums in Japan. I got a call from this guy in Japan who was sort of in the middle of nowhere, he was on this island Awaji Shima, and he offered us a ton of money to come and play at this club. We had to take a ferry from Kobe. So we get to this club and he's charging a fortune to get into this place, something like \$200.00 a person and he's doing two shows and clearing the house and it's packed already as we walk into this place. So we play the first show and people love it, it's great and we get a standing ovation. So they leave and we take a break. Now we haven't had time for dinner so he takes us to the back and says "I have Sushi for you." And there's table after table of

platters with Sushi on them and they are covered with Saran Wrap and just waiting for us after the gig. And were starving...we're playing and we're thinking about this food while we're playing...lol...the second set comes and the audience loves it but we can't wait for these people to leave so we can finally eat and as we're putting away the gear we hear screaming! I had brought a friend with me and we look at each other wondering what is going on. I have learned to speak Japanese pretty well but this was when I didn't speak the language very well. It turns out the club owner is screaming at the bass player because he hired me to play Beatle songs and we didn't play any Beatle's songs. So the club owner comes over and pays us the money, thank God, and then says, "I refuse to give you any food. I'm not giving you Sushi!"...lol...and this is a place that has no restaurants so we go back to the hotel and we're just starving to death. So we get back to the hotel where earlier that night they were bowing to us and all that and the doors are locked! We can't get into the hotel...lol...we began to walk around the island looking for phone booths but there were no phone booths anywhere. So we're walking and walking and we are carrying all our instruments and stuff and we finally come across a phone booth and call the hotel time and time again until finally someone wakes up and let's us into the hotel. So that's something that those theme albums can do for you in terms of expectation...lol.

JGL: Sheesh...it's kind of like the "Stairway to Heaven" syndrome...

JB: Yeah...It's a little different now. I just recorded "Memoire" at the end of August, so it's not that long ago. And that record sat around until about a month ago when I went in and did the mastering and a little bit of editing and it took a month for this thing to be made up. It's like back then you would do a record and it would come out a year later let's say...and for me, like these theme records, man, that's what I was doing a year ago. Like I might play a few of those things but I'm not still in that place. But people sort of expect you to be playing that stuff. Man, I feel sort of relieved when I finish up a record and walk out of the studio. You've absorbed that stuff, and that's part of you and now you're going on to something new. It's a great feeling.

JGL: It is indeed...before I forget, what kind of guitar are you playing now?

JB: I have many guitars but the one I use most frequently is an L5 from the early '70s. I use an old Yamaha 100 watt amp, solid state, with a 12 inch JBL speaker. It has an equalizer, which I like quite a lot.

JGL: I want to thank you Joshua for taking the time out of what is undoubtedly a busy schedule and I would like to wrap this up with a big question. It's obvious that you have had and continue to still have a wonderful career...and you have been very fortunate and lucky in a lot of aspects and please do not take this the wrong way but why you and not someone else who may be just as competent a player?

JB: What a great question. Well, there's a lot of different things that occur to me but one thing is that playing music, and there are a lot of frustrating things about playing music, but the business of music is a really, really hard business and it's a real struggle playing for people who are involved in this music only as a business and playing for people who really don't care what you're playing. And as you know, it is a struggle to play good music anyway and there's a lot of pressure playing music as great as that is. I've known so many people who are just

incredible players who have passed by the wayside over the years. Not because they weren't the greatest players but the people who have ended up making it are the people who have paid the dues that you have to pay psychologically to be a musician. So there is some kind of psychological component that allows you, or maybe even induces you to go on and to keep on in this business, which I think, is a very difficult one. Certainly nobody is doing this for the money. If money was the question there would be a million different things I would be doing that would be smart alternatives. For some it is a difficult lifestyle to live. You are your own product and the values of this music in a way are sort of non-commercial in a kind of way that can't ever be sold. So it's kind of a very fine line. That's one thing that occurs to me. The other thing that occurs to me is the advice that I get asked by young players all the time. They keep asking me "what do you think about a life in music?" and "how do you make it in music?" and "how do you do it" and all of this stuff. And one of the things that I have told people over the years is...I've already had this belief and I don't know if it is naïve or an accurate reading of the music business but I've always thought that if you stayed true to playing your own way, playing something with solid values, playing something beautiful, something that communicates, something that's real, playing something that is simple in a way, playing things that have emotional content, playing things that have a range of emotions. If you do all these things, you may not end up being the most famous person ever but I think that if you continue to play with these types of values you'll always have people interested in what you are playing. I'm not talking about the commercial side of things but I always thought that there would be some people out there interested in what I was doing just because it was done honestly and well and there were values that spoke for themselves.

JGL: Thank you Joshua, it's been a pleasure.

JB: Same here Lyle and thank you.

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