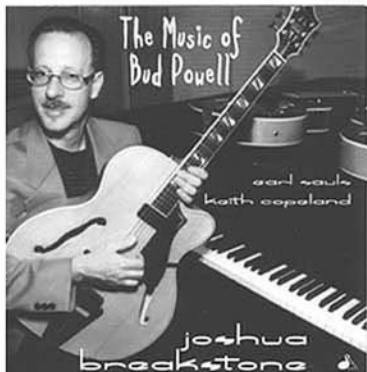


# Vibrant piano jazz via smooth guitar

Breakstone takes cross-instrument arrangements on tour



By Paul Weideman  
The New Mexican

**F**ire in velvet. A fitting description of Joshua Breakstone's jazz guitar. The New York musician has one of the softest-sounding guitars in the business, but his legato tones don't hide a scorching facility on the instrument.

Witness *The Music of Bud Powell* (released Sept. 15 by Double-Time Records), on which Breakstone tackles 10 tunes by the master jazz pianist.

Powell (1924-1966) was one of the mid-1940s founders — along with saxophonist Charlie Parker, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Thelonious Monk and drummer Max Roach — of the bebop form.

On songs such as *Tempus Fugit*, Powell kept time by pounding chords with his left hand while playing dazzling melodies and improvisations with his right.

During a casual listen, Breakstone's arrangement of the tune sounds much different. The guitarist's pretty, round tone almost sounds like smooth jazz, but listen carefully and you're quickly awed at the musicianship.

Improvisation is a hallmark of true jazz and Breakstone is a believer.

"That's really the be-all and end-all of this music," he said by phone from New York. "It's the ultimate challenge in jazz, to be able to improvise over any kind of harmonic terrain and invent new melodies. The demands of improvising are unparalleled in other kinds of music.

"To me the playing of the melody and the expression of a song are paramount, but when

you get into the improv, hopefully you can say something unique and in your own way. That's what I try to do."

Jazz fans in Northern New Mexico can hear for themselves in a series of concerts next week. Joining Breakstone on tour are bassist Earl Sauts and drummer Keith Copeland, who back the guitarist on the new CD.

Breakstone, born in New Jersey in 1955, was shipped as a teenage guitar aficionado at the altars of Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa. His preference shifted to jazz after encountering the music of Parker, Powell and other boppers.

He studied for two years with New York guitarist Sal Salvador and went on to earn a degree in jazz studies at New College in Sarasota, Fla. In 1983 Breakstone debuted as a recording artist with *Wonderful*. Since then he has recorded 11 albums, working with pianist Kenny Barron, baritone saxophonist Pepper Adams and drummer Kenny Washington.

He said he always has loved the voices of saxophones, trumpets, clarinets, flugel horns and trombones. There have been times when he wished he had learned to play a horn rather than guitar.

"Throughout my life I've listened more to horn players and I've been more influenced by that kind of sound than that of traditional guitar music," Breakstone said. "I haven't cared for the sound many guitar players have. I hope what I'm getting is a more substantial sound, maybe it's more like a tenor sax."

"Another thing about my sound production relates to the contact between voice and instrument, which is difficult with the guitar because you don't breathe in it. It's very important to me to play legato, or smooth, just like you're singing the notes."

Breakstone's enchantment with beautiful melodies has led him over the years to cover pop songs by composers such as George Gershwin and Henry Mancini. His current project, arranging for guitar the music of America's remarkable jazz pianists, is more challenging.

*The Music of Bud Powell* is his second in the series for Double-Time. The first effort, *Let's Call This Monk* (1996), involved translating such Thelonious Monk monuments as *Ruby My Dear*, *I Mean You* and *Brilliant Corners* into guitar epiphanies.

"We did the Monk record, and he is known as a composer, whereas Powell is just the opposite," Breakstone said. "People think of Bud as that fierce soloist but often know little about his writing. When I started considering him as a topic for a CD, it surprised me how many great original songs he wrote."

"On the new album we tried to be representative, doing both some of Bud's early, famous songs and his later, lesser-known ones. *Tempus Fugit* and *Poco Loco* have some of the greatest Powell playing ever."

"Elegy is an example of a later one people don't know too well. *Time Waits* is a ballad where there was a little harmonic problem between Bud and his bass player. I sort of resolved the problem and figured out how I think it was meant to be played."

Who might be next in the piano-to-guitar CD series? Red Garland, maybe? Hampton Hawes? Bill Evans?

"I have some thoughts," Breakstone said. "The obvious next tribute would be to Elmo Hope, because Monk and Bud and Elmo hung out together a lot, playing and sharing music." ◀

## DETAILS

**WHAT**  
Joshua Breakstone Trio  
Concerts

**WHEN/WHERE/INFO**  
6-9 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 20  
Taos Inn  
125 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, Taos  
No cover  
505-756-2233

7-10 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 21  
Seasons Ritesville-Gill  
2031 Mountain Road NW, Albuquerque  
No cover  
505-766-5100

9:30 p.m. Sept. 22  
Bar B of the Paramount  
331 Sandoval St.  
Tickets \$10  
982-8999