

NEW ISSUES



Doug Lawrence by John Herr

and pianist Barkan joins in. It is tender late-night music, its theme romance—without being narrowly restricted or hackneyed. Gill's vocal instrument has its limitations, but the occasional conversational thinness of his voice makes him work seriously to convey the message: I thought of Astaire rather than Sinatra, and that's high praise. He takes the lyrics to heart, and his understanding of the texts shapes his approach, thus "Detour Ahead," which is really a song about how love is going to succeed, is taken at a brighter, happier tempo than usual. Stein has a shining tone and he never overplays: his notes ring; his lines and chords are poised, dramatically rich. And the duo-trio context works splendidly: a vocal/guitar duet gives way to a piano/bass interlude which becomes a trio: listeners will find this subtle, probing disc a pleasure.

(2) presents a well-respected European Jazz pianist accompanying his own vocals. Amsallem isn't loud, but his singing has arresting force. His piano is spare but powerful, and one feels his conviction—he's never casually running through a familiar set of lyrics and chords, although on "Dream" he shows how he can gently woo us. In the middle of the CD, he presents the musical equivalent of a palate-cleanser—a solo version of "Solitude" lasting about a minute that simply explores the last sixteen bars of the chorus in a harmonically dense way, Monk-like without resorting to the well-known collection of dissonances and intentional awkwardnesses. I never doubted Amsallem's sincerity, and I admire this CD for his willingness to present himself unadorned. My one objection concerns his Euro-pronunciation of the English lyrics: his way with a vowel or consonant sometimes distracted me, although this won't be an obstacle to many, less sensitized listeners.

(3) features the Japanese singer Taeko, who has a splendid vocal range and energy; she negotiates with great style among varied material; Taeko takes naturally to "I Mean You" and Marvin Gaye as well as the folk song "Biwako." I admire her willingness to take chances—the scat / drums episode that begins "On a Clear Day" reminded me of a marching band coming down the street—that raise this CD above a formulaic rendering of audition pieces designed to appeal to the widest possible audience. (I drew the line at Sly Stone's "Stand": I listened to the whole track only out of a sense of moral duty.) Taeko's duet version of "I Didn't Know About You" with guitarist McNeal is particularly touching, and pianist Rainone gives attentive support throughout.

I have been quite unkind to CDs by Jack Wood in these pages, although not without musical justification. Thus I was uneasy about (4) and hoped that his earnest claim that it is his "best work to