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by Jack Bowers

Bruce Eskovitz Jazz Orchestra

Invitation

Pacific Coast Jazz

The Bruce Eskovitz Jazz Orchestra is actually a tentet that sounds appreciably larger, thanks to resourceful charts by the leader and inspired blowing by all hands. The group's second recording, *Invitation*, more than stands its ground against the first (*Regions, Backstage Records*), which this reviewer praised as "both cerebrally and aesthetically rewarding."

As before, all of the arrangements are by Dr. Eskovitz, as well as seven of the ten compositions. The exceptions are Bronislau Kaper's "Invitation," Freddie Hubbard's "Red Clay" and Herb Ellis' "Detour Ahead," the last an overlooked gem that's always a pleasure to hear, especially when played with passion, as it is here. Eskovitz, whose expressive tenor sax points the way, divides the chart in two, the first half "dark and mellow," the second "a la Stan Kenton," and it works splendidly, as do the other themes. "Damien's Dance" is a minor blues Jazz waltz, "Just in the 'Newk' of Time" a shuffling salute to the great Sonny Rollins (based on Rollins' "Doxy", "One Last Time" an old-school gospel jubilee, "A Walk in the Park" a gentle refrain "that hearkens to a warm summer's day." Eskovitz adds a pinch of salsa to enliven the ardent "Latin Fever," "Breakthrough" and "Dialogue."

The ensemble is cohesive throughout, while the charts are inlaid with persuasive solos by Eskovitz (on tenor or soprano sax), alto Billy Kerr, trumpeters Larry Williams and Jeff Jarvis (who engage in serious horn-to-horn combat on "Fever", trombonist Andrew Lippman, guitarist Ian Robbins, pianist Mark Balling and bassist Adam Cohen. Drummer Steve Barnes and percussionist Angel Figueroa make sure the rhythm never wavers.

Even though the BEJO isn't quite a big band, don't let that dampen your interest. As the saying goes, If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . . In other words, the tentet sounds like a big band, and Eskovitz' tasteful charts assure a pleasurable listening experience. **Explicitly recommended.**