



Easy Living (featuring Jim Hall)
Paul Desmond (RCA Victor - Speakers Corner)
by George Kanzler

While he was a member of the Dave Brubeck Quartet (1951-1967), alto saxophonist Paul Desmond made five albums as a leader for RCA Victor. This 1966 LP is the last and the third of a series of quartets with guitarist Jim Hall. While the dynamic of the Brubeck Quartet pivoted on the contrast between Desmond's liquid lyricism and the leader's pile-driving, muscular attack, Desmond and Hall shared a penchant for coolness and emotional restraint. Their dynamic was one of close empathy, never more so than on the kind of harmonically sophisticated standards that dominate this album. Filling out the quartet is Modern Jazz Quartet drummer Connie Kay and a rotating bass chair

of Gene Wright (from the Brubeck Quartet), Gene Cherico or Percy Heath (of the Modern Jazz Quartet).

Side One begins with what was a nascent standard, a recent (1964) hit for Tony Bennett, "When Joanna Loved Me", from composer Robert Wells (Mel Tormé's co-writer on "The Christmas Song") and lyricist Jack Segal. Hall opens a cappella, then has a central solo between outings by Desmond, whose saxophone sighs the closing melodic line. Sammy Fain-Lew Brown's "That Old Feeling", Jimmy Van Heusen-Johnny Burke's "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and "Here's That Rainy Day" close out Side One, with "That Old Feeling" given a faster, brighter tempo that highlights Desmond's ability to improvise by mulling over a repeated phrase from different angles.

Ralph Rainger-Leo Robin's "Easy Living", the standard immortalized by Billie Holiday, finds Desmond and Hall responding to each other with utter simpatico over a slow heartbeat tempo, saxophone slipping seamlessly from improvisation to closing theme. The *My Fair Lady* song "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" by Frederick Loewe-Alan Jay Lerner easily rolls over a chord change every chorus; while the Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart standard "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" is treated to a sinuously lyrical saxophone solo that melds the theme and improvisation fluidly. Any doubt that the two principals can swing is dispelled with the closer, Desmond original "Blues for Fun", driven by lilting cymbal ride and featuring saxophone and guitar solos containing romping a cappella breaks.

For more information, visit speakerscornerrecords.com. A Desmond listening session is at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Varis Leichtman Studio Mar. 4th. For information, visit jazz.org/events/t-8660/