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- 1 seven blend 7:14
- 2 brooms 9:02
- 3 discreet plucking 11:02
- 4 emmett spencer 8:07
- 5 ernie the neck 8:01
- 6 robmac 2:16
- 7 fragile forms 7:10
- 8 beijing 13:00

produced by michael musillami
 recorded & mixed by joe marciano
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 mastered by max ross
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 liner notes david r. adler
 executive producer michael musillami

all compositions by michael musillami
 published by diggin music / bmi

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michael musillami's *dialect*



peter madsen drew gress matt wilson

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fragile forms	michael musillami	guitar
	peter madsen	piano
	drew gress	bass
	matt wilson	drums

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"Big, brave and beautiful." That was Michael Musillami's assessment of *Fragile Forms* when the smoke from the session cleared. I was with the guitarist in the studio in early March 2006, eager to digest his new batch of music, performed by a new quartet called Dialect. I've long admired Musillami not just for his adventurous playing, but also for his stewardship of Playscape Recordings. It's a label that embodies the three adjectives at the start of this paragraph, and *Fragile Forms* is no exception.

This album was originally conceived as a follow-up to *Part Pitbull*, Musillami's sterling 2002 duo session with pianist Peter Madsen. "The writing called for more players," says Musillami, who recruited bassist Drew Gress and drummer Matt Wilson for the occasion. "All of these guys are composers," notes the leader. "I've learned that people who look at music in that way, there's a certain patience and arc to their playing. Also, there's not a lot said beyond the written note. All these guys are of that mindset." Musillami refers to Wilson as "a 2006 jazz drummer" and cites Gress's *7 Black Butterflies* as one of his favorite CDs of 2005.

Fragile Forms is divided evenly between new pieces and reconceived earlier works. When I walked into the session, the quartet was tearing through "Brooms," a brisk and challenging line with a slang title ("brooms" refer to a drummer's brushes). "It's a motif played in two different keys, inspired by my studies with Joe Diorio in the late '70s," Musillami says. "Discreet Plucking," another new theme, features a piano solo described by Musillami as "off the page—it's like a hurricane!" The namesake of "Ernie the Neck" is Musillami's 210-pound Great Dane, who "towers over all other animals

"Beijing" and "Emmett Spencer" both appeared on Musillami's *Archives*, recorded with the late Thomas Chapin in 1990. "I wanted one tune with some more standard chord changes," the guitarist says of "Emmett Spencer," a mournful ballad. He is still fond of the earlier version, but he wanted to "open it up" this time. "Beijing" also began life as a more standard-type tune, but the arrangement on Musillami's 2003 trio outing with Joe Fonda and George Schuller (titled *Beijing*) is far more spare and abstract. On this version, Madsen preserves the abstraction while adding another harmonic dimension. "7 Blend" first appeared on 1994's *Groove Teacher*, in a thick septet arrangement with three horns and a second-line rhythmic feel. Here it's leaner and more modern in approach. "Fragile Forms," a showpiece for the Musillami/Madsen duo, works well for the quartet but still is geared toward Madsen's unaccompanied voice (heard to great effect on his two solo releases for Playscape, *Sphere Essence* and *Prevue of Tomorrow*). "Peter's the master of solo playing in the more open-ended vocabulary," Musillami contends.

"In most cases I didn't know what the improvised sections in these tunes would be," Musillami says, adding: "Sometimes harmony is in the forefront, sometimes rhythm, sometimes color and so on. We try to create different environments to compose in and over. These environments are always in flux, never stable, and somehow very fragile." Fragile: not the first word you might choose to describe music so angular and assertive. But it's this very paradox that gives the work its vitality. It is full of grit and heedless of rules, but it has an internal coherence that only the most sensitive players could produce.

- David R. Adler, New York