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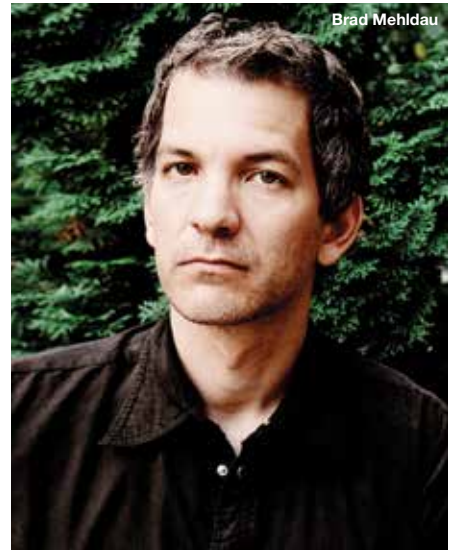


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Brad Mehldau's Piano Solo on 'Sky Turning Grey'



On "Sky Turning Grey (For Elliott Smith)" from Brad Mehldau's 2010 CD *Highway Rider* (Nonesuch), the pianist elegantly fuses musical connectivity with compositional sophistication. As is often the case with Mehldau's groove-based solos, instruments other than the piano play a harmonic role, negating the prominence of Mehldau's otherwise active left hand. Therefore, this transcription shows the treble staff only.

The form is 64-bar AABC, where B and C share the same melody but different changes. An almost constantly descending bass line is spelled out by Mehldau's changes—largely a mixture of diatonic chords derived from the key, some tritone substitutions and elongated functional II-V-I cadences. An example of this harmony can be found at measures 14–17, where a II-V-I is played in B \flat minor, however an E \flat m/B \flat extends the C half-diminished sound for a measure, before the V chord at measure 16.

Mehldau's improvisation evokes a sense of relaxed maturity and stylistic confidence. Chorus one includes strong references to the melody on a regular basis, such as measures 0, 6–7, 11, 16–18, 26–28, 32, 40–41 and 55–60. There is much antiphonal content, too. The opening phrase, based on the first two notes of the melody, is a four-beat cell that is stated then answered during bars 1 and 2. The next phrase starts at measure 4, for two measures, and is answered during bars 6–7 before a blues figure at bar 8. Motivic repetition is heard in several places (e.g., bars 55–60); also, chromatic references can be heard throughout the improvisation, either acting transitionally or to approach chord tones. Mehldau introduc-

es harmonic imposition within the first quarter of chorus one by playing a line derived from C# Locrian #2 mode over a Cm7 \flat 5, effectively side-slipping up a semitone.

In chorus two, an increased sense of intensity and drive is achieved with rhythmical features such as four-note chromatic or melodic triplets (bar 68). Mehldau employs tension by way of juxtaposing uncommon note choices; at measure 74, he plays an A and B, the sharp ninth and perfect 4th of G \flat major. This precedes a D over a D \flat major chord in the next measure, spelling a flat ninth—all risky choices, but placed within a firm melodic context, they work well. At measure 77, the solo culminates with a long 16th-note passage from 77–80, then again at 87–89. **DB**

MARK BAYNES IS A JAZZ PIANIST IN AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND. HE IS STUDYING THE MUSIC OF BRAD MEHLDAU FOR A DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS DEGREE AT AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY. BAYNES TEACHES AT BOTH THE NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY. VISIT BAYNES ONLINE AT JAZZPIANO.CO.NZ

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Chord progression: A B \flat 7/A \flat G \flat maj7 D \flat maj7/F E \flat 7 E \flat m7/O \flat

Chord progression: C \flat 7(\flat 5) E \flat m7/B \flat F7/A D \flat maj7/A \flat G \flat maj7 D \flat 9 \flat /F

Chord progression: E \flat 7 B \flat m7/O \flat C \flat 7(\flat 5) E \flat m7/B \flat

Chord progression: F7/A A B \flat 7/A \flat G \flat maj7 D \flat maj7/F E \flat 7 E \flat m7/O \flat

Performance markings: STRAIGHT, STR., 8 \flat 5, 8 \flat 5

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Musical score for tenor saxophone with various chord notations and performance instructions.

Chord notations include: C Δ 7(b9), Eb Δ 7/Bb, F7/A, D Δ 7 Δ 7/Ab, G7 Δ ALT, Gb Δ 9/9, C7+, F7, F7/Eb, Gb Δ 7(11)/Db, F Δ +7/C, B Δ 7, F# Δ 9/A, Ab Δ +7, Gb Δ 7, C# Δ 7/E, D Δ 7(11), Eb Δ 7/Db, C Δ 7(b9), Eb Δ 7/Bb, D Δ 7 Δ 7/Ab, Db Δ 7/Ab, Gb Δ 7, Bb Δ 7/F, Eb7, Gb Δ 7/Db, CHORDAL C Δ 7(b9), B Δ 7, D Δ 7/Ab, Gb Δ 7, F7(b9), C# Δ 7/E, D Δ 7(11), Eb Δ 7/Db, C Δ 7(b9), Gb Δ 7/Bb, D Δ 7 Δ 7/Ab, Gb Δ 7, D Δ 7 Δ 7/F, Eb7, Eb Δ 7/Db, C Δ 7(b9), Eb Δ 7/Bb, F7/A, D Δ 7 Δ 7/Ab, Gb Δ 7, Bb Δ 7/Db, C Δ 7(b9), F7/A, Bb Δ 7/Ab, Gb Δ 7, D Δ 7 Δ 7/F, Eb7, Eb Δ 7/Db, C Δ 7(b9), Eb Δ 7/Bb, F7/A.

Performance instructions: LAID BACK, CHORDAL, SOLO.

SOLO CONTINUES ...