

Brad Mehldau

Jazz pianist Brad Mehldau has recorded and performed extensively since the early 1990s. He has worked primarily with the same trio since 1995, featuring bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Jorge Rossy. Between 1996 and 2000, they released a series of five records on the Warner Brothers label entitled *The Art of the Trio*, and in 2003 released the album *Anything Goes*. In 2005, drummer Jeff Ballard joined Mehldau's trio. Mehldau also has a solo piano recording entitled *Elegiac Cycle*, and a record called *Places* that includes both solo piano and trio songs. These latter two recordings might be called "concept" albums. They are made up exclusively of original material and have central themes that hover over the compositions. Outside of the piano solo or trio format, Mehldau collaborated with the innovative musician and producer Jon Brion on *Largo*, released in 2002. His first album for Nonesuch Records, the solo recording *Live in Tokyo*, was released in 2004, and his most recent release is with the new trio with Larry Grenadier and Jeff Ballard, entitled *Day is Done*.

Mehldau is first and foremost an improviser, and greatly cherishes the surprise and wonder that can occur from a spontaneous, directly expressed musical idea. But he also has a deep fascination for the formal architecture of music, which informs everything he plays. In his most inspired playing, the actual structure of his musical thought serves as an expressive device. As he plays, he listens to how ideas unwind, and the order in which they reveal themselves. Each tune has a strongly felt narrative arc, whether it expresses itself in a beginning and an end, or as something left intentionally open-ended. The two sides of Mehldau's personality—the improviser and the formalist—play off each other, and the effect is often something like controlled chaos.

Mehldau has performed around the world at a steady pace since the mid-nineties, with his trio and as a solo pianist. His performances convey a wide range of expression, and he favors juxtaposing extremes. Often, the intellectual rigor and density of information in the abstraction of one tune is followed by a stripped down, emotional directness in the next. Over the years, he has attracted a sizeable following, which has grown to expect a singular, intense experience in his performance.

In addition to his trio and solo projects, Mehldau has worked with a number of great jazz musicians, including a rewarding gig with saxophonist Joshua Redman's band; recording and concerts with Charlie Haden and Lee Konitz; and recording as a sideman with the likes of Wayne Shorter, John Scofield, and Charles Lloyd. For more than a decade, he has collaborated with several musicians whom he respects greatly, including guitarists Peter Bernstein and Kurt Rosenwinkel and tenor saxophonist Mark Turner. Mehldau also has played on a number of recordings outside of the jazz idiom, like Willie Nelson's *Teatro* and singer-songwriter Joe Henry's *Scar*. His music has appeared in several movies, including Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* and Wim Wender's *Million Dollar Hotel*. He also composed an original soundtrack for the French film *Ma femme est une actrice*. Mehldau's most recent project was a commission from Carnegie Hall to compose and perform songs for voice and piano, featuring the classical soprano, Renée Fleming. It was performed in May of 2005, and a recording of the music with Mehldau and Fleming is planned for the future.