Brad Mehldau - Highway Rider (2010)



01. John boy [03:16]
02. Dont be sad [08:41]
03. At the tollbooth [01:08]
04. Highway rider [07:46]
05. The falcon will fly again [08:22]
06. Now you must climb alone [04:06]
07. Walking the peak [08:00]
08. Well cross the river together [12:28]
09. Capriccio [05:21]
10. Sky turning grey (for elliot smith) [06:24]
11. Into the city [07:37]
12. Old west [08:29]
13. Come with me [06:20]
14. Always departing [06:21]
15. Always returning [09:53]

Personnel: Brad Mehldau - Arranger, Orchestral Bells, Orchestration, Organ (Pump), Piano Alyssa Park, Sara Parkins, Robert Peterson, Vladimir Polimatidi, Josefina Vergara, Philip Vaiman, Tereza Stanislav, Michele Richards, Natalie Leggett, Gerardo Hilera, Dorian Cheah, Caroline Campbell, Jacqueline Brand, Bob Becker - Violin Andrew Picken, Qiang "John" Wang, Carole Kleister-Castillo, Roland Kato, Julian Hallmark, Matt Funes, Andrew Duckles, Denyse Buffum – Viola Stefanie Fife, Trevor Handy, Armen Ksajikian, Timothy Landauer, Martha Lippi, Rudolph Stein, Cecilia Tsan – cello Phillip Yao, John Reynolds, Dan Kelley, Steven Becknell, Mark Adams – horns Andrew Radford – bassoon Allen Savedoff – contrabassoon Joshua Redman - Sax (Soprano), Sax (Tenor) Michael Valerio, David Stone, Susan Ranney, Ed Meares, Oscar Hidalgo, Larry Grenadier, Timothy Eckert – bass Matt Chamberlain, Jeff Ballard - Drums, Percussion The Fleurettes - Guest Appearance, Vocals

The Highway Rider is pianist and composer Brad Mehldau's second collaboration with enigmatic pop producer Jon Brion. The first was 2002's ambitious but tentative Largo. As a

collaboration, The Highway Rider is much more confident by contrast. Mehldau's most ambitious work to date, its 15 compositions are spread over two discs and 100 minutes. His trio --bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Jeff Ballard -- is augmented by saxophonist Joshua Redman, drummer Matt Chamberlain, and a chamber orchestra conducted by Dan Coleman. The album is a narrative jazz suite, orchestrated and arranged by Mehldau, though it has much in common with classical and pop music, as well.

The group settings range from solo to quintet, with and without strings, all of it recorded live in studio. Redman's addition is welcome. "Don't Be Sad" features his consoling tenor, Mehldau (on pump organ and piano), Grenadier, and both drummers with orchestra. It begins as a piano solo, languidly establishing a pace that begins to swing with gospel overtones. Later, Redman's lower-register blowing, strings, and winds carry it out joyfully. Brion adds drum'n'bass overtones to the trio on the title track. The electronics are a narrative device designating motion; they accompany the gradually assertive knottiness in the post-bop lyric. Mehldau begins "The Falcon Will Fly Again" with a complex solo that touches on Latin grooves, even as Chamberlain and Ballard create an organic loop effect with hand percussion. Redman's soprano creates a contrapuntal melody extending the harmonic dialogue. Disc two's lengthy "We'll Cross the River Together" has quintet and orchestra engaging in a beautiful study of texture, color, and expansive harmonics with wildly divergent dynamics. It showcases Mehldau's trademark pianistic elegance in counterpoint. Redman's deep blues tenor nearly weeps on "Sky Turning Grey (For Elliot Smith)." "Capriccio"'s Latin rhythms contrast ideally: Mehldau's classical, gently dissonant motifs create an exploratory harmonic palette as Redman's magnetic soprano playing joins Mehldau's in the last third, anchoring the complex melody. The closer, "Always Returning," builds to a climax that incorporates themes from the cycle. Redman and Mehldau soar with the orchestra before they all close it in a whispering tone poem. By combining sophisticated -- yet accessible -- forms with jazz improvisation, The Highway Rider exceeds all expectations, giving jazz-classical crossover a good name for a change. It is Mehldau's most ambitious, creatively unfettered, and deeply emotional work to date, and will stand as a high watermark in his catalog. ---Thom Jurek, All Music Guide

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