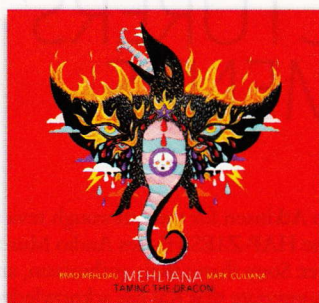


## JAZZ


**MEHLIANA**  
*Taming the Dragon*

Brad Mehldau, synths, Fender Rhodes, piano, speaker; Mark Guiliana, drums, electronics  
 Nonesuch 536645-2 (CD). 2014. Brad Mehldau, Mark Guiliana, prods.; Greg Koller, eng., mix. DDD. TT: 71:52

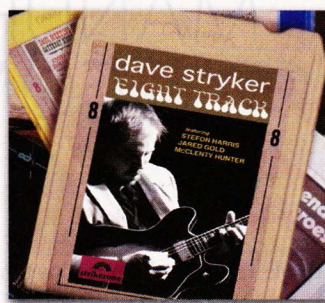
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★

**SONICS** ★★★★★

It's common for young jazz pianists to double on Fender Rhodes or synths, but Brad Mehldau has done relatively little of this on record until now. *Mehliana*, his electronic duo with drummer Mark Guiliana, is thus a radical departure, yet *Taming the Dragon* contains compositional elements and gestures consistent with Mehldau's overall output. The fat, glitchy synth-bass lines, worthy of Parliament-Funkadelic, might throw you off track, but the harmonic motion and beautifully paced Rhodes solos are Mehldau through and through, and Guiliana's beats and sounds have a taut, complex energy at any tempo. Six pieces are Mehldau's; the other six are co-composed with Guiliana.

The opening, title track is flat-out weird and strangely compelling: huge synth-driven beats drop in and out as Mehldau recites an involved story, printed in the liner notes, about a vivid dream set on the roads near Los Angeles. There's a lesson from the dream, but it isn't self-serious; there's a bit of implied wink in Mehldau's delivery. Sampled voices of Amelia Earhart and Serge Gainsbourg also creep onto the album.

The sound is nuanced and varied, often explosive. The sheer thunder of Mehldau's synth bass in "Sleeping Giant" and "Sassyassed Sassafrass" practically cries out for a Jeep subwoofer. But there are periods of calm—in "The Dreamer," "London Gloaming," and "Elegy for Amelia E."—when the dragon is tamed and the music absolutely glows. Even as they venture deep into instrumental hip-hop, experimental dance music, or what have you, Mehldau and Guiliana instigate things that only the finest jazz players can. —David R. Adler


**DAVE STRYKER**  
*Eight Track*

Dave Stryker, guitar; Jared Gold, organ; Stefon Harris, vibraphone; McClenty Hunter, drums  
 Strikezone 8809 (CD). 2014. Dave Stryker, prod.; Chris Sulit, eng. DDD? TT: 60:22

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★

**SONICS** ★★★★★

How fun is this: A world-class jazz quartet brings everything they've got to a playlist of pop tunes from the 1970s. Most jazz players nowadays only want to do their own stuff, whether they're good composers or not. Here Dave Stryker willingly, wisely defers to people like Jimmy Webb, Roger Waters, and Stevie Wonder. For Stryker, who was 18 in 1975, these songs were road music. He had an eight-track in his 1969 GMC van. Didn't we all.

Because his band is so hot, Stryker's version of generational nostalgia is hard and tight, not sentimental. "Wichita Lineman" takes on serious new drama when Stefon Harris enters on vibes. He plays pieces of the story, holds back until exactly the moment, then spills resonant revelations all over the song. Jared Gold on organ is a skittering speed demon ("Aquarius") who can also lay down plush carpets under Stryker's circling, floating guitar ("Make It with You"). Who knew a Bread song could contain adult poignance?

Stryker gets a lovely warm sound from his Gibson. In every reflective solo he patiently works through the feelings and memories these songs evoke. "That's the Way of the World" and "Never My Love" become personal testaments. The latter was a big hit for the Association—a silly band, but the melody of their only good song opens entry points to the past.

The whole experience is optimized by excellent recorded sound.

If you don't know these tunes, you were born too early or too late. It was a special time, now rapidly receding in the rearview mirror of Dave Stryker's van. —Thomas Conrad


**STEVE TRESLER GROUP**  
*Center Song*

Steve Tressler, tenor & alto saxophones, clarinet, bass clarinet; Ingrid Jensen, trumpet; seven others  
 CMA 004 (CD). 2013. Steve Tressler, prod.; Reed Ruddy, Andrew Ching, engs. DDD? TT: 56:51

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★

**SONICS** ★★★★★

Jazz has globalized. New York is no longer the only scene that matters. Seattle is the home base of Steve Tressler and most of the players on *Center Song*, a fresh, confident, urbane album.

Tressler has nine players at his disposal and typically uses six or seven at a time. His arrangements creatively manipulate the sonorities of his own reeds plus trumpet, cello, guitar, piano, acoustic or electric bass, and drums. There is strong blowing, but it emerges from meticulous ensemble concepts and is therefore more meaningful. "Painted Trail" evolves through contrapuntal tenor saxophone/trumpet theme statements, guitar/piano interludes, and gliding group movements that make a sextet sound like a little big band. When Tressler flows free for a gradually climbing, intensifying solo, five other instruments remain fully engaged in the near background, offering complementary or contrasting content. Then Ingrid Jensen steps out. The hired gun imported (yes, from New York) for this session, she transforms it. There is no shortage of trumpet players with chops, but Jensen is a unique, subtle thinker with unsettling ideas.

Jensen also burns. "Cold Hammered" is a thrusting declamation. Jensen wrote the title track, which fits beautifully in an album about integrating individual improvised breakouts into elegant ensemble designs. "Days Were Golden," by the Seattle rock band Sunny Day Real Estate, is an inspired discovery. Seven of Tressler's players share the mystery of this intriguing drone.

Not many records hipper than this one from Seattle will come out of Manhattan in 2014. —Thomas Conrad