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Dave Brubeck performs at the 2001 Music Teachers National Association Convention. He has composed enough classical piano solos to fill four C.D.s

Ten Classical Gems for Piano From Composer Dave Brubeck

BY JOHN SALMON

Everyone knows the jazz standard "Take Five," which Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond wrote with a $\frac{5}{4}$ lilt that is punctuated by Brubeck's infectious comp. Countless jazz students have imitated his style since the original 1959 recording was included on the album *Time Out* (Columbia), and many high school and college jazz bands have played transcriptions of "Take Five." The jazz single of "Take Five" was the first to sell a million copies and catapulted the Dave Brubeck Quartet to international fame.

Less well known is that while Brubeck toured and recorded as a jazz artist, he continued to compose concert works for classically trained musicians. These ranged from large-scale choral and symphonic works to intimate piano pieces and songs. For these Brubeck was recently named to the American Classical Music Hall of Fame where he joins James Levine, Morton Gould, the Boston Symphony,

and Steinway & Sons. Brubeck has been given honorary doctorates by ten universities.

This record of achievement is not bad for a fellow who almost gave up on music to pursue a career as a veterinarian or cattle rancher. Brubeck had trouble reading music when he was a young music student, which was partly the result of being born with a crossed eye. He was a gifted improviser and became good at faking his classical lessons after listening to what his mother played. She was a classically trained piano teacher. Whatever her students would play, young Brubeck could play it back by ear.

This talent got him in trouble at the College of the Pacific where he was a music major from 1938-1942. During Brubeck's senior year, the dean caught wind of the young composer's inability to read music but agreed to let him graduate under the condition that Brubeck would never teach music and embarrass the college. Years later the

University of the Pacific also gave him an honorary doctorate, and the Brubeck Institute and archives are located there.

In 1946 he pursued graduate studies in composition at Mills College under the guidance of Darius Milhaud. By this point Brubeck was an accomplished musician who had played in many clubs and led an army band during W.W.II. Milhaud had composed in 1923 what some consider to be the first symphonic piece in a jazz style, *La création du monde*. It pre-dated Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* by a year and encouraged Brubeck to craft compositions

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that incorporated the jazz language. Milhaud had a profound influence on Brubeck, both musically and philosophically. Milhaud lived until 1974 and witnessed Brubeck's success as a jazz artist. Over the years Brubeck has composed enough classical piano solos to fill four C.D.s. Among them are *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata* and *Points on Jazz*, both of which are multi-movement works about 30 minutes long. They are written for advanced pianists and are technically difficult with thick textures, repeated chords, and complex passages, including two fugues, and several tone rows. Most of Brubeck's classical pieces are quite difficult, although a selection of works are at the beginning and intermediate levels. Here are ten of Brubeck's classical piano pieces that intermediate students will be able to perform if they can play a Bach *Invention* or Chopin's "Raindrop" Prelude.

"Struttin'"

This is the second movement of a four-movement ballet suite, *Glances* (Warner Bros.), written in a form similar to the scherzo movement of a four-movement sonata. It is lighthearted, hummable, and follows the lithe, elusive rhythms that Louis Armstrong perfected. All the triplets in "Struttin'" should be played freely in his style, and some of the figures could surely be evened out a bit. Here are measures 35-36, as written.

Measures 35-36, as I play them.

Perhaps the best advice on learning to swing is to listen how Brubeck played "Struttin'" on the C.D. *For Iola* (Concord).

Suggestions on How to Swing

Imagine learning French without hearing French spoken to get an idea of how preposterous it would be to learn to swing without listening to others. The subtle accents, inflection of diphthongs, and pacing of cadences are best learned by imitation. Listen to such great swing masters as Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Lester Young, Billie Holiday, and Count Basie and then let their collective wisdom sink in. When anyone can lope along with the easy stride of Waller, skate over the barline like Young, and lag behind the beat the way Holiday did, an authentic swing style is a step closer.

Also listen to how other swing masters play, such as trumpeter Clifford Brown and pianist Kenny Barron. Brubeck wrote measures 54-56 with triplet figures, which are reprinted here; but sometimes I add notes, adding to the swing style.

Here I play

The two pieces discussed here that are in a swing style are "Struttin'" and "Chasin' Yourself." In playing them, set a metronome to maintain a steady tempo at ♩=144 for "Struttin'" and ♩=160 for "Chasin' Yourself." Eighth notes should vary between straight eighths in the notated version of "Chasin' Yourself" and triplets in the version I play.

Occasionally it helps to anticipate the beat, but not too often or it will sound stilted. I sometimes combine anticipation of the beat with an appoggiatura a half step lower. To add to the mix, accent some off-beats, but not too often.

"Blue Aria"

This is the third movement of the ballet suite, *Glances*, which was commissioned in 1976 by the Murray Louis Dance Company. The outer two movements of *Glances* brim with pyrotechnics (16th-note chords recalling *Petrouchka*, brilliant figurations, difficult rhythms), but "Blue Aria" is remarkably playable. The piece is based on six, chromatically ascending 12-bar blues forms and has a sad character, much like the blues styles of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey.

"Blue Aria," however, has a distinctly Romantic cast and is closer in spirit and melodic formation to the music of Chopin and Rachmaninoff than Horace Silver or Art Blakey. The rhythms are straight, not swung, and the touch is mainly legato.

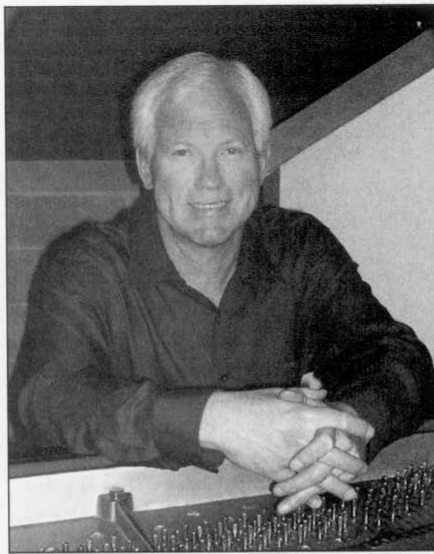
I would pedal the opening measures to catch the bass notes.

Don't be terrorized by the left-hand whole notes in 14-37, which will probably have to be played at half value in order to change pedal on the third beat of these measures.

Sometimes I will add notes to the bass pattern for a grander effect. Here are measures 50-52, as written.



I often play them with an added bass pattern.



— John Salmon

“Chorale”

This is the sixth of eight movements in the ballet suite *Points on Jazz* (Warner Bros.). All the movements are based on the theme of the first movement. Anyone who listens to the entire suite will begin to appreciate the extent of Brubeck’s compositional mastery: the plaintive theme reappears in a fugue, a blues, a rag, and other styles.

The “Chorale” movement looks and sounds like a composition by Milhaud. It has a starkly bitonal layout, with the left hand in C major and the right hand in C minor. The clear four-part texture suggests the piece could be played by an ensemble, such as a string quartet; the lowest note, C, happens to be the lowest note on a cello.

The greatest problem in this piece is probably the left-hand tenths in measures 5-7 and other large intervals, such as those in measures 10 and 17. The pedal is used throughout; but fortunately the tempo is only about $\text{♩} = 52$, and a gentle roll is certainly possible for anyone who is unable to make the stretches. Another possibility to consider is rolling backwards for some of the tenths, which will emphasize the tenor voice. Here is the original score, measures 5-8.



This is how the left-hand tenths could be rolled backwards.



“Going to Sleep”

This gentle piece from *Nocturnes* (Warner Bros.) is just 16 bars and barely a minute long. It can have the same lyrical effect as the subtle Chopin Prelude in A Major and one of Schubert’s *Ländler*. It gives a glimpse of beauty, and then it’s over. The work should be played with a delicate soprano line, using a legato that occasionally overlaps and a pedal on some of the jazzy chords.



“Quiet as the Moon”

Although the reflective mood and the $\frac{5}{4}$ meter is similar to “Going to Sleep,” here there is a bouncier, perhaps jazzier, quality to this second piece from *Nocturnes*. The tempo of about $\text{♩} = 184$ should be steady. While the first theme of measures 1-8 can be played legato, later iterations, as in measures 33-36, should be more rhythmic and more marcato. This is my legato phrasing for the first eight measures.



The first system shows a piano introduction with a dynamic marking of *p*. The second system shows a more active piano accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *mp*.

I add more marcato to measures 33-36.

Two systems of musical notation showing a more rhythmic and accented piano accompaniment for measures 33-36, with a dynamic marking of *mf*.

"Winter Ballad"

This is one of the 24 pieces in *Two-Part Adventures* (Warner Bros.), all of which have two lines. The right hand almost always plays the upper line. Brubeck uses imitation and sometimes even a canon, with musical results in the first eight measures of "Chasin' Yourself." The pieces never seem like contrapuntal exercises. I would take a brisk tempo of about $\text{♩} = 144$. The predominant touch is legato, but there are several places to use two-note slurs. The work was included on a 1964 album, *Jazz Impressions of New York*, on which Paul Desmond's cool alto saxophone played the upper line. This is the opening with my phrasing.

Two systems of musical notation showing the opening of "Winter Ballad" in 3/4 time, featuring a piano accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *mf*.

I phrase measures 9-12 like this.

Two systems of musical notation showing the phrasing for measures 9-12 of "Winter Ballad", with a dynamic marking of *mf*.

"Chasin' Yourself"

I disagree with the indicated tempo of Moderately for this piece, which is also in *Two-Part Adventures*. I play a perky tempo of about $\text{♩} = 160$ and swing bars 1-16, but play 17-24 with straight eighths. Here are measures 1-4 as written.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 1-4 of "Chasin' Yourself", marked *mf*.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 5-8 of "Chasin' Yourself", marked *mf*.

I play these in a swing style.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 9-12 of "Chasin' Yourself", marked *swing*.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 13-16 of "Chasin' Yourself", marked *swing*.

This is my phrasing for measures 17-20.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 17-20 of "Chasin' Yourself", marked *straight*.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 21-24 of "Chasin' Yourself", marked *straight*.

"Sun Up"

I also disagree with the indicated tempo of $\text{♩} = 84$ for this piece and prefer a more leisurely $\text{♩} = 66-69$ because the sun rises gradually. "Sun Up" is the first section of a six-piece suite from *Reminiscences of the Cattle Country* (Associated), that Brubeck wrote in 1946 when he was a composition student of Darius Milhaud. He says that these compositions "were my first pieces for piano not in the jazz idiom of the blues or popular song form." To paint a picture of a rustic yet gentle dawn in the West, play this piece legato but with an easy lilt with straight eighths and pay attention to soprano voicing. Here is the way I phrase the opening.

Two systems of musical notation for the opening of "Sun Up", with tempo markings $\text{♩} = 66-69$ (my preference) and $\text{♩} = 84$, and a dynamic marking of *p legato*.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 2-4 of "Sun Up", marked *with pedal*.

Two systems of musical notation for measures 5-8 of "Sun Up", marked *mf* and *p*.

"Brandenburg Gate"

This piece was included in a 1960 publication, *Themes From Eurasia* (Derry Music Co), that has long been out of print. It reflects Brubeck's lifelong quest to merge classical and jazz forms and his enduring reverence for J.S. Bach, which was also evident in his minute-long "Bach Again" (from *Two-Part Adventures*) and his massive *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata*. Brubeck's late, older brother, Howard (1916-1993), provided the smart phrasing, pedal, dynamic, and fingering indications. Any intrepid souls who wish to improvise over these Bachian harmonies should interpret all the "E dim" signs as E-half-diminished-seventh (the chord E-G-B \flat -D).

"Christmas at the Ranch"

I often play this piece first slowly and legato, about $\text{♩} = 104$, followed by an iteration in virtual double-time ($\text{♩} = 96$) with spry phrasing to create a light and Christmasy effect.

Two systems of musical notation for the opening of "Christmas at the Ranch", marked *mf* and *i.h.*

Two systems of musical notation for measures 2-4 of "Christmas at the Ranch", marked *mf*.

Originally conceived to appear with the set *Reminiscences of the Cattle Country*, "Christmas at the Ranch" from *Dave's Diary* (Derry Music Co.), was also written during his study with Milhaud; it portrays Brubeck's joyful

Christmas at the Ranch

Moderately ♩ = 104

Optional Double Time, Second Time ♩ = 92-96

Dave Brubeck

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. It begins with a dynamic marking of *mf* and includes a first-hand (*l.h.*) annotation. The lower staff is in bass clef. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some chords and rests.

The second system continues the piece from measure 5. It features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass clef and a melodic line in the treble clef. A dynamic accent (>) is placed over a note in the bass line.

The third system starts at measure 9 and shows a change in the bass line with a new rhythmic pattern. The treble clef continues with its melodic line. A dynamic accent (>) is present in the bass line.

The fourth system begins at measure 13. It features a more complex rhythmic pattern in the bass line, including some chords. A first-hand (*l.h.*) annotation is present in the treble clef. A dynamic accent (>) is placed over a note in the bass line.

The fifth system starts at measure 17 and concludes the piece. It features a final melodic flourish in the treble clef and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef. A dynamic accent (>) is placed over a note in the bass line. A first-hand (*r.h.*) annotation is present in the bass line.

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1946 Christmas at the Arroyo Seco Ranch in Ione, California. On the previous Christmas, 1945, Brubeck was a soldier holed up in a cellar in Thionville, France, where he waited for the Battle of the Bulge to end. There he heard an Axis Sally broadcast that the war was over and that Brubeck and his comrades should come out with their hands up.

Classical Piano Music

Reminiscences of the Cattle Country (Associated); six short, colorful sketches of life on a cattle ranch.

Points on Jazz in *Seriously Brubeck*, (Warner Bros.); an advanced work with a Chopinesque theme that is the basis for eight movements.

Glances in *Seriously Brubeck* (Warner Bros.); a ballet suite composed for advanced pianists that includes a stride in two keys.

They All Sang Yankee Doodle in *Seriously Brubeck* (Warner Bros.); an advanced solo that is Ivesian in style with American folk tunes.

Tritonis in *Seriously Brubeck* (Warner Bros.); an advanced solo imitates the guitar, with flamenco and blues.

Nocturnes (Warner Bros.); short, mostly lyrical pieces for beginning to intermediate students.

Chromatic Fantasy Sonata in *Seriously Brubeck* (Warner Bros.); uses B-A-C-H motif and three tone rows, although most of the piece is tonal; advanced.

The Salmon Strikes in *Seriously Brubeck* (Warner Bros.); an advanced-level tone poem about a fishing expedition.

Two-Part Adventures (Warner Bros.); short, two-voiced pieces of varying characters for beginning and intermediate students.

Classical Piano Discography

John Salmon Plays Dave Brubeck Piano Compositions (Phoenix); includes *Glances*, four pieces from *Dave's Diary*, *Points on Jazz*, *Reminiscences of the Cattle Country*, *They All Sang Yankee Doodle*.

John Salmon Plays Dave Brubeck (Naxos); *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata*, five pieces from *Two-Part Adventures*, *Tritonis*, *The Salmon Strikes*, *Rising Sun Dave Brubeck*; *Points on Jazz and Other Works for Two Pianos*, Anthony and Joseph Paratore, pianists (Koch Classics);

Gold & Fizdale Play Dave Brubeck's Jazz Ballet "Points on Jazz"; *Carmen McRae Sings with the Dave Brubeck Trio*, *Theme from "Points on Jazz"* (Columbia, released in 1961) □

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