

Recorded in Binaural+ with the B & K 4100 Head and Torso simulator,
MSB A/D Converter, and Crystal Microphone cable

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Piano Tuner: Kaz Tsujio

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THE DAVID HAZELTINE TRIO IMPROMPI TU

DAVID HAZELTINE piano
GEORGE MRAZ bass
JASON BROWN drums

1. Clair de lune 7:40
2. Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring 5:15
3. Impromptu No. 4 6:16
4. Moonlight Sonata 6:49
5. Waltz of the Flowers 5:06
6. Prelude 8:12
7. Rêverie 6:11
8. Für Elise 7:17

Clair de lune – Claude Debussy
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring – Johann Sebastian Bach
Fantaisie – Frédéric Chopin
Moonlight Sonata – Ludwig van Beethoven
Waltz of the Flowers – Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Prelude (Opus 28, No.4 in E minor) – Frédéric Chopin
Rêverie – Claude Debussy
Für Elise – Ludwig van Beethoven



cleverly morphs into the jazz standard “I'm Always Chasing Rainbows” while Chopin's “Prelude in E Minor” is handled like a moody modal jazz tune.

“As a piano student, I've played these tunes before,” says Hazeltine, “but I never thought about, ‘How would you turn this into a jazz piece?’ That is, until now. And it took me six months of working on it to get it to a point where I thought I could actually record it.”

Hazeltine's thoughtful work has paid off. His reinventions of these sacred cows are both engaging and rewarding, for both jazz and classical fans alike.

—Bill Milkowski

Bill Milkowski is a contributor to *Down Beat* and *Jazziz* magazines. He is also the author of *JACO: The Extraordinary and Tragic Life of Jaco Pastorius* and co-author of *Here and Now! The Autobiography of Pat Martino*.



proceedings with his hip, understated brushwork as Hazeltine extrapolates on the theme with a solo that is bristling with melodic invention and imbued with a bluesy, boppish feel. Mraz turns in a virtuosic solo himself and Brown adds some tasty fills on brushes to complete this inspired reading of "Jesu."

Elsewhere on *Impromptu*, Hazeltine cleverly incorporates a blowing section into the fabric of "Waltz of the Flowers" and he reinvigorates the two Beethoven pieces, "Moonlight Sonata" and "Für Elise," with an alluring bossa nova touch underneath. His version of Chopin's "Fantaisie-Impromptu"

Since arriving in New York City 21 years ago from Milwaukee, where he gained significant bandstand experience in the house band at the Jazz Gallery backing the likes of Sonny Stitt, Eddie Harris, Chet Baker and other visiting jazz dignitaries, pianist-composer-arranger David Hazeltine has amassed an impressive list of straight-ahead recordings as a leader and another dozen as a charter member of the hard bop collective One for All. While his jazz pedigree is unquestioned, pianist-composer and record executive David Chesky had the idea that Hazeltine might be open to imposing his jazzy aesthetic on a set of well-known classical pieces.

Of course, several jazz artists over the years have treaded on this territory. Duke Ellington swung Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" back in 1960. French pianist Jacques Loussier had his way with Bach on jazzy interpretations in 1959 and again 50 years later in 2009. Dave Brubeck alluded to Bach in his piece "Bradenburg Gate" and to Chopin on his "Thank You (Dziekuje)." Flutist Hubert Laws turned in slightly funky renditions of Fauré, Debussy, Bach, and Stravinsky on his 1971 CTI album *Rite of Spring* and saxophonist-composer-arranger Bob Belden reinvented Puccini and Vivaldi on his adventurous interpretations of *Turandot* and *The Four Seasons*. Now it's Hazeltine's turn to tweak the classics with his own swinging and syncopated interpretations.

By recruiting veteran bassist George Mraz, the former Oscar Peterson sideman who had previously played with Hazeltine on the 2006 Chesky album *Manhattan*, the pianist found the perfect partner for tackling this classical repertoire. Mraz's intonation is impeccable and his phrasing so precise that he is able to adapt the melodic themes and contrapuntal lines quite naturally, as he does so well on Chopin's "Prelude in E Minor" and Tchaikovsky's "Waltz of

the Flowers.” Add young drummer Jason Brown, who demonstrates a capacity for Ed Thigpen-esque slickness with the brushes—which is particularly evident on their swinging take on Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” and “Moonlight Sonata”—and you have a highly interactive trio that is flexible enough to take these familiar pieces to some unexpected places.

They had initially forged their chemistry as a trio on a tour of Japan prior to recording this session. “George is very picky about drummers,” says Hazeltine of Mraz, “but during that tour he said he really liked Jason.”

Together they strike an easy accord on the aptly titled *Impromptu*. “I tried to come up with a little different take on each one,” says Hazeltine of the Debussy, Bach, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, and Beethoven pieces that he tackles here, “but I didn’t want to overwrite it. That’s always the temptation as an arranger, to do all sorts of little tricky time changes and reharmonizations. But I figured, ‘Let’s just play this like jazz musicians would play it.’ The whole thing was challenging and I learned a lot doing it.”

While Hazeltine found the French Impressionist composer Claude Debussy more directly applicable to jazz (his pieces “Clair de lune” and “Rêverie” fit easily and organically into the straight-ahead aesthetic), Chopin and Beethoven required much more work on the arrangements to get them to feel right. “Take ‘Moonlight Sonata,’ for instance,” he says. “There’s no particular song form to it. It’s not easily condensed into an AABA structure. The other thing is it has many parts of it that are just rolling, arpeggiated chords, and it just stays there as kind of a drone or what might be analogous to what a jazz group would do with an extended vamp. That’s why I tried to put some Cedar Walton in there, just to get some of that jazzy quality in there.”



After negotiating the thematic material of Debussy’s “Clair de lune,” the trio heads into a blowing section at the two-minute mark that showcases Hazeltine’s confident soloing over Mraz’s walking bass lines and Brown’s lightly swinging pulse on the kit. As they return to the delicate and familiar melody at the 5:40 mark, the flexible rhythm tandem adjusts accordingly. Mraz opens “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” with a straightforward 6/8 reading of that familiar theme on his upright bass, until he syncopates a note and bounces into a 4/4 swing feel with the trio. Brown underscores the swinging