

**By Ray Hogan**  
Staff Writer

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"Anything Goes"

Brad Mehldau Trio

(Warner Bros.)

Two and a half stars

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"Start Here, Finish There"

The David Berkman Quartet

(Palmetto)

Three stars

A pair of jazz pianists who took diverging roads to reach the top of the class. One has been viewed as something of a savior since arriving; the other has, through intelligent recordings, finally started to realize the marquee status his talent merits.

Mehldau's status as one of jazz's great young minds is exemplified by the anticipation of each new recording project, whether it be trio format or "Largo," an ambitious collaboration with producer Jon Brion that almost caught the rock world's attention.

"Anything Goes" is a standards album that was recorded simultaneously with a forthcoming disc of originals. To this pianist, standards include everything from Hoagy Carmichael and Cole Porter to Paul Simon and Radiohead. It would be easy to say Mehldau and band, drummer Jorge Rossy and bassist Larry Grenadier phoned in this one, and in some respects they did. "Get Happy" and "Smile" are both songs the pianist recorded with high school buddy, Joel Frahm, for release just a few months ago and don't need repeating here. But give the trio more challenging material and they rise to the occasion.

Mehldau shows rhythmic ingenuity on Thelonious Monk's "Skippy" (check the jarring stop-start maneuver he pulls off during it) and makes a strong case for postmodernism on Radiohead's "Everything In Its Right Place." If there were more selections like these and less like "Nearness of You," the trio would make a stronger argument for the equally beloved and cursed standards concept.

Berkman is a methodical craftsman. His stately elegance brings to mind Duke Ellington, and his band (saxophonist Dick Oatts, bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Nasheet Waits) understands its leader's mathematical mind well. The opening "Cells" unfolds like an equation, which each piece integral to the whole. The pianist is a generous leader and gives ample space to his players even at the expense of his own systematic playing, which sometimes could be more front and center. When listening to the emotions he creates in "Iraq," a rare nonabstract cut, it's hard to not be swayed by the quartet's subtle power. Oatts brings a sense of West Coast cool to the equation, and Waits, while not showing the abandon he does as part of Jason Moran's trio, is one of the great young stickmasters in the genre. "Start Here, Finish There" is an example of some of the fine contemporary jazz currently being played. For shame that artists like Berkman aren't more well known.