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Half Seas Over: Half Seas Over

(Brownswood)

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2010

Pianist Elan Mehler has already made two albums for DJ Gilles Peterson's Brownswood label, accessible but cliché-avoiding sessions that sometimes resembled soundtracks to a romantic movie and which suggested classical music played with a spontaneous jazzy edge. But this collaboration with singer-songwriter Adam McBride-Smith (a folk and country-rock singer Mehler met in New York five years ago) is a very different venture, building a productive relationship between two genres of music that few jazz artists other than Bill Frisell have managed to splice. Sometimes the songs have a folksy sway, cool melodic lines unfolding with squeezebox sounds, soft basslines and understated percussion around them; sometimes, they coolly shuffle like the bouncier songs of Madeleine Peyroux. Mehler accompanies his partner gracefully and unobtrusively, and without needing to substantially change his own solo style,

which depends heavily on gently warming the harmonic implications of song chords. McBride-Smith's voice is conversational and informally mellifluous (sometimes eerily like a cross between Jeff Buckley, Johnny Cash and Jamie Cullum), and though he mostly keeps the intensity down, he erupts into a pleading wail at the close of Evensong, and rips out a storming blues over Mehler's stabs and fills on Cypress Grove.

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