

## Ralph Towner & Paolo Fresu ☐ – Chiaroscuro (2009)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Wistful Thinking* 4:19 2 *Punto Giara* 6:20 3 *Chiaroscuro* 6:30 4 *Sacred Place* 4:13 5 *Blue In Green* 5:44 6 *Doubled Up* 4:55 7 *Zephyr* 7:28 8 *The Sacred Place (Reprise)* 1:58 9 *Two Miniatures* 2:38 10 *Postlude* 2:31 Paolo Fresu - Trumpet, Flugelhorn Ralph Towner - Classical Guitar, Twelve-String Guitar [12-String Guitar], Baritone Guitar

Chiaroscuro at once has the feeling of inevitability and a sense of randomness about it, as if it were meant to happen, yet it's such a long shot that it ever did. Towner, the guitarist of the jazz/world/new age outfit Oregon, is an American who celebrated his 70th birthday in the year of this album's release, 2010 -- it's his 22nd for ECM. Fresu is an Italian trumpeter, not quite 50, whose only previous ECM connection (among some 300 albums he's appeared on in all) came in 2007 when he worked with pianist/composer Carla Bley on her release *The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu*. Towner and Fresu actually met some 15 years earlier, but didn't commit to recording together until now. Good thing they did, because they've made an exhilarating, affecting recording rich with great sensitivity and vibrant colors. Towner's spare, translucent acoustic 12-string and baritone guitar, and Fresu's bold, meaty trumpet and flügelhorn complement each other exceptionally well, their tight-knit interactivity and radiant melodicism reminiscent of collaborations of much longer duration. Laid bare in typically flawless ECM fidelity, their urbane compositions (most by Towner alone, the last two with Fresu) and perceptive improvisations are more like quiet conversations than contests. Each musician allows the other ample space to investigate and develop in solo format, but although their histories and perspectives are so unlike, when they meet up, they're always speaking the same language. Towner prefers a lighter touch than Fresu, but there is courageousness and respect in both of their statements. On "Wistful Thinking," the opening track (which appeared on an earlier Towner solo album), Towner's first notes feel as if they might just float away. Fresu's lines, though hardly brash and never aggressive, provide an anchor as the number builds. "The Sacred Place" is offered twice in balanced but dissimilar arrangements, while "Zephyr" is a more fully realized, more focused take on the song than the Oregon rendition that appeared on 1987's *Ecotopia*. "Blue in Green," the only non-original composition, can't be considered a cover of the Miles Davis/Bill Evans *Kind of Blue* track so much as a thorough reimagining of it -- Fresu doesn't mimic Davis; instead he suggests how the song might have developed independently of

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Davis had it originated someplace else. Chiaroscuro, naturally, boasts virtuosic musicianship, but it's never about that; it's about two artists coming together by chance and allowing their mutual respect to show them the way to something great. ---Jeff Tamarkin, AllMusic Review

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