

Mp3 Russ Nolan - Two Colors



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High-Energy Modern Jazz that both satisfies the intellect of its musical peers and speaks to everyone on a soulful level. 9 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo Details: Kenny Werner -- "Russ Nolan's new CD features great compositions and a great band that plays on the highest level of sophistication." David Liebman -- "A wonderful debut recording by a gentleman who has gone back into the woodshed in the past few years, dedicated to getting it right. Russ Nolan has composed some challenging music for this CD and does the job at a very high level. Hats off!!" Chris Potter -- "Russ Nolan has matured into a saxophonist with a highly developed sense of melodic line, both in his improvisations and compositions, and the band sounds great." Liner notes by Bill Milkowski-regular contributor to Jazz Times and Jazziz magazines: It takes more than sheer talent to get over in the big city. Of course, sheer talent never hurts but there are dozens and dozens of extremely gifted musicians who come to New York every year from the four corners of the world, trying to make it in the big city. Talent aside, there's a hidden X-factor that ultimately makes it all happen. Call it guts, chi, chutzpah or the power of positive thinking, it's that extra quotient of confidence, hustle and persistence that separates the also-rans from the claimers.

Saxophonist Russ Nolan, already dripping in talent, has a schmear of chutzpah on the side. Consider this: He moved to New York from Chicago six months after 9/11. At a time when the air above Ground Zero was still very toxic, when people were leaving the city in droves for the safer confines of Westchester, Connecticut, New Hampshire and as far away as they could possibly get, Nolan was strolling into town with his axe in hand and a can-do expression on his face, asking for a gig. Of course, he already had the seasoning. You can't come to town without that. Following a late '80s stint at North Texas State University, he lived and played around Chicago and had already studied with the likes of Chris Potter, Kenny Werner and Dave Liebman, soaking up their New York vibe along with the wisdom

that they had to impart. So by the time he came to town in March of 2002, he was fully prepared to deal. Two years later, after scuffling, playing for the door and never saying no to a gig (no matter how lame), he decided to take matters into his own hands, form his own band and put out his own cd. Two Colors is the result of Nolan's journey to date. Consider it volume one in an ongoing series of good things to come from this talented saxophonist/composer. "Jazz is best when it not only satisfies the intellectual side that your peers appreciate but also relates to the general public on a soulful level," says Nolan. "That's something that Dave Bloom, who founded the Bloom School of Jazz in Chicago, put into my head a long time ago. I've tried to follow that idea on this recording." By now you've already gotten the idea that Nolan is no neophyte. Indeed, at 36, he's well beyond the Young Lions phase. But his playing throughout Two Colors does reflect the more mature approach of someone who's been around the block and knows what time it is. "I left Chicago because all of my heroes were in New York," says Russ. "And even though I revere the longevity of Von Freeman and really dug Ed Peterson, who moved to New Orleans shortly after I got there, I just wasn't able find the role models tenor-wise in Chi-town. All my heroes lived in New York. And all the people I studied with, from Kenny Werner to Chris Potter to Dave Liebman, encouraged me to move there." The Kenny Werner influence immediately springs to mind in the opening re-harmonized rendition of the Willy Wonka theme "Pure Imagination," which is cleverly melded with the infectious riff from Miles Davis' "It's About That Time" (from In A Silent Way). Nolan plays soprano sax on this expansive arrangement, which alters the vibe of the original Anthony Newley piece from wistful to pensive. Drummer Vinnie Sperazza provides a nice touch and bounce while Nolan also summons up the influence of mentor Liebman on his daring intervallic leaps here. Switching to tenor sax, Nolan exhibits a cool, confident air and robust tone on the buoyant, Metheny-flavored vehicle "The One Smiling." As the composer notes, "This is based on a great sermon 'When God is smiling down on you, it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.'" Drummer Sperazza and veteran bassist Sean Conly (who has performed with Tom Harrell, Freddie Hubbard, Ray Barretto, and Nicholas Payton) provide the infectious, grooving undercurrent here. The title track, inspired by the Miles Davis/Bill Evans compositions "Blue In Green", is a swinging vehicle for some serious trading of eights by all the participants while "End of Innocence," by contrast, is a simple, lyrical original by Nolan featuring some beautifully cascading piano work by the remarkable 23-year-old Chicago native Sam Barsh (also currently a member of the Avishai Cohen Quartet and the Lonnie Plaxico Group). Nolan's re-harmonized take on the Rodgers Hart classic "Spring

Is Here" is an ambitious big band arrangement that he had written in college while under Bob Brookmeyer's spell. This pared-down quartet rendition is underscored by the lightly swinging brushwork of Sperazza (also 23) while showcasing Nolan's matured, take-your-time tenor approach on a ballad. "Hai Sensei" is a punchy, provocative statement that carries the boldly aggressive and angular attitude of Nolan's other passion, Martial Arts. "It keeps my head on straight-a great tension reliever," he says. Both Russ and pianist Barsh stretch out considerably on this surging, open-ended blowing vehicle. "Shadow" is a brooding, darkly beautiful chamber-like piece reminiscent of Michael Brecker's 1982 collaboration with Claus Ogerman on the orchestral Cityscape while "East Stroudsberg Stomp" is a chops-busting romp with a particularly challenging head that features Nolan stretching in Liebmanesque mode on soprano sax. "I wrote that the night before I left for Dave Liebman's master sax workshop in Pennsylvania. And I just tried to make it as Liebesque as possible, knowing that it will probably have a good chance of being performed and recorded one day." The collection closes on an uplifting note with the lyrical, Metheny-esque "Light Traveler," which features some beautiful tenor work upfront by Nolan. "I thought that after the darkness and edginess of 'Hai Sensei,' 'Shadow' and 'East Stroudsberg Stomp' I'd leave the listener at least with a smile on their face at the end," says Nolan. Nolan succeeds in grand style on his auspicious and long overdue debut, Two Colors. "For somebody who moved to New York six months after 9/11, I've done pretty well," he says. Amen. -- Bill Milkowski

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