

# **RUSS NOLAN** | biography

---

russ@russnolan.com • 646-320-3617

Saxophonist and composer RUSS NOLAN, 37, hails from Gurnee, IL, a near Chicago suburb. Through the first half of his life, it was not music that was his passion, but athletics. Practicing his jump shot and fastball as much as a prodigy puts time into their musical instrument, it was his dream to play professional sports. It was only after high school that he was bitten by the proverbial 'jazz bug'. This new 'infection' led him to study at the widely acclaimed music department at North Texas State University and spent his summers at the feet of Chicago Saxophone Legends Joe Daley and Rich Corpolongo.

Returning home after school, Russ was active for over ten years on the Chicago music scene, absorbing the music and rubbing shoulders with the world-class touring groups at Joe Segal's Jazz Showcase--as well as appearing as a sideman in the club himself on occasion; sitting in with Lin Haliday at the Get Me High Lounge and the legendary Von Freeman at the New Apartment Lounge; leading his own groups at the Bop Shop w/guitarist John McLean, the Get Me High Lounge, Martyrs and the Green Mill; collaborating with Violinist Zach Brock at the Hot House, Pete Miller's, Katerina's and the Jazz Showcase; and playing in Kurt Elling's orchestra for Chicago's Millennium Celebration.

Nolan's big band arrangements of Kenny Garrett and Pat Metheny compositions (originally written for the One and Two O'Clock Lab Bands at NTSU) have been performed across the United States.

Always focused on musical growth, Russ has had personal study with David Liebman, Chris Potter, and Kenny Werner.

Continuing to true his metal with fire, Russ made the trek to pay the toughest dues of all... the Big Apple. Since arriving in March 2002, Russ has begun to emerge as a bandleader, performing in various New York City jazz clubs and other performance venues.

Russ is very committed to jazz education, and as a result, has an extensive tour in 2005-2006 conducting clinics and adjudicating jazz festivals at the college, high school, and middle school level. His January-February 2005 schedule in the Chicago area included clinics/performances with Northwestern University, Knox College, the North Shore Jazz Festival, as well as numerous award-winning high school jazz programs. He returns to the Chicago area in November and January-February to be the guest combo director for the IMEA District I Jazz Fest and once again a clinician for the North Shore Jazz Festival. Check the schedule for updates.

Russ' complete itinerary, music services, and new recording can be found at [www.russnolan.com](http://www.russnolan.com).

# **RUSS NOLAN** | quotes

---

russ@russnolan.com • 646-320-3617

*“Russ Nolan was prepared, organized, articulate, and passionate in his improvisation clinic with our students of varying abilities. He purposely creates situations where students actively participate in the learning process, thus generating a very effective learning experience!”*

– **MARY JO PAPICH, IAJE Vice President**

*“Nolan succeeds in grand style on his auspicious and long overdue debut, *Two Colors*...Consider it Volume One in an ongoing series of good things to come from this talented saxophonist/composer.”*

– **BILL MILKOWSKI, Jazz Times & Jazziz magazines**

*“Russ Nolan is a monster in a closet. I hope that his CD debut will open that closet door to unleash that monster. Not only is he a technical beast, but his musicianship is beyond his age.”*

– **JOSHUA MUSSELWHITE, Jazz Improv Magazine – January 2006**

*“Russ Nolan has matured into a saxophonist with a highly developed sense of melodic line, both in his improvisations and compositions.”* – **CHRIS POTTER**

*“Russ Nolan's new CD features great compositions and a great band that plays on the highest level of sophistication.”* – **KENNY WERNER**

*“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!!!”* – **DAVID LIEBMAN**

*“Russ Nolan is a dedicated and original saxophone talent whose love of the music comes through in his playing. He's well worth a listen, and one hopes he develops a deserved following for future recordings.”* – **CADENCE MAGAZINE 2005**

*“Although somewhat of a newcomer to NYC, Nolan has obviously been around and this debut shows his strong suit to be a facility in moving from soprano to tenor without sacrificing a step. This makes for an appealing session that holds your interest with its broad tonal palette. Nolan is a most able stylist/ composer who, for his debut as a leader, has formed a wonderful partnership with pianist Sam Barsh. Here's hoping that there will be more to come from this terrific twosome.”* – **ELLIOTT SIMON, All About Jazz – 2005**

*“Assertive, challenging, intoxicating, undeniably progressive. The origins/stories behind each composition is very compelling, as evidenced in the release's liner note. Superb all-around recording.”* – **THE JAZZ NATION 2005**

*“It is clear that the young man has been blessed with harmonic, melodic, and technical giftings.”*  
– **JOHN STEVENSON, ejazznews.com – 2005**

**Jazz Improv Magazine's NY Jazz Guide**

January 2006

By Joshua Musselwhite

*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

Russ Nolan certainly does not lack preparation for his debut album. He has studied with some of the most well-respected jazz musicians in the business: Kenny Werner, David Liebman, and Chris Potter. His previous schooling was at the infamous University of North Texas. He then moved to Chicago and eventually New York, where he is today. I can't think of more deserving place for him to be. Russ Nolan is a monster in a closet. I hope that his CD debut will open that closet door to unleash that monster. Not only is he a technical beast, but his musicianship is beyond his age. Nolan believes, "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." This creed will certainly open doors for him.

My favorite jazz compositions to listen to are the kind you can't sit down and read at a jam session; they take many hours of rehearsal just to get the melody section right, and then several more hours of polishing to get it tight. The tunes on *Two Colors* are all in this fashion. They are very intricate, but never over busy. Rhythmic punches, modern chords, and ostinato bass lines are some of the characteristics found through out the tunes. The nine compositions on the album are either performed in a straight-eighths or modern swing style. The title track, "Two Colors," borrows the chord progression from "Blues In Green." I must admit this is not something that I recognized by listening to the track. The tune is performed as a medium-up swing and the melody is quite intervallic with little comping. The idea that these were the same changes flew right by me until I read it in the liner notes. Nevertheless, it is a great composition and a wonderful example of borrowing changes.

Although the members in Nolan's group are quite young, the maturity and interaction is amazing. *Two Colors* is one of the better debut albums I have heard.

TWO COLORS—Rhinoceruss Music. Pure Imagination; The One Smiling; Two Colors; End of Innocence; Spring is Here; Hai Sensei; Shadow; East Stroudsburg Stomp; Light Traveler.

PERSONNEL: Russ Nolan, tenor and soprano saxophones; Sam Barsh, piano; Sean Conly, bass; Vinnie Sperrazza, drums.

**Cadence Magazine**, Copyright 2005*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

With imagination and a blending of intellect with emotional, perhaps spiritual, depth, Nolan has adopted classic Jazz themes, such as 'Blue in Green's' changes (in, appropriately, 'Two Colors'), and transformed them into personalized statements through reharmonization and a coherent feeling among his quartet's members. 'Pure Imagination,' played fairly often by Jazz musicians due to its unmistakable changes and opportunities for reflection and improvisation, is stretched as Nolan repeats the song's first phrase while the chords shift beneath it, casting it in varying perspectives with each shift. Nolan alters the character of the music he plays by switching instruments or by applying appropriate force or delicacy to each tune, the upper-register tenor sax sweetness of the unhurried 'Spring Is Here,' Gil Evans-like in its lushness, contrasting with the bounding soprano sax tribute to Liebman, 'East Stroudsburg Stomp.'

Fortunately, I listened to Two Colors without forming extraneous opinions before I read the liner notes. The relatively young age of two of the members of Nolan's group, 23-year-olds (at the time of recording) Sam Barsh and Vinnie Sperrazza, is not indicative of the depth of their talent. Indeed, some of Barsh's solos, like his turbulent reworking of Nolan's melody on 'Two Colors,' illuminate the recordings with an alternative but supportive vision. And Nolan's concept behind 'Shadow' reinforces a thought mentioned in the introduction to these reviews: the frustrations of playing Jazz in 'a non-artistic society' (Nolan's words). Still, Russ Nolan is a dedicated and original saxophone talent whose love of the music comes through in his playing. He's well worth a listen, and one hopes he develops a deserved following for future recordings."

**All About Jazz** by ELLIOTT SIMON February 20, 2005

*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

Two Colors, from sax player Russ Nolan, begins with a pleasantly laid back meeting between Willy Wonka and Miles Davis - a meeting that has the "Pure Imagination" melody from the children's film being reharmonized with Miles' "It's About That Time". From there, things get a bit more intense as pianist Sam Barsh, along with bassist Sean Conly and drummer Vinnie Sperrazza, take the journey through Nolan's intriguing musical mind. Nolan switches from soprano to tenor and weaves bop, cool and swing with a dash of Latin into his own mélange on seven originals.

"Two Colors" turns out to be Blue in Green as the rhythm section takes the Miles classic uptempo to serve as a vehicle for Conly to be in control while Nolan wails a mean soprano. One can't help but be impressed by Barsh, who belies his youth and is equal partner to Nolan's wide range. Barsh effortlessly imposes a lovely Latin feel to "The One Smiling", bops through the unpredictable changes of "Hai Sensei" and flat out burns on "East Stroudsburg Stomp", the soprano blow fest and tribute to Nolan mentor Dave Liebman. Although somewhat of a newcomer to NYC, Nolan has obviously been around and this debut shows his strong suit to be a facility in moving from soprano to tenor without sacrificing a step. This makes for an appealing session that holds your interest with its broad tonal palette. Nolan wisely chooses his tenor to take things home at a leisurely but melodic pace on "Light Traveler" while Barsh sets up a beautifully flowing backdrop. Nolan is a most able stylist/ composer who, for his debut as a leader, has formed a wonderful partnership with pianist Sam Barsh. Here's hoping that there will be more to come from this terrific twosome.

**JazzReview.com** by PETER WESTBROOK March 2005

*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

Having just come from seeing a parade of young turks showcasing their not inconsiderable techniques at the East Coast Jazz Festival scholarship competition, it is intriguing to hear an artist who has had the patience and persistence to hone his skills for over a decade before venturing into a recording studio. Such is the case is with Russ Nolan and it has definitely been worth it.

Saxophonist and composer Nolan is originally from Chicago, where he was active as a sideman with a variety of groups for more than ten years. Coming to New York to develop his career, Nolan has studied with David Liebman and Dave Bloom at the Bloom school of jazz, and continues to work with Chris Potter. Now, at age 37, he has finally put out what Bill Milkowski at Jazz Times calls a "long overdue debut."

For this session, Nolan chooses the classic, and challenging, horn plus rhythm section format, and provides seven of the nine compositions. From the outset, Nolan's mastery of the demanding soprano saxophone is evident, as he draws a warm, rounded sound from the instrument, avoiding the nasal overtones to which it is often prone. His arranging skills are also immediately evident as he deftly turns the surprising selection, Pure Imagination from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, into a prime vehicle for abstract invention from himself and Barsh by reharmonizing it in the style of Miles Davis' It's About Time. The session continues in the same vein, with The One Smiling in a fastish 3/4 time, the title track based around a bop-pish unison line between soprano piano and bass, another waltz, End of Innocence with Nolan's tenor in more rhapsodic mode, a slow-tempo, wistful reading of Spring Is Here which, again, he has artfully re-harmonized. And so on through the program, intelligently varying moods and tempi, with Nolan moving between soprano and tenor, and Bash, Conly and Sperazza supporting him throughout with both sensitivity and aplomb.

This is inventive, well-executed music in the post-Coltrane genre. It is mildly original; Nolan clearly likes Liebman and Lovano and Potter as well as Coltrane. His task now is similar to that which faced Herbie Mann when he arrived in New York in the late forties. As Herbie recounted to me: "I just wanted to be a jazz tenor player. But when I got back out of the army I found that there were a lot of great Youngites out there, you know, Stan Getz, Al Cohn, Zoot Sims. So I might have been a second level, talented, Lester Young disciple." As it turned out, Mann took up the flute to help him get work. Nolan faces the same situation; there are a great many tenor players working in this style in New York. But, as he told me, he has no problem with this. He has no plans to switch instruments. Rather, he understands that he needs to continue to work to make this style his own, as Clark Terry puts it, to emulate, assimilate and then innovate. He has gotten off to an excellent start and he will undoubtedly continue to grow and develop. Many artists really begin to find their voice by their third or fourth recording. In Nolan's case that is something to look forward to but this recording is worth hearing now.

**ejazznews.com** by JOHN STEVENSON December 17, 2004

*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

Gentlemen never run. They always walk. This aphorism can be liberally applied to boss saxophonist Russ Nolan's rather dashing CD debut; this gentleman of jazz has brought thorough and clearly unhurried preparation to his musical tasks. Out of nine featured pieces, an ambitious seven of them are originals, which range across broad stylistic terrain. From the bell-like clarity of his soprano saxophone lines on the opener Pure Imagination, to the bittersweet and wistful End of Innocence – on which Mr. Nolan's not inconsiderable tenor sax capabilities billow forth – it is pellucidly clear that the young man has been blessed with harmonic, melodic and technical giftings. Sidemen Sam Barsh (piano), Vinnie Sperazza (drums) and Sean Conly (bass) supply excellent support throughout the disc.

---

**ejazznews.com** by JOHN GILBERT December 15, 2004

*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

A very pensive mood is set by Russ Nolan's Tenor on "Spring Is Here" Nolan pays homage to this beautiful melody with a no frills approach which lends itself admirably to this Rodgers and Hart classic. The mood is dusky without being somber.

Grooving splendidly, Nolan harks back to the roots of Jazz on "Hai Sensei" while Pianist Sam Barsh talks about Monk in his solo, albeit with rapid fire lines that are reminiscent of the great Bud Powell. The ubiquitous Sean Conly takes no prisoners in his exchanges with drummer Sperrazza.

Sam Barsh jumps in his Powell bag again on "East Stroudsburg Stomp" with a blazing solo and exhibiting more chops than a meat market. Nolan's soprano follows suit with a fiery soliloquy.

Russ Nolan and company have a fine album that will satisfy jazzophiles and the intelligentsia alike.

---

**ejazznews.com** by GEORGE W. CARROLL November 22, 2004

*Russ Nolan Two Colors Cd Review*

The debut CD of Reedman colossus Russ Nolan: Illuminating, dazzling, arousing, admirable, brilliant, vivid, splendid, intellectual, instructive, edifying.....With an emotional range that veers from the lyrical to the more experimental side of jazz.

I'm putting him on my "Dean's List."