

TWO SHADES OF NUDE - LINER NOTES

by Scott Yanow

Up to this point, trombonist Doug Beavers is perhaps best known for being a member of the Mingus Big Band and for his long-time association with Eddie Palmieri. Two Shades Of Nude, his second CD as a leader (following his jazz project for children, Jazz, Baby!), has plenty of his fine trombone playing but is most noteworthy for Beavers' adventurous writing and for his leadership of a very impressive nonet.



The group first formed in 2000. “We worked around New York, having a monthly gig which acted as a breeding ground for the band,” remembers Beavers. “It developed into a nonet because I wanted to have guys that I could arrange for and yet, at the same time, have the feel of a small group.” Other projects took precedent at times, but documenting the music of his nonet was always a goal for the trombonist. “Finally it got to the point where I had the band that I had always wanted so it was definitely time to record.”

In addition to contributing four of the nine compositions on Two Shades Of Nude, Beavers wrote all of the arrangements. The players in the nonet are musicians who he had played next to in the Mingus Big Band (the two trumpeters and bassist Boris Koslov), met through Eddie Palmieri, or had encountered on gigs in New York. The brilliant trumpet soloist Alex Sipiagin, lead trumpeter Kenny Rampton and bass trombonist Max Seigel join Doug in the brass section, both Marc Mommaas and Jon Irabagon (winner of the Thelonious Monk competition in 2008) are on tenors, and pianist Henry Hey (a key member of the modern jazz group Rudder), bassist Boris Koslov and either Dafnis Prieto or Tony Moreno on drums comprise the rhythm section. “The players had to be musicians of the first order in order to play this music, and they all had to be excellent soloists. These are musicians who can read anything put in front of them while always swinging.”

The memorable program begins with “Two Shades Of Nude.” Its four-note theme pops up throughout the piece, the adventurous harmonies are a little reminiscent of Herbie Hancock in the 1960s, and the piano solo is a logical outgrowth of the arranged ensembles. “There is a duality to the music. The melody moves kind of slow but the underlying part is fast. I wanted it to burn.” With Koslov's rapid bass lines pushing Hey and Beavers during their solos and the ensembles in general, “Two Shades Of Nude” definitely burns while being quite unpredictable.



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Herbie Hancock's "Tell Me A Bedtime Story" is brought into the 21st century with an intricate arrangement featuring dense harmonies that still let its melody sing. The tenor solo will not displease Wayne Shorter fans, Beavers has a strong solo, and Sipiagin's dramatic spot near the performance's conclusion is climatic.

"Scurry" was originally inspired by an encounter with a mouse. The cinematic piece has an especially heated trumpet solo, a nice spot for Hey's piano, and plenty of adventure.

"Lapse" is a ballad feature for Henry Hey over dense harmonies played by the horns. Its title pertains to temporarily losing one's inspiration. "Living in New York when times are tough, sometimes it can be hard to keep the creative energy flowing. It can be the loneliest place in the world."

Clare Fischer's "Pensativa" is given a complex but logical reworking. Although reharmonized, its rich melody is left intact. Sipiagin and Mommaas take inspired solos while Beavers' chart really pushes the harmonies of this standard.

Chick Corea's "Gemini" has rarely been revived. "It is from Corea's Now He Sings, Now He Sobs, which I always loved. Even years ago, I could always imagine this song being orchestrated. Our version is through-composed." The arrangement features the horns with just minimal playing by the rhythm section. Its brief melody is stretched out with atmospheric tone colors that make this piece quite haunting.

One of the most exuberant performances on this CD is "Hand Jive." The uptempo post bop piece, taken from the repertoire of the Miles Davis Quintet of the mid-1960s, has interaction between the horns just as one might hear from a very creative small group. After Beavers takes a fine trombone solo, a muted Kenny Rampton and bass trombonist Max Seigel solo together. The two tenors join in, Hey gets a bit of the spotlight, and the closing ensembles are quite spirited. Tony Moreno's driving drumming adds a great deal to this rollicking performance.

The longest piece of this project is "Brink," a dark brooding ballad that showcases Hey, Beavers and horn harmonies that are full of tension and suspense.

A contrast is the closing piece, the nonet's interpretation of McCoy Tyner's "Blues On The Corner." This particularly happy performance gives the musicians an opportunity to cut loose in their solos, with extroverted and exciting spots for Sipiagin and Beavers. "We had a lot of fun with this and I tried to make it sound almost like a traditional big band."

Doug Beavers grew up around music. One of his grandfathers was a clarinetist and an arranger-composer, while his father enjoyed listening to soul and blues. After a brief and unsuccessful attempt at mastering the clarinet, Beavers switched to the trombone, finding that he was able to develop a warm and original voice on the instrument from the start. He began his career playing in the San Francisco Bay area with both Latin music



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groups and jazz bands. After earning a bachelor's degree in music, he moved to New York to attend the Manhattan School of Music. While earning a master's degree in composition, he learned important lessons from such teachers as trombonist Conrad Herwig and arranger-producer Mike Abene.

Beavers has since written scores for both symphony orchestras and films, played and arranged for the Mingus Big Band, and collaborated extensively with Eddie Palmieri. In addition to leading his popular salsa group Conjunto Rovira, he has worked with the Spanish Harlem Orchestra, produced a variety of recordings, and became the Professor of Jazz Trombone at Cal State University East Bay.

“I’ve brought all of these experiences and influences together on this CD. For the future I want to continue developing my voice as both a player and a writer in both jazz and Latin music.” *Two Shades Of Nude*, which emphasizes the jazz side of his music world, is Doug Beavers' definitive statement so far, both as a trombonist and as an arranger-composer. This is modern jazz that both looks back to his roots and ahead to what will certainly be a very productive future.

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