

JAZZ IMPROV MAGAZINE

Album Review

By Dan Bilawsky

The title track of Elio Villafranca's *The Source In Between* is a fine synthesis of disparate musical influences forged into one cohesive statement. Imagine, if you will, a song with the vibe of "A Night In Tunisia," a groove that is equal parts Mozambique-inspired moodiness, fiery Latin lines, headlong swinging and compositional quirkiness that screams of Thelonius Monk. Throwing all of this in a blender might yield this opening track. To top it off, Villafranca's solo is in a realm all its own, betraying no singular debt to any one specific pianist. The "Latin Re-Mix" of this tune that closes the album adds a little more spice to the mix as percussionist Arturo Stable joins the fray playing tumbadoras. Dafnis Prieto responds well with small adjustments in his playing to Alexander's solo ideas. "The Lonely One," a mournful ballad-like piece, begins with Villafranca tenderly laying out a sparse piano line. Alexander follows the pianist with a gentle statement over some light cymbal work from Prieto. Bassist Jeff Carney is the prime rhythmic catalyst on this track, as he guides the band in the right direction throughout. The sleepy nature of this piece gives way to the mystery and majesty of Villafranca's "Oddua Suite." Prieto's cymbal and tom swells help to heighten a sense of drama at the outset. Alexander controls the direction until the group returns to the original dark hues of the introductory material. Jeff Carney has a brief unaccompanied cadenza before laying down a sly bass line, at which point he hands things over to Villafranca. Prieto, master of the ever-evolving groove, follows and responds to every statement made with slight modifications and directional changes in his drumming. Alexander's sound is much broader and bolder when he returns with some explosive soloing that really helps to light a spark under the rest of the band and they return one last time to the introductory theme to bring things to a close.

Monk, filtered through a Latin post-modern prism, is once again a noticeable influence on "Three Plus One." Prieto brilliantly fills in the spaces at the top of the song and toward the conclusion. Some trading between Villafranca and Alexander

keeps the excitement up throughout the middle of the piece. "In The Dark" doesn't conjure up any of the spooky thoughts of a child in said predicament, but rather exudes a gently swirling and soothing mixture of sounds. Ferenc Nemeth, occupying the drum chair for this track, creates gentle wave like sound with his brushes. Villafranca's gentle lyricism and impressionistic side is on full display. Carney's arco bass work melds with the waves of sound created by Nemeth and Villafranca beneath Alexander's saxophone lines. Alexander, Villafranca and Carney have no shortage of ideas during their solos on "Faces, Not Evil" and Prieto has some nice set-ups that help to push and drive the band. "Resurrection Of The Incapacitated" is a stormy musical piece, which features a lot of give and take between Villafranca, Prieto and Carney. Yosvany Terry, on alto saxophone, makes an appearance on "Don't Ever Say Never." Prieto and Carney make the ground seem to shift beneath the band during various parts of this tune. Terry, moving to the soprano saxophone, plays the snake charmers role on "Luna," as he seduces you with his sly yet friendly lines. Villafranca's choice of musicians proves to be a great match for this forward-thinking Latin-leaning program of originals.