

JazzTimes Magazine (March 2009 issue)

By *-Michael J. West*

On *The Source in Between* pianist Elio Villafranca attempts to fuse venturesome postbop and classic Latin jazz. Its real ambition, however, is rhythmic, which is why, in addition to drummer Dafnis Prieto—part of the core quartet along with saxophonist Eric Alexander and bassist Jeff Carney—the album features two guest percussionists, Ferenc Nemeth and Arturo Stable. As such, even as the other instruments luxuriate in tuneful melody and rich harmony, the percussion consistently sounds busy, even skittish. Therein lies the rub: *The Source in Between* is a fine set that's somewhat overwhelmed by its sophisticated rhythms. "Oddua Suite," for example, is a droning, Coltranesque modal piece, but the beat shifts between trudging 4/4 and upbeat 5/4. Odd accents offset those meters, an effect that confuses even casual foot-tapping. Worse, the ballad "In the Dark" has no apparent time signature whatsoever, Prieto letting licks fall where they may. Although the playing (especially Villafranca's chording) is beautiful, the track is shapeless.

These flaws, however, are in the compositions, not the performance. The musicians work magic throughout, with special praise for Carney's clever, creative lines and solos ("Resurrection of the Incapacitated"). Alexander also shows great imagination with his note choices on the deliriously catchy hard bop "Faces, Not Evil." This tune, which could easily become a standard, demonstrates that Villafranca is a top-shelf composer despite his overly ambitious rhythms. Tuning out the latter defect to concentrate on these virtues makes great pleasure of *The Source in Between*.