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Since *Van Halen II* (1979), if not before, the sophomore curse has beset bands' second albums. After a lifetime of collecting material for the first record, the short calendar for the follow-up imposes a harsh discipline that is not always friendly to the artist. Well, that might have been Van Halen's excuse, anyway; in jazz, the same logic doesn't necessarily apply.

This sophomore effort from the quintet led by drummer Olivier Robin and saxophonist Sébastien Jarrousse exhibits most of the elements that made its début, *Tribulation* (Aphrodite, 2006), so durable. Chief among these is an expertly played fast and demanding mid-1960s groove (think Miles' Hancock/Shorter quintet) with slightly outside soloing by five strong musicians.

A surprise on *Dream Time* is what looks like a concerted effort to take on slower tempos and more tender moods than on the fairly driving *Tribulation*. Mostly, this strategy yields fine results, especially bassist Jean-Daniel Botta's "Le Pèlerin de Cadaquès" or the soprano/piano duet, "L'impermanence."

If there is evidence of the sophomore curse on this record it lies in the cool reserve of the enigmatic compositions; a tendency present too on *Tribulation*. The angular tunes are flawlessly executed and feature sometimes stunningly-arranged ensemble passages, but about half the time fail to engage the listener.

Paradoxically perhaps, this group nevertheless comes across as warm and approachable. That's surely down to the empathetic group playing, already present on the earlier record, and the closely argued solos—no slacking here.

As was the case on *Tribulation*, pianist Emil Spanyi emerges as the star of the show—his symphonic solo on "Calame" and his gentle accompaniment of Jarrousse's soprano sax on "L'impermanence" are among the highlights. Something about Spanyi's playing is akin to McCoy Tyner's in the way he fills all the space without getting baroque in the vein of, say, the late Oscar Peterson. Spanyi can be heard playing a

lot of electric keyboards on François Jeanneau's Weather Report-like *Quand se taisent les oiseaux* (Bee Jazz, 2007); clearly he is a player of great breadth.

Jarrousse has some of the characteristics people associate with [Chris Potter](#): energetic playing and an apparently bottomless pit of melodic and timbral ideas. If the Robin/Jarrousse quintet could receive even a tenth of the attention paid to Potter, they would amply deserve it; now if *Dream Time* could get a tenth of the attention paid to *Van Halen II*...

Jeff Dayton-Johnson