

Review [Pete Robbins]

It's odd that the album's called *Centric*, since many of Robbins' compositions have a hazy, shimmering quality that's more indeterminate or decentered (I like it that way, by the way). The intertwined tones of the two saxophonists lend these tunes - already somewhat ambiguous and open in their possibilities - an obliqueness of texture that forces one to listen to harmony and line somewhat differently. It's just this side of an outward-leaning session like Mat Maneri's "Acceptance" and just the other side of the kind of work being done by young saxophonists such as Tony Malaby. When the sax players solo, however, the distinctiveness of their voices is apparent. While Robbins is a careful, considered player who tugs and pulls at a single idea during his improvisations, Garzone's is a lustier voice who more or less barrels through the composition (though he, too, is a thoughtful player. Gamble's chugging guitar sets up "Screwgun," a gnarled and open-ended spool of a song which, from the sound of it, may be an homage to Tim Berne. Robbins bounces along atop the supple rhythms and makes some pretty daring harmonic choices. Garzone unleashes a smoldering line of split tones and smears. Gamble's ringing notes twist in on themselves, courtesy of some judiciously-used delays and samples, as the saxophonists reenter with an insistent half-tone interval. A fine one. "Reach" isn't quite as distinctive, though Garzone impresses again with his muscle amid the staggered rhythms and cadences. Ironically, Robbins sounds most energized in "Somnambulist" as he uses a more caustic tone and darting phrases even as he displays his customarily patient lyricism and flair for motivic development. Van Beest and Zimmer are really quite fine here, and they impress on each tune. "Swimthere" features another spaced-out guitar intro, which then settles into another Berne-like bustle (Bloodcount, particularly the version with guitarist Ducret, seems to be a model - but imagine them doing miniatures). "Hone" follows a similar path, but with a head that floats more independently of the rhythm. Gamble rocks out with distortion on, somewhat unexpectedly (but then again, there is an inner tension to many of these tunes and his playing is often key to this presence). Hot polyrhythmic ending could almost be lifted from a King Crimson record. The final tracks return to the cooler climes with which the disc began. I like this record, and I like Robbins' playing. He's got vision in his writing and improvising, and the focus to bring it out in the open.

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