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This sax virtuoso will make you believe you can fly

[John Shand](#) and [Michael Bailey](#)

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MATTHEW OTTIGNON
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Reviewed by JOHN SHAND
★★★★

Flying is miraculous not because of altitude, speed, precision or aerodynamics, but because of earth and gravity. So in creating music to celebrate birds and flight, Matthew Ottignon ensured airiness and velocity are only part of the equation: he also often grounds the music in grooves and weightier textures, so the impression of flight is not observed, but is experienced and exhilarating.

Launching his new album *Volant* (Earshift Music), the composer and saxophonist reassembled the quartet that made it for the first time since its recording a year ago. They'd be dangerous if they could do it more often. Pianist Lauren Tsamouras, bassist Hannah James and drummer Holly Connor are fully alive to Ottignon's desired balancing of lightness and mass, so the drums might crunch while the piano floats, for instance, or the saxophone might soar high above an earthy rhythm.



There are hints of giants such as John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders in Ottignon's lines. BARNABAS IMRE

The opening *Moon Rock* had Ottignon's alto glancing off the Goethe-Institut's bright but sympathetic acoustics, while the band lit flares around it. *Naturis* was more contemplative, beckoning a brooding solo from James, while Connor stretched time by playing behind the beat, whereas on *The Third Bardo*, she perforated the storming tenor's density.

Murmuring seemed the project's very essence, with the tenor wheeling and swooping over the updraught of the evolving intensity of the others' eighth-note ostinato. *Rocky Lux* was simultaneously driving and weightless, culminating in an exultant four-way dialogue, while for the incendiary *Bilpin*, Ottignon swapped to baritone, making a vast, majestic sound, and Tsamouras again played dancing lines that did much to lend all the music its buoyancy.

The tenor came to the boil over the free-jazz blaze of *Rolling and Circling*, and to the *Volant* material they added *Jet-Setters*, which was like funk with tripwires attached, featuring a jolting feature from Connor.

Through it all came hints of the spirit of such monumental figures as John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders, but Ottignon's artistry is too far advanced for you baldly to hear the sounds or lines of the forebears who helped shape him.