



**Corrie van Binsbergen**  
**Self Portrait In Pale Blue**  
(Brokken Records)

It was a nice surprise, a few years ago, when, totally by chance, I happened to "discover" the mature, expressive guitarist Corrie van Binsbergen. When, just a few days later, while talking with a friend over the phone, I tried to remember the name of the fine musician I had just "discovered", the best I could come up with was "Corrie van... Something.". "You mean Corrie van Binsbergen?", he said. And so it immediately dawned on me that what for me was a "new discovery", for others was already a proven entity.

The album in question being For A Dog, by the quartet called Cram. I listened to it again the other day, just to make sure, and I noticed that I haven't changed my mind: it's a "fusion" album, but light, never vulgar, totally non-showy (which is definitely a plus, given the "genre", right?), the leader's guitar reminding me here and there of Frank Zappa's and Jeff Beck's lyricism and angularity.

I'll immediately say that the album I'm reviewing now is: a) totally different; b) a lot better. Self Portrait In Pale Blue is an album for solo guitar whose chosen approach is improvisation. A musical dimension that here is definitely "teleological" and extremely "consonant", which moves along lines that are sometimes "modal", with the pleasant addition of a bit of a "raga rock" aroma. In more direct terms, I'll say it's a very fine album whose melancholic and serene beauty can also work as an invitation for an analytical ear.

Now that I think of it, The Lake Isle Of Innisfree - the track for solo guitar that came at the end of For A Dog, with those arpeggios for nylon guitar almost sounding like a transcription from the classical guitar repertory, with those nuances of serene melancholy - could almost be seen as a "bridge" to the new album; but the new album was deliberately conceived, and - though the featured sound palette is greatly varied - works perfectly as a whole.

The process that gave birth to *Self Portrait In Pale Blue* is explained in the CD liner notes. Fine recorded sound, by Chris Weeda, in the German studio called Fattoria Musica. Four pieces here were created through a "two-track" process, meaning that a guitar track was superimposed in real time on a previously conceived track. While the remaining pieces were created "in the moment", the guitar being assisted by a few pedals, like the ones we know so well from the days of, say, Robert Fripp and Elliott Sharp.

The album features thirteen tracks, for an optimum length - 41' - just like an old vinyl LP. The pieces have no title - there's only a numerical progression - as if the artist had wanted to avoid superimposing "content" - and so, "meaning" - on a substance that's deliberately kept as "elusive".

Here and there I was reminded of something known - those harmonics on track 2 reminded me of Jeff Beck, while the opening arpeggio on track 3 reminded me of Robert Fripp - but I have to confess that the meditative and introspective nature of this work had me thinking of the most introverted moments of the once-famous solo album by Peter Green titled *The End Of The Game*, above all the track *Timeless Time* and, of course, the title-track.

With the only exception of the tracks that open and close the album, all episodes are on the short side. However, in my opinion the album works best when listened to as a whole.

I'll try to offer readers a quick description of the music featured on the album. However, readers are invited to start a first-hand exploration.

1) starts as a modal meditation on a "cloudy"-sounding "pedal", the performance at first being for the most part on the lower strings. There's a pinch of "raga rock" here. Starting from 3' we are immersed in a meditation for "backwards tapes" (obviously through the real-time use of pedals). Starting at about 4' 50" we are transported back to the meditative mood of the start of the piece, with the "backwards tapes" of the "B" section still in the background, the performance now for the most part on the higher strings.

2) reminded me of Jeff Beck on pieces like, say, *Where Were You*, with its use of harmonics pulled with the vibrato arm, there's also what sounds like a wha-wha, and strings being lightly stroked.

3) is a "two-track" piece, with a "noisy" side against a clean arpeggiated guitar that reminded me of Robert Fripp's intro to *The Letters*, by King Crimson.

4) is luminous, serene, modal, ends on a chord.

5) is almost a jig, with basso continuo, and echo, all of a piece with track 9).

6) has a "hold" arpeggio, and a subtle, serene, bitter-sweet, solo; it ends on the arpeggio.

7) is a "two-track" piece: wha-wha on one side, with a rhythm sounding

like a mix of "techno" and "ethnic" elements, and a sequence of harmonics on the other, with echo.

8) is a "two-track" piece, is a composition "in the moment", clean, with peaceful-sounding melodic lines and a fine use of the volume pedal.

9) takes us back to the jig from track 5).

10) starts with "backwards tapes": serene, meditative, then it goes straight to track...

11) which sounds like a piece for classical guitar.

12) a "two track" piece, has a very strong "noisy" ingredient on one side, with stroked strings, and an arpeggio with a fine melodic dimension on the other; here and there we are surprised by strong melodic bursts, against the arpeggio.

13) goes back to the "raga" mood with echo, a strong melody, arpeggio, harmonics; there's a fine use of the volume pedal, sounds which fade-in, harmonics; then there is something which to me sounds like an "electronic mandolin" with a clear "kinetic" function, then - starting at about 4' 30" - a solo guitar with volume pedal takes the album to a fine close.

The player's touch being very clean and expressive, the album's sound being quite beautiful, listeners are invited to turn their amp's volume knob to the right. I hate sounding like a paid advertisement, but I would not be surprised if quite a few people found themselves to be in love with this album, well beyond the usual boundaries of this "genre" (?).

**Beppe Colli**

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