



An interview with Corrie van Binsbergen

By Beppe Colli

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Two albums recently released by the line-up called Vanbinsbergen Playstation made me think deeply about Corrie van Binsbergen, a guitarist and composer who in the course of a long career has successfully managed to move through an artistic travelogue that has seen her working with quite varied line-ups - from solo to quartet to octet and even more - in a variety of styles that doesn't lack coherence, with a spirit that after all these years still maintains a lot of verve and "joie de vivre".

So I decided that doing a wide-ranging interview was only logical. Corrie van Binsbergen agreed, the interview being conducted via e-mail, last week.

Given the high quality of the two CDs you released with the new line-

up called Vanbinsbergen Playstation, I'd like to know more about the way this octet came into being, and your intentions when assembling this band, whose repertory - provided I'm not mistaken - is a bit of departure for you, compositionally?

It's a combination of different factors. From 2003 on I did a lot of projects with writers and poets. They tell their stories on which I composed a musical scenario. For the audience it's like a "movie for the ears". I also wrote music for large projects, an opera, a film. I began to miss a "simple" instrumental band. So from 2010 to 2012 I played in an improtrio with drummer Yonga Sun and bass player Hein Offermans, later Dion Nijland. Then I wanted to start a larger ensemble. Thinking about the line-up, I decided that it should be a bit like my first band Corrie & de Brokken (1986-1989), a quintet with two horn players (Angelo Verploegen on trumpet and Tobias Delius on tenor sax), from 1988 a sextet with Joost Buis on trombone. For my new band I wanted four horns: two reed and two brass. Joost I've known for a very long time. I met the young French horn player Morris Kliphuis on stage at an impro-session at a festival and was pleasantly surprised. I never played with Mete Erker and Miguel Boelens but I heard them play and thought that these four horn players would sound great together. And they do!! On the first rehearsal with the septet after playing through the first piece, we all looked at each other and said WoW! this is really something special!

I used the BrokkenBal 2014 (a yearly happening with writers and musicians I organized from 2006 to 2016 at the Amsterdam Bimhuis) as an opportunity to try out this combination of musicians. Actually I had no piano in mind for my future band, but for this BrokkenBal with a lot of storytelling I needed Albert van Veenendaal with his special way of playing on prepared piano. And there it was: BAM! a real match. We all wanted to do more with this octet, but we had to wait a year, because everyone had lots of other bands and projects going on.

The repertoire is mainly mine. We played one piece by Joost and one by Albert.



You've released two albums featuring the octet, Live and Tales

Without Words. I'd like you to talk about them, since they are in many ways quite different (or so I think).

Yes, they differ a lot, they are like opposites. The first CD is a live album with great energy, you can put it on your record player and start the day with a boost, dancing around with your vacuum-cleaner, haha. Tales Without Words is more introspective, it's also a concept album. Put it on at the end of the day, listen to it sitting at the fireplace with a nice glass of wine.

The tracks on LIVE were recorded on the very first concert at the BrokkenBal 2014, when we actually even didn't exist as a band, and on our first concert at a festival 2015 as the band Vanbinsbergen Playstation. The album really had this vibe: "Yoohoo, here we are!". Tales Without Words is a studio album with the intention "sit down, relax and listen to our stories".

I'd really like you to talk about the line-up called Corrie en de Grote Brokken. I only own Vier! - the "Best of" CD that came out in 2011, where in the liner notes you wrote that you had started your own band 25 years earlier! So, I'd be glad if you could talk about this band.

I started my own band Corrie en de Brokken in 1986 and 10 years later I started Corrie en de Grote Brokken, with twice as many musicians. This was a cooperation of pop and jazz musicians. Before starting my own band I did many different things, actually just things people asked me for. I played bass guitar and electric guitar already during my studying classical guitar at the Conservatory. I just did things that came in my way and earned money with music but not with something I regarded as special, which was actively connected to *me*. Then on my 27th birthday I realized all of a sudden that time was passing by and that in three years I would be 30! So I then decided to start my own band.



The line-up that's featured on Vier! - four wind instruments, keyboards, marimba, vibes, plus vocals, guitars, and rhythms - and some of the music - especially, Zootsuit I & II and This Suits You II - reminded me of Frank Zappa, both of his music and the large line-up that toured Europe in 1988. Am I wrong? Could you please talk about this?

Oh yeah you are absolutely right about this. I listened to Zappa in my teens and loved it. One Size Fits All, Roxy & Elsewhere, Zappa In New York, so great! Then at one point I lost track - the man kept on producing new albums - and I was more into jazz and classical, but then I came by an old friend (he really has ALL FZ CDs!) and saw Make A Jazz Noise Here. I took it home and was flabbergasted again. So a new "era" of Zappa listening in my life.

The line up of Corrie en de Grote Brokken is a direct inspiration.

And I composed ZOOT-SUIT (part I - V) as a tribute to Frank Zappa.

When it comes to guitar playing, I've noticed quite a few similarities - more in the past, they are fewer now - between some of your guitar solos and some solos in Zappa's canon. Here the best example I can give you is the track called Stories From The Girl Who Couldn't Talk, which I've seen on the Net (don't know on what album it appears). The articulation, the scales, the variable density of the notes, all this tell me that you must have studied his compositional logic quite closely. Would you mind elaborating on this?

I never study on trying to find out what other guitarists play, I know most musicians do, but I don't. Nevertheless I get infatuated with the idiom. I even have to watch out for this haha! Certainly there are similarities. Zappa once said "I'm a one chord guy", so am I. I like the wah wah, and rather play low then the screaming high notes, so does he. And his use of modal scales I like a lot, especially, as you noticed well, in my period playing with Corrie and de Grote Brokken.

First there was I Wasn't Talking (Corrie en de Grote Brokken, first album 1997), basically only a groove and a long guitar solo. The title refers to Zappa's Shut Up And Play Your Guitar. Then I did a few solo concerts, and made a soundtrack with all kind of quotes of Zappa. Called it Stories From The Girl Who Wasn't Talking and later More Stories From The Girl Who Wasn't Talking. The video you saw was from the German Festival Zappanale 2006.

When it comes to composing: during my study at the Conservatory for classical guitar, I had to make a study-project analyzing a classical composer. I chose Zappa!



I have a soft spot for the solo album you released a few years ago, *Self Portrait In Pale Blue*, which - compared to other albums you've released - offers a quite "naked" instrumental dimension that's quite personal and intimate. Would you mind talking about this very beautiful album?

I'm really happy to hear that you have a "soft spot" for the album. The CD happens to be liked by many people. You don't have to be into jazz to appreciate the music. It appeals to both my neighbor and to Ernst Reijseger so to speak. Hereby the liner notes I wrote for the album.

"In August 2013 I had made a reservation for a recording in studio Fattoria Musica. The scheduled project however, was cancelled. Pianist and good friend Albert van Veenendaal suggested to use the studio days to record my own album. A solo album. After initial doubts (who is waiting for this and what pieces am I going to record?), the idea settled in my head. OK, I will go there but totally unprepared. Tabula Rasa. Sit down and play and see where I stand. The only assignment for myself was to take time, let time in. Let it last and play as few notes as possible. A period of self reflection came in spring 2012 more or less by accident. Due to a fracture in my left hand I couldn't play for months and it was even uncertain if this would happen ever again. After having lived in the city for 30 years we moved to the country. I am older. My mother passed away. I can hear it in the recordings; it has become a time document, a self portrait."

There's an album on which you appear that I like quite a bit - *For A Dog*, released under the name Cram. The music sounded quite fresh, and I've seen a couple of clips of the group performing two tracks off the album - *Breakfast* and *Blues For Penelope* - that sound really nice. Was it the only album released by the group?

Yes, we released only one CD. CRAM was formed when I was invited to play at "Rencontres Musicales The Rabat" (Morocco). I was asked with the quartet CVB4 I had back then (special line-up with Pieter Jan Cramer on accordion and Ernst Glerum on bass) but two musicians were not free. Instead of asking two replacers I started from scratch with a new quartet and put together the musicians: drummer Arend Niks, Rutger van Otterloo on saxophone and Mick Paauwe on bass. It turned out to be quite nice and when we did another concert in Italy, we decided we were a band. We played short pieces with a poppy edge. We did only one tour in Holland (among others, at North Sea) and mostly played abroad, Brasil, The Baltics, India and China. But frequently after a few years I get to know the musicians very well and when composing for that line-up I already know how it will sound. So why writing it down then? For me it loses the attraction, there's no need anymore.



The Cram album was the first one released on Brokken Records, a label you founded. If you don't mind, I'd like you to talk about the "financial dimension", so to speak, of your work. Times being what they are, how do you manage to keep those musical endeavours afloat?

I'm in the happy circumstances to get financial support from the Dutch Performing Arts. Still, I work my ass off to realize all these projects.

I'm really curious to know about the way you started. How you developed an interest for music, your musical studies, and your early influences. I bet listening to the radio was quite exciting when you were in your teens!

Although neither of my parents were musicians, I feel that I inherited my artistic skills from my mother, who sang in a choir, and from my grandmother, who had literary skills and wrote poetry. All kind of musical

genres existed together and mixed and merged throughout my childhood. I encountered music at an early age in an informal way. I picked up the guitar at 7, two guitars were lying around in the house, because I had two older brothers who played it. They had lots of records too! So I heard Jimi Hendrix, Traffic, Blind Faith, Joni Mitchell, Jethro Tull, Randy Newman, Steely Dan, Zappa, also Beatles of course, and much much more. Also Bach, Bartók, Gershwin, Debussy, Ravel. When I was in my teens both brothers played in bands. It appealed to me enormously! When I moved out of the house and moved to "the big city" I didn't have much money, but I had a big tape recorder with tapes where I put on all kinds of music I got from the music library. I had it play all day: Perotinus, African music, flamenco, Stravinsky, Zappa, Varèse, Carla Bley, Jaco Pastorius, Joni Mitchell, Miles Davis, Mingus, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Hancock, Ornette Coleman, Ry Cooder, Captain Beefheart, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, to name a few... It was a crazy mix.



In closing, I'd like you to paint me a picture of the way you regard the current climate when it comes to people's appreciation of music.

Oof, difficult question. Maybe people are more open to different styles? Less putting labels? Don't know who said that (Ellington?): "The only thing that matters is that it is good music." Amen to that. But what I find a pity is that people who program festivals don't seem to take risks anymore. They want to have success guaranteed. And I always like to walk the thin line, try out things, discover.

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