



Vanbinsbergen Playstation Live

(Challenge Records/Buzz)

"Vivacious, full of variety, exuberant, well recorded, very well played, quite solid when it comes to compositions, sporting inventive arrangements, also - will wonders ever cease? - surprisingly accessible".

Before writing a review, I usually don't write such long lists of pros and cons of every album I want to talk about, this time it was different: Live, by Vanbinsbergen Playstation, was part of the truckload or two of albums which were sent to my tiny but muscular webzine during the time (seven months) when it was in a state of "suspended animation". Its release date now not so fresh, how was I supposed to proceed?

I had a look around, saw that the album already had a few quite positive reviews, but I decided that a little "extra push" couldn't hurt.

I'll add a little background to my judgment. Compared to the music I listened to in three different occasions - recent concerts I attended, by the Mary Halvorson Trio, the Instant Composers Pool Orchestra, and The Bad Plus - the music featured on this CD is the clear winner, by a wide margin. Vanbinsbergen Playstation may not be as "trendy" as Mary Halvorson, as illustrious as the ICPO, and as commercially relevant as The Bad Plus, but let's just consider the facts, please.

A musician who hits the bull's eye quite more often than mere fortune would permit, this time guitarist and composer Corrie van Binsbergen decided to put together an octet with a strong foundation and a versatile wind section (names to follow in a minute).

The ensemble already sounds quite together, though - as per the CD's liner notes - these pieces were recorded during the first two concerts played by this line-up. While in the past I've greatly appreciated her work with her quartet and in solo mode, here Corrie van Binsbergen

clearly shows she also possesses a fine ability to dress such a "jazzy"-sounding medium-sized line-up to perfection. I thought I could still trace tiny traces of Frank Zappa and Jeff Beck (but here the leader did not grant herself much solo space), while listeners will be able to find various similarities, depending on what they already know (some Mingus for sure, also for a moment or two I was reminded of the large-scale line-up of Nucleus as featured on Solar Plexus), but there's nothing that sounds derivative.

A CD of perfect length - just like a vinyl album from the old days - though the perceived duration appears to be longer, thanks to the great variety of climates featured on the album.

Those who played what. Mete Erker on tenor sax and bass clarinet. Miguel Boelens on soprano sax and alto sax. Morris Kliphuis on french horn and cornet. Joost Buis on trombone and lapsteel. Corrie van Binsbergen on guitar. Albert van Veenendaal on prepared piano. Dion Nijland on double bass. Yonga Sun on drums.

The first part of the CD was recorded by Marc Shots, the second part by Micha de Kanter. Mixed by Chris Weeda. Mastered by Darius van Helfteren.

The CD features a precise "live" sound, a lively rhythm section - the prepared piano gives an important timbral contribution that's not apparent at first, but which comes into focus with repeated listening sessions - and a front line which offers a fine blend of different colours.

Let's have a look at the featured tracks.

Goofy is the brief but intense opening track. Live riff, up-tempo, "Latin"-sounding, the trombone plays a vivacious solo. Riff.

Onderuit is the brief second track, an arpeggio acting as "pedal", and a "lyrical"-sounding theme where the guitar is paired to the cornet. Fine piano.

The Magic Sock part 5 starts with an arpeggiated motif, guitar, bass, piano. There's a fine theme played on tenor, then the other winds appear, sounding a bit Zappa-like. There's a tenor solo with fine backing from the rhythm section (there's a very weird sound on the tenor, starting at 2' 28"), then the theme is restated by the cornet, winds follow, then a piano-drums interlude. Then it's back to the theme played on tenor, engulfed by the wind section.

On My Way To Central Station has a "Latin" mood, with a lyrical-sounding melody on guitar that gradually gets more "crunch", distortion, and wha-wha, and which gets "dressed" by the wind section, sounding very "Mingus-like". Swing! Applause!

Same Place Wrong Time starts with a Mingus-flavoured "big band" theme, followed by a tenor sax solo, while the guitar plays some "space" sounds on the right channel, with fine contrasting timbre. Excellent work by the rhythm section. In closing, a theme that sticks in one's mind.

White Lines - Free Way starts with a "Spanish"-sounding solo guitar, played rubato, with an added "sound on sound" dimension that I'll call

"Fripp-like", though the music is quite different. Then the lyricism gets more "angular", à la Jeff Beck. Effects, cymbals, double bass, then the rhythm on the ride cymbal gets more regular. Enter the winds and the piano. The theme is played by the whole ensemble. A fine close, quite moving.

Basil Outside - penned by Joost Buis - is the more jazz"-sounding track of the album. Theme played by trombone, with fine wind backing, then the trombone gets a solo. Drums sounding a bit like Han Bennink. Swing!

Als Mijn Hart De Weg Volgt starts with an arpeggio, the prepared piano sounds a bit "gamelan", the muted trombone going "growl" at low volume, paired to "eastern"-sounding guitar effects on the right channel, acting as an intro; the bass clarinet plays a quite "Monk-like" sounding theme, enter the winds, then fine written unison passages, and an excellent bass clarinet solo. Theme.

The Restless Hour has a fast riff, an intermezzo for breathing, then the riff.

A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing - penned by Billy Strayhorn, arranged by Buis - reminded me of some "classic" pages as arranged by Misha Mengelberg. Theme for alto which reminded me a bit of Michael Moore, "shadows" in the background, alto sax solo, brushes to the fore, then a tenor sax solo. Then it's back to the alto sax, and the theme.

Central Station has a "Mingus-like" riff, the double bass coming to the fore, trombone, piano, ride cymbal, interlocking winds.

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P. S. 1/03/17:

Today I received a message from Corrie van Binsbergen, stating that - in so, differently from what I assumed - Morris Kliphuis on french horn plays the solos on Goofy and on Basil Outside; on The Magic Sock part 5 Miguel Boelens plays the theme and the solo on alto saxophone; on A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing Boelens plays the theme, while the solo is Mete Erker on tenor.

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