



**Vanbinsbergen Playstation
Tales Without Words**
(Challenge Records/Buzz)

One year after the release of *Live*, Corrie van Binsbergen hits the bull's eye again with *Tales Without Words*. Funny thing, her new album is in many ways the opposite of its very good predecessor. Well, let's backtrack a bit, shall we?

Live featured the line-up called Vanbinsbergen Playstation - an octet rich with colours, which already sounded like a band in spite of their recent formation - inside a framework which highlighted the exuberant feel of the whole and the excellent solo performances of its members. It was not merely "music for solos", though, since the instrumental colours and the movements of the sections told without a doubt of a quite attentive arranging/compositional work. In a nutshell, it was the kind of album that in the privacy of my home I'll have my friends listen to, introducing the work with words such as "It's a very good jazz album you're going to listen to".

Tales Without Words is a very different album, in a way much more ambitious. Jazz is not absent here - and how could it be, given the leader's writing style and the "pronunciation" of the featured musicians? But this is a more polychromatic album, which completely reveals its colours in time.

It goes without saying that all the best intentions in the world are bound to stay on sheet music if the technical side proves to be lacking, something which definitely doesn't happen here. Recorded by Chris Weeda at Fattoria Musica, 24 and 25 January 2016. Mixed by Chris Weeda at Studio Rapenburg. Mastered by Darius van Helfteren.

The sounds on the album appear in front of a "black" background, which highlights them. Music is not merely "photographed" - listen to those "liquid"-sounding cymbals on the first track, sounding hyper-real; also, those various percussion instruments appearing here and there; also,

the bass clarinet shown in extreme "close up" when in solo mode, showing its wood. An active mixing work, very well done. And an excellent mastering work that invites listeners to turn the volume knob to the right.

The CD cover features the tag "Music Inspired By Literature And Poetry". Here's a direct quote from the CD booklet. "Over the last few years I have composed music for many literary concerts where writers tell their story live and I create a musical scenario based on the story. I then arranged some of these compositions for the band and took them to the studio."

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.

Recording sessions lasting (just) for two days and the circumstance of having to deal with unfamiliar material favoured an "exploratory spirit" that in Mingus times I would have thought was easy to detect "in the grooves".

This is an album that's surprisingly accessible, ideas being presented with great clarity having no small part for its "user-friendliness". That this music needs a quiet room and the listener's undivided attention goes without saying.

Listeners will notice the very musical and extremely logical way sounds appear in the stereo spread, highlighting the arranging choices - the opposition of "dark" brass and "bright" reeds, of winds and guitar, and so on.

Let's have a quick look at the individual tracks.

Night Sky opens with a mid-tempo ostinato, double bass and hi-hat, drums, those aforementioned "liquid" cymbals, theme for guitar in middle register, then piano, then winds, sounding quite dark, as a counterpoint to the guitar. Then it's time for a "singable" theme performed by guitar and bass clarinet in unison mode. A second time, by guitar and alto or soprano. The "wood" sound of the bass clarinet appears over piano, drums, double bass, and guitar. Back to the theme, again with guitar coupled with alto or soprano, then it's guitar and winds as a counterpoint. The track ends with guitar, high-pitched percussion, and a "pedal" from winds.

Pagan Goddess 1 starts with prepared piano, then a chord from winds, it's a track that makes great use of "empty" space; there's a piano progression in rubato, unison winds, piano with "sustain" pedal, playing in the low register.

Pagan Goddess 2 starts with winds blowing, a fine snare played brushes, reeds with mute/plunger going wha-wha, in rubato, then, french horn. There's a fine theme for tenor and alto in unison mode with the guitar appearing in the right channel. A "plunger" close.

Pagan Goddess 3 has a theme shared by "dark" and "bright" winds, fine

brushes. A solo for alto, with "dark" winds acting as a counterpoint, brief pause, then it's time a great guitar solo with lotsa harmonics and a very fine "rock" timbre, going from Jeff Beck to Frank Zappa (think: Rat Tomago-Filthy Habits), with fine backing from winds, piano, and cymbals.

Dreamlike 1 is a pointillistic episode, with lonely sounds, piano, drums, percussion, trombone, french horn, guitar, in a mysterious mood. Long solo passages from french horn plus trombone, pedal from winds, muted sounds, percussion.

Dreamlike 2 is basically a unison wind arpeggio, acting as a brief interlude between longer, more complex, episodes.

Dreamlike 3 starts with a piano arpeggio, then alto, brushes, a fine crescendo, light moments from guitar.

Circles & Squares is a brief improvised episode, quite percussive, made of particles, with instrumental "mumblings", featuring mutes, double bass, and a pinch of metallic sounds.

Point Of No Return starts with a mid-tempo piano arpeggio, ride cymbal, double bass, a dark-sounding theme, then it's time for a guitar solo with volume pedal, nervous vibrato, "Indian"-sounding microtonality, with the instrumental background getting progressively louder, slowly enveloping the guitar, a nice arranging touch. In closing, highly rhythmic riffs from winds.

Sketches In Dark Blue 1 starts with slow figures from the guitar, double bass, percussion, a "soft" entrance from the winds, all placed over a "dark" background. This is a piece that makes great use of space.

Sketches in Dark Blue 2 starts with ruminations from the bass clarinet, then a piano ostinato with winds counterpoint. Again, it's time for a very meditative-sounding bass clarinet, then winds appear - soprano, cornet - then the guitar through a wha-wha pedal.

Sketches In Dark Blue 3 starts with solo guitar, with double bass ostinato and percussion, playing a clean melody in the middle register. Playing just a few well-chosen notes, the double bass comes to the fore - in the opposite channel, there's a mix of high sounds from guitar and cornet that for a moment reminded me of the music by Michael Mantler - together with a very percussive cymbal and an austere-sounding piano that widens at the close of the track. Which fades out.

Dance Of The Mayfly starts with an ostinato figure, an arpeggio from guitar with reverb, backing from double bass, cymbals playing time, and something that sounds like a theremin (maybe a lap steel with a shitload of compression?), fine blowing from tenor, with hi-hat and double bass, this is definitely the most accessible episode on the album. The tenor gives way to the alto, then it's tenor again. Drums, and the track fades out.

Wake Up Call For A Lethargic Planet is an improvised episode, with long, "hushed" tones from winds, a solemn air, single notes from piano and guitar, percussion, it reminded me of some grieving moments in the Art Ensemble Of Chicago oeuvre - think: People In Sorrow. Fine timbral mix

from the winds, from trombone to soprano.

Lament features a sorrowful theme for french horn playing just a few notes, with fine backing from the double bass, and winds blowing in the background. There's a change of pace, a dramatic entrance by the rhythm section, the french horn gets a fine solo, with precise wind backing. Guitar chords, mutes. At the end of the track, there's a fine moment from the double bass - over a winds background - with a fine suspension effect sounding halfway between Charles Mingus and The Art Ensemble Of Chicago.

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