

Dreams of the caterpillar: KORSRUD
Cruel yet fair
Combustion Chamber, conducted by Rutger van Leyden
BV Haast 0804 – DDD-63

Performance 9

Once again BVHaast is true to its name: in the immediate wake of a successful tour, the label has issued a live recording of Interconnector, a project which, according to conductor Rutger van Leyden, was inspired by the Steve Martland Band. After listening to it, it becomes clear that Louis Andriessen, in particular, lies at the roots of this music. The final piece (the CD follows the same sequence as the performance) by Canadian, John Korsrud, is even dedicated to Louis and bears the title, "Cruel Yet Fair" – a reference to a stern mentor perhaps? What's more, the work is eminently suitable for listening to by anyone who enjoys pop and jazz alongside modern classical music – an interconnector *pur sang* with fine solos, in turn reminiscent of Frank Zappa and Blood, Sweat and Tears. The CD opens with a piece by Steve Martland entitled "Horse of Instruction", an explosion of rhythmic energy, which incidentally comes across even more powerfully in Martland's own recording (Black Box BBM 033). After the remorseless rhythmic tenacity of Martland, Renske Vrolijk bewilders us with gROUND, a whimsical combination of *ground* (chaconne) and *round* (rondo) – excellently performed and not a second too long. Frank Crijns is responsible for writing "Propulsion", a completely different piece with echoes of Arnold Schönberg and Miles Davis. John de Simone wrote his "Hero" fantasy especially for the band, undoubtedly *the wackiest piece* of the set: John Zorn meets the Salvation Army. Toek Numan has produced the capricious "Dreams of the Caterpillar", in which Duke Ellington meets the *Haagsche School*. All in all an interconnective feast for the ears and the live recording is fantastic. - SR

Combustion Band catches the eye

Photo caption: The Combustion Band during Nieuwe Muziek Zeeland's New Year's Concert

MIDDELBURG –02-01-04. Every year, the Willem Breuker Kollektief provides a lively and festive finishing act to Nieuw Muziek Zeeland's New Year's Concert, held in Middelburg's Kloveniersdoelen. This year was no exception. However, the preceding acts always produce a surprise.

This time it was the turn of 12-man strong Combustion Band to catch everyone's eye. The Combustion Band plays the work of contemporary composers whose ears are not averse to modern pop music. As such, the make-up of the band has accordingly pieced together. Prominent roles have been set aside for percussionist Hans van de Meer, guitarist Wiek Hijmans (back on his home patch in Middelburg), bassist Florian Friedrich and pianist Pauline Post. Nevertheless, the Combustion Band is no pop band dressed up by brass (6 in total), percussion and violin.

It is primarily a tightly-knit collection of musicians, in which no one particular band member enjoys the limelight. The band, conducted by Rutger van Leyden, was able to excel on account of its faithful, virtuoso ensemble work. For the first five numbers, none of the musicians gave a real solo performance and it was only when John Korsrud's exciting and dynamic final number, "Cruel Yet Fair", started up that the band fell still, so that extra attention could be given to successive solos by Maarten van Norden on soprano sax, Frank Anepool on trumpet, Jeroen Drenth on trombone and Wiek Hymans on guitar. Even so, all these solos were placed in a strictly arranged straightjacket.

It is the forceful compositions in particular which make the Combustion Band so powerful. Four of the six pieces that were played last night had been especially composed for the group and the other two for parallel bands playing under Korsrud and Steve Martland. Martland was responsible for writing "Horses of Instruction", the band's first number. It is a repetitive piece, in turn imploring and agitated. For pop fans, it's reminiscent of Godley and Crème – in particular the sound of the marimba – but then at its most extreme. According to van Leyden, "Martland is sometimes referred to as a punk composer. So where does that leave John de Simone?" Indeed his "Hero fantasy" sounds quite eccentric. If there had been no conductor there, you might have been excused for thinking that the brass players were just warming up during the intro. But it turned out to be a striking example of well-orchestrated chaos, a rhythmic cacophony which becomes increasingly more compelling.

The cyclical composition "gROND" by Renske Vrolijk (present in person), the melodically moving "Dreams of the Caterpillar" by Toek Numan and the fanciful "Propulsion" by Frank Crijnsens offered further proof of the Combustion Band's amazing versatility combined with precision and fervour.

CLASSICAL CD
(NRC Handelsblad 25/01/05)

The band-cum-chamber orchestra Combustion Chamber operates in that shady area between jazz, rock and contemporary composition. Defying compartmentalisation, the group has nurtured a partiality for well-considered structures, complete freedom, elaboration and energy. A CD of live recordings of contemporary works by composers who live and study in the Netherlands has recently been issued. The central theme is a rhythmical pulse, which begins with *Horses of Instruction* (1994) by Steve Martland, a work with which Combustion Chamber would seem to have forged its identity: neurotically minimalistic and constantly persuasive. The same pulse can be heard in Rense Vrolijk's *gROUND* (2003), but with yet more dramatic accents and contrasts. In Frank Crijns' "*Propulsion*" (2003) the pulse wages a fascinating struggle with looming stagnation. That neurotic feeling – in context, actually a positive one – returns mercilessly in John de Simone's *Hero Fantasy* (2003). One of the more differentiated compositions is *Dreams of the Caterpillar* (2003) by Toek Numan. The droning chaos and complexity are exchanged here for a wonderfully hushed violin solo, interpreted by Bas Wiegers. In the fusion-like *Cruel yet Fair* (1994-2004) by John Korsrud, the other members of the band are given the opportunity to show off their soloist qualities. However, it is the passionate interplay which is the most impressive element on this impetuous CD.

JOCHEM VALKENBURG

Combustion Chamber conducted by Rutger van Leyden. Interconnector. (BVHaast)

CLASSICAL
(Parool 18/01/05)

Martland, Vrolijk, Crijns et al.
Combustion Chamber/van Leyden
Interconnector
(BV Haast)
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Combustion Chamber is the Dutch answer to the Steve Martland Band, the ensemble of composer Martland which for the last ten years and more has been exploring the boundaries between contemporary classical music and pop music. So it is no more than fair that Combustion Chamber's *Interconnector* CD kicks off with one of Martland's own compositions, *Horses of Instruction*, in which the worlds of better pop and minimal music confront each other and are seen through the eyes of Louis Andriessen. The music is exhilarating with a strong rhythmical drive which is played at its finest by the musicians of Combustion Chamber, conducted by Rutger van Leyden.

Renske Vrolijk's *gRound* is a fine tribute to Machaut and thoroughly energetic in nature. The success of this number can be put down to the utterly convincing integration of a nicely transformed, shrill-sounding electric guitar in the ensemble sound.

The same instrument also figures in the Zappa-like *Cruel Yet Fair*, with screeching solos from Wiek Hijmans on guitar and Maarten van Norden on soprano sax, likewise to the same success. *Prospulsion* by Frank Crijns, *Hero Fantasy* by John de Simone and *Hero Fantasy* by Toek Numan are more fidgety in character which makes them the least accessible numbers on this refreshing CD. - EV