



Misha Mengelberg. PHOTO © SUSAN O'CONNOR 2007

Misha Mengelberg

Afijn

ICP 044/DATA IMAGES 03 (WWW.TOONDIST.NL)

There are probably plenty of humourlessly straight-ahead jazz musicians in the Netherlands, just like anywhere else—the kind of folks who spent their formative years assiduously copping solos from John Coltrane or Bill Evans and playing along to Aebersold records. But when people talk about “Dutch jazz” they usually mean something else: a brand of jazz at once avant-garde and hyper-traditional, jumping easily from Ellingtonia to faux-Baroque counterpoint to cacophonous free improvisation, and laced with a wicked sense of humour that can be deadpan-subtle or cream-pie outrageous. Pianist Misha Mengelberg is one of the masterminds of the New Dutch Swing (as the critic Kevin Whitehead dubbed it), and there’s no better portrait of the man and his music than Jellie Dekker’s superb 77-minute documentary *Afijn*.

Dekker’s film builds a composite portrait of Mengelberg out of interviews with his friends and colleagues, including the composer Louis Andriessen and members of the ICP (Instant Composers Pool), the ensemble/big band that Mengelberg has helmed for the past four decades. The picture that emerges is of a man who’s a charming but sometimes exasperating bundle of contradictions. Mengelberg has a laissez-faire attitude to concert start-times and is serenely addicted to foment-

ing chaos—in one segment, Dave Douglas recalls Mengelberg telling him just before they went onstage: “The first ten minutes of this concert, we must play complete garbage.” But he is also one of jazz’s greatest interpreters of Monk and Herbie Nichols—he was in fact one of the first musicians to twig to Nichols’s importance—and a thoroughly schooled composer who’s still a huge fan of Stravinsky and Renaissance polyphony. (One sequence shows Mengelberg in the classroom, genially critiquing his students’ counterpoint exercises.)

Dekker has turned up some extraordinary archival footage: a glimpse of Mengelberg’s trio in the early 1960s; a plethora of ICP gigs from over the decades; and theatrical performances, wacky collaborations and Fluxus events from the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s avant-garde. The DVD includes another 70 minutes of extras, ranging from Mengelberg’s notorious duet with his pet parrot to a recent ICP performance of the bizarre “With Sincerest Regards from the Camel,” which involves onstage carpentry and a raucous guest appearance by Anthony Braxton. It’s a pity that even more unedited archival material wasn’t included as a supplement, since the snippets presented in the documentary are tantalizing (especially the performance by the short-lived Mengelberg/Breuker/Bennink trio), but that’s the only complaint I have about the DVD. This elegant, beautifully edited film is that rarity: a jazz documentary that does real justice to its subject.

NATE DORWARD

Oscar Peterson Trio

The Berlin Concert

INAKUSTIK/MVD

(distributed in North America through www.mvdb2b.com)

Oscar Peterson’s formidable chops are at full strength in this 1985 concert at the Berlin Philharmonie. Joined by his virtuoso bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen and drummer Martin Drew, the pianist’s setlist includes some of his favorite standards, interpretations of landmark jazz compositions, plus a few of his most memorable originals. Peterson blends his trademarked

rapid-fire, two-handed runs with innate lyricism in his dazzling interpretation of “Who Can I Turn To,” while he opts for simple romanticism in the old chestnut “Yours is My Heart Alone,” an oldie that has long since fallen out of favour in jazz. “Falling in Love With Love” seems effortless as Peterson’s intricate improvisation is fueled by his potent rhythm section. Peterson shows off with a bit of stride in his “Cakewalk.” Pedersen is showcased in Peterson’s powerful “Nigerian Marketplace” (which was part of a larger suite that the pianist evidently never got the opportunity to record as a whole), while Drew trades fours with the pianist in a gallop through the leader’s “Blues Etude.” Closing the performance is a delightfully subdued “Perdido” that segues into their blistering finale of “Caravan.” The superb photography, sound and editing, with numerous closeups of Peterson’s mammoth hands in action, make this DVD an essential acquisition.

KEN DRYDEN

Benny Golson

The Whisper Not Tour

ARKADIA (www.arkadia.com)

Billy Cobham/Louis Bellson

Cobham Meets Bellson

VIEW VIDEO

Mel Lewis

Mel Lewis and His Big Band

VIEW VIDEO

Modern Jazz Quartet

40 Years of MJQ

VIEW VIDEO (www.view.com)

Four different concert DVDs, for the most part, beautifully photographed with excellent sound and bonus features, have been issued by Arkadia/View Video.

The Benny Golson disc mostly comes from a 1998 Berlin performance, reuniting him with his old friends from the Jazztet, Art Farmer (on flumpet) and trombonist Curtis Fuller. Also on hand are vocalist Jon Hendricks, pianist Geoff Keezer, bassist Dwayne Burno and drummer Joe Farnsworth. Highlights include Golson’s impassioned feature in “Whisper Not,” Farmer’s magical opening solo in “I Remember Clifford,” along with Keezer’s tremendous chops heard in “Are You