

Brussels Jazz Orchestra / Royal Flemish

Philharmonic: Dangerous Liaison (2006)

By

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I am loath to use the word masterpiece when appraising any musical endeavor, but there is simply no better way to describe these remarkable compositions for big band and symphony orchestra by the superb Belgian composer/trumpeter Bert Joris, which together frame the definitive answer to anyone who says there's not much happening on the European jazz scene.

Joris was commissioned by the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and Royal Flemish Philharmonic to write two compositions for big band and orchestra, and they positively chose the right man for the task. His extended works, "Dangerous Liaison and "Between Hope and Despair, are absolutely brilliant, as are the two shorter pieces, "Anna and "Alone at Last, that consummate this in-concert date recorded in May '06 at deSingel in Antwerp. Joris not only confronted but vanquished the formidable challenge of blending jazz ensemble and symphony orchestra, designing wonderful themes that not only are aesthetically rewarding but also satisfy the essential jazz criterion of swing while assuring that neither ensemble assumes a dominant role.

The opening passage of "Dangerous Liaison, played primarily by winds and strings before the brass appear at the three-minute mark, reminds me of something Tchaikovsky might have written, or perhaps one of the French romantic composers. More than four minutes elapse before the BJO enters, creating a more contemporary groove that nourishes heated solos by trumpeter Nico Schepers, alto Frank Vaganée, and tenors Kurt van Herck and Bart Defoort. Even though the jazz component is in command, the orchestra is never slighted and is an integral part of the resolution.

"Hope and Despair, on the other hand, embodies a more rigorous fusion of band and orchestra, ambling along at a moderate pace that is thoroughly compatible with both its jazz and symphonic purposes. Again, the soloists are dazzling, from drummer Martijn Vink (on brushes) to Vaganée, pianist Nathalie Lories, trombonist Marc Godfroid and trumpeter Gino Latucca. Joris is the lone soloist on "Anna, a sumptuous ballad inspired by his encounter with "an extraordinary six-year-old girl at a garden party. Once more, the symphony orchestra plays an indispensable role in its success, as it does on "Alone at Last, a meditative blues in C gently introduced by Lories' lissome piano, pizzicato strings and unison brass. Joris again solos, this time with alto saxophonist Dieter Limbourg.

A masterpiece? When all is said and written, that is in the ear of the beholder. I'm willing to cast aside any misgivings and use that word to portray *Dangerous Liaison*, and would encourage others to listen openly and decide for themselves.

Track Listing: Dangerous Liaison; Anna; Between Hope and Despair; Alone at Last (53:24).

Personnel: Bert Joris: composer, arranger, trumpet; Daniele Callegari: conductor, Royal Flemish Philharmonic. Soloists on Track 1: Nico Shepers: trumpet; Frank Vaganée: alto sax; Kurt van Herck, Bart Defoort: tenor sax. Track 2: Bert Joris: trumpet. Track 3: Martijn Vink: drums; Nathalie Lories: piano; Marc Godfroid: trombone; Gino Latucca: trumpet; Frank Vaganée: alto sax. Track 4: Bert Joris: trumpet; Dieter Limbourg: alto sax. Other personnel unlisted.

Record Label: Domusic

Style: [Big Band](#)