

Baker's Swiss Role

Brett Baker

Stadthausaal, Winterthur, 27 March 2011

Black Dyke's principal trombonist Brett Baker appeared as guest soloist with Brass Band Winterthur in Switzerland at its annual Gala Concert in the Stadthausaal on Sunday evening 27 March. Following on from the successful visits of Richard Marshall and David Thornton, Brass Band Winterthur was able to invite another star performer from the British banding scene for its 2011 event.

The programme included no less than four solo items, namely The Blue Bells of Scotland, Charlie Chaplin's Smile, Arthur Pryor's Fantastic Polka and Ray Farr's arrangement of Close to You. In fact, the audience was so enthralled that it insisted on an encore, so Baker rattled off an unaccompanied version of variations on Annie Laurie to the delight of the public.

The solos were interspersed with the band playing R. B. Hall's march Death or Glory, A Malvern Suite by Philip Sparke – played especially to make the soloist feel even more at home – Libertango from Astor Piazzolla, Deep Harmony and music from the 2005 remake of King Kong.

An enthusiastic audience responded with rapturous applause for the superb playing throughout the evening.

Ian Keeble

Never Alone

Ben van Dijk & Friends

Medium: CD

Discs: 1

Label: BVD Music Productions



For his fourth and latest solo album, Ben van Dijk continues to champion new music by featuring seven of his more recent commissions for bass trombone and ensemble. The accompanying forces vary from flamenco guitar to brass band in a well-judged variety of musical styles.

As we have come to expect, van Dijk sounds very assured throughout and I find it comforting in a world of increasing uniformity that one can still hear differences between national styles of trombone playing; the soloist brilliantly showcases the warmth and fine control of the Dutch method, not to mention the high compositional standard of his countrymen Ilja Reijngoud and Steven Verhelst, along with Spaniard, Vicente Egea.

Our attention is grabbed by the opening Intrada, which demonstrates the effectiveness of multi-tracking between two well-matched players (van Dijk and Martin van den Berg). We then move to the title work of the album, which is an extended, meandering ballad for bass trombone and quartet; this ensemble is formed of ex-students of the Rotterdam Conservatory who are now top professionals in the Netherlands and Germany. The innately musical accompaniment they give felt absent in the next track, Concertino, for solo bass trombone and string orchestra. A live violin is used, backed by a synthesized string orchestra; this creates a spookily realistic pizzicato, but I found the computerised arco sound a distraction from van Dijk's virtuosic performance. The quartet rejoins the soloist for the infectious rhythms of Rapsodia Flamenca and are augmented to a sextet for the Capriccio. The

latter is a catchy composition that demonstrates the value of teamwork – the excellent quality of intonation and dovetailing within the ensemble simply has to be heard to be believed! The forces increase still further for My Spanish Heart and the sound of the Amsterdam Brass Band is a welcome treat: they provide a sensitive accompaniment to the soloist during the extended cadenza-like passages whilst shining in their own right for the tutti sections. Finally, van Dijk is joined by his youngest son Erik on the flamenco guitar for the self-penned Cancion para Cas, an upbeat lullaby for his first grandson scored for two guitars and tenor trombone.

In striking the balance between the musical message and technical perfection I find the latter triumphs occasionally in the larger ensembles; my overwhelming impression though is one of satisfaction with a well-thought-out and varied album which showcases a still-neglected solo instrument. Christian Jones

Harlem Nocturne

Brett Baker

Ratby Cooperative Band / Mike Fowles

Medium: CD

Discs: 1

Available to buy online from the World of Brass and Midland CD



Brett Baker needs no introduction. Educator, recitalist, member of Black Dyke Band, BTS President and conductor, Baker is a multi-faceted musician and the most recorded trombonist of his generation. Harlem Nocturne is the latest CD in his prolific output.

The album opens with John Kenny's Fanfare played unaccompanied over sustained piano strings, which shows Baker's mastery of the range of the instrument and the inventiveness of the composer. The title track follows in complete contrast to the Fanfare and aptly demonstrates Baker's ability to quickly change musical styles, though for me the work does not capture the dark images that are portrayed in the original big band and alto saxophone solo. This is neatly followed by a romp through the Eric Coates classic, The Dam Busters. This is a première recording and while the main theme is present throughout, the added air varie elements do seem a little excessive despite being skilfully played by band and soloist alike. Alan Fernie's arrangement of Over the Rainbow is a familiar ballad that works excellently well and is long overdue for inclusion in the trombone repertoire. Bone Apart is a classic air varie waltz that highlights Baker's exceptional technique. Georgia, arranged by Goff Richards and one of my favourite tracks on this CD, gives the soloist the opportunity to extemporise over a given theme in the middle eight section and Baker carries this off with grate panache. Caprice for Trombone by Bram Wiggins comes next and is a complete contrast to the programme so far – a real tour de force for band and soloist alike. The following arrangement by Irish composer Richard Rock of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, second movement, is a thinly scored work that needs a delicate touch; the band intricately accompanies Baker's lyric, sensitive playing in the higher register. Howard Snell is a master conductor and arranger and this simple offering of the delightful tune Londonderry Air, featured on this album, is uncluttered and