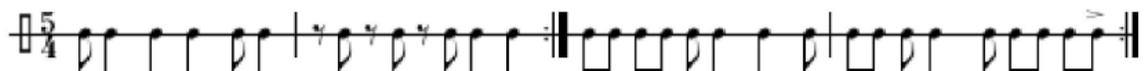


*The World's Longest Melody* is the title of this CD, the sixth to date devoted entirely to Larry Polansky's music, and, curiously, the title of not one but two of the pieces on it: *The World's Longest Melody (Ensemble)*, and "The World's Longest Melody (Trio): 'The Ever-Widening Halfstep'", the final piece of *for jim, ben and lou*. On casual listening, the two pieces seem to bear little relationship to each other. In fact, "The World's Longest Melody" is a generic title, which referred originally to a simple but powerful theoretical melodic algorithm that Polansky devised and first published in a set of pieces called *Distance Musics* in the mid-1980s; the title then became attached both to the software itself (several generations thereof) as well as to a number of compositions of radically different form and character that resulted from its use. This situation shows something of the nature of Polansky's musical and conceptual world, where ideas constantly grow, mutate, and branch out in unexpected directions. There are no clear lines of demarcation between his activities as composer, performer, improviser, theorist, computer musician, teacher, publisher, editor, musicologist: Polansky's whole artistic endeavor might be thought of as a search for ways of participating responsibly in the complexity and plenitude of the world, and of sharing its abundance with others.

The guitar has long been an important component in Polansky's musical explorations, and this CD has grown from the enthusiasm for his work by the musicians of the Belgian electric guitar quartet ZWERM. The acoustic and electric guitar are featured both solo and in small and large combinations; a few pieces not originally conceived for the instrument are also presented here in guitar-oriented guise. This is true of the opening track, *Ensembles of Note*, which can be done with any instrumentation. It was composed in 1998 for the New York City-based Gamelan Son of Lion, at the request of its director Barbara Benary for a one-page process piece. *Ensembles of Note* has received many performances worldwide, and a glance at the score immediately suggests why—the underlying concept is so simple and yet so rich in interpretative possibility that one's first instinct is to grab the nearest musicians around and give it a go. It is based on an ostinato pattern, heard here on claves, that runs throughout—an eight-measure sequence in five beats to a measure, structured as two times through a two-measure pattern followed by two times through a second two-measure pattern. Over this, the players gradually build melodies, first by playing only one note or sound anywhere in the eight-measure sequence, then two notes the second time through, then three, and so on, until they have built up what they individually feel to be a complete melody. (The patterns can either be worked out in advance or, if the players have a good memory, created in real time.) Once the melodies are fully ripe the musicians move, on cue, to play in rhythmic unison a few times through the ostinato to end the piece. *Ensembles of Note* therefore proposes an intriguing independence of form and material: the form, while variable in length, will nonetheless always be essentially the same, whereas the musicians' material (other than the ostinato itself) can vary hugely in nature and style.



*Ensembles of Note* ostinato

*tooytoods 1–11* are very short pieces written originally for solo piano at various times and places between January 2000 and September 2004. The first two were arranged for electric guitar duet by the composer; *tooytood 6* was originally conceived for electric guitar quartet, for a New York City group that never actually played it; and the others recorded here have all been arranged for electric guitars by Toon Callier. Although the literature of music contains an enormous number of short pieces, we have very few examples of pieces quite as short as Polansky's *tooytoods*. Each of the first eleven pieces in the still-expanding set is intended to be played in two seconds, although not all of them need necessarily to be taken at tempo, especially when arranged for other ensembles. On this disc *tooytood 9*, the longest of them, takes less than twelve seconds to play; at the opposite extreme, *tooytoods 3* and *6* each last less than three seconds. But in this extremely compressed time-world matters of duration become not so simple. Several of the *tooytoods* depend for their full musical effect on the resonance that hangs in the air after the last note has been played, so that some of the pieces divide, we might say, into an *active* part and a *passive* part, both equally essential. In *tooytood 2* the resonance of the last chord—D7 with a few lingering overtones—may last, as in this recording, longer than all the played notes that precede it. Here the resonance is full and rich, almost as though the “active” part of the piece has been merely a way of bringing about this lush sonority. In *tooytood 5*, the resonance is quieter, more complex harmonically, more thoughtful, dream-like (the piece was written as a lullaby for the composer's daughter). At the end of #9 we have a very low, steady, bass throbbing that seems both hip and profound. An equally fascinating problematic of duration seems to me to attach also to those of the *tooytoods* that are played staccato, dry, their last notes not sustained: #3, for example, here the shortest of all, consists of six chords each of which is exactly half the duration of its predecessor, the result forming a written-out *accelerando*. To the ear, the effect of these accelerating chords—accompanied by a *crescendo* through the piece—is a sort of *Alice in Wonderland* moment of watching water disappearing down a plughole; we seem to need another few seconds to accept that the piece is actually over. The same is true of *tooytoods 6* and *11*; events happen so quickly that we need some aural “recovery time” to digest what we have just heard. It is as though the form of these tiny pieces adds up to more than is actually stated: there is an eventful, articulated part, followed by an inarticulated part that, far from being empty, is filled with what might be called *inaudible content*. These, it seems to me, are just some of the fascinating perceptual questions opened up by the radically miniature scale of the *tooytoods*.

Polansky calls the *tooytoods* “a set of meditations on time, form and idea, and the conservation thereof.” The musical material of each piece is highly focused and coherent. *tooytoods 1, 2, 6, and 11* derive all their pitches from the harmonic series on a single fundamental, but each piece explores this starting-point in very different ways: in #1, the two guitars begin at opposite “ends” of the array of harmonics 1–17 of D and gradually converge in the middle; in #2 more or less the reverse happens; in #6, by retuning only three open strings, Polansky enables the four guitars to give the exact intonation of harmonics 2–11 of a low E; and in #11 he applies the “rhythmicana” principle invented by Henry Cowell, in which the frequency relationships among the notes are the harmonic-series equivalents of their rhythmic values. *tooytoods 3* and *7* in contrast use jazz-derived *ii-v* chord progressions (#7 even has a chromatically ascending bass line), while the harmonic worlds of #5 and #9 are freely composed, gently dissonant sonorities. #9 is one of two homages on this disc to Polansky's colleague and friend Christian Wolff, and is, the composer says, a “homeopathic study in Christian's ideas of ensemble playing.”

Loud. Very fast. ♩ = 120

Guitar 1

Guitar 2

(accidentals hold through the measure, at their octave)

(rev. 8/9/04;  
11/29/00  
3:00-5:00 P.M.  
Hanover)

*tooytood 1*

• = 1/12th sec, or • = mm. 720

Piano

(even and abstract, LH/RH need not be exactly together)

(8/18/04; rev. 4/15/05)

*tooytood 7*, original piano version



followed by an instrumental “verse” that is essentially a variation on the melody. The words commemorate the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York in 1911 in which nearly 150 women died, being unable to escape from the burning building because of the company’s policy of keeping doors and stairwells locked in order to stop them from taking breaks during their long shifts. Polansky specifies a just tuning with different shadings of intonation of the minor triad as well as different tunings for each octave of the harp. Equally striking is the percussion part, with its engaging home-made feel, using a small bass drum, a suspended cymbal, and three pitched metal milk cans (originally a reference to the Warsaw Ghetto; on this recording beer cans are used instead). The players also make pitched inhales of breath (an Appalachian musical technique called “eeping”) and use a form of handclapping derived from Javanese tradition. The final movement is a succession of single-line melodic phrases in irregular rhythmic groupings of twos and threes (expanding gradually to longer groupings); these are played by harp and guitar, hocketing, with an improvised accompaniment from a tuned hand drum. There is the sense here that the melody, as the movement’s title suggests, is endlessly self-renewing and could easily go on forever. This final movement was written by computer, and uses The World’s Longest Melody algorithm to traverse the composite “space” of the possibilities within the guitar/harp tuning.

The earliest piece on this disc is “. . . *getting rid of the glue* . . . ” for solo acoustic guitar, written at Christmas 1978 during Polansky’s student years at the University of Illinois. The title quotes the famous description of the music of Cage, Feldman, Brown and Wolff by Henry Cowell, who said that these composers were “getting rid of the glue” that connects sounds together; the complex of thought habits and prefabricated materials that were the basis of conventional musical continuity was to be replaced by a new frame of mind that encouraged the perception of each sound as an event in itself, not dependent for its meaning on neighbouring sounds. Some of the sonorities of this piece seem close to the world of the New York School composers (for example, single notes registrally and dynamically isolated from each other), while others are prophetic of the new worlds Polansky had begun to explore, such as vocalizing, detuning a string in performance, and the deliberate use of microtonal subtleties of intonation where different inflections of the “same” pitch are found on the fretboard and amongst the (untempered) natural harmonics.

*ivtoo*, for multiple guitars, or guitar and tape, was written in October 2000 and revised some eight years later. It is another of Polansky’s explorations of the harmonic series and of canon form. It draws its initial pitch material from the first 17 partials of a low C, which are introduced one at a time through the first six minutes of the piece. The second section features cascading downward arpeggios. A brief calm chordal passage leads to a wild canon, with one guitar after another tracing shapes downward through harmonic-series pitch arrays modulating, by the final section of the piece, to G. The title is another of Polansky’s quirky “cross-linguistic/numerical shorthands”; this tendency began with a piece called *ivt* (pronounced “forty”), to which *ivtoo* (pronounced “fortyto”) is compositionally related.

*The World’s Longest Melody (ensemble)* was written in December 1992 and scored for electric guitar, electric bass, and drum kit (not notated). The version recorded here takes up Polansky’s invitation to add additional soloists to the piece, here saxes and electronics (in the first performance, with Nick Didovsky, Leo Ciesa and Greg Anderson, the ensemble for whom this piece was written, the extra soloist was Polansky himself playing computer; this recording uses a newer version of the same The World’s Longest Melody software). The presence of the guest musicians creates the

possibility of varying the number of repeats of certain measures to allow for group or individual solos. The notated part consists of a first half with seventeen measures, some of them repeated, which gradually lengthen (from the opening eight beats per measure up to thirteen beats per measure) and a second half of sixteen measures which gradually, though irregularly, contract in length to a final repeated measure of five beats.

*Ontslaan (toontood)* for four or five guitars was written for ZWERM and premiered by them with the composer on fifth guitar in Ghent and Brussels in April 2009. It is based on the hymn tune “Dismission,” found in several shape-note tunebooks including *The Missouri Harmony*; the tune itself is originally a German Christmas hymn, although probably of Italian origin. A musicologist friend of Polansky’s found an old manuscript of an American version of it and copied it out for him; in one passage the original contains what are apparently mistakes that nonetheless create an appealing and gently dissonant harmonic effect that set the composer’s creative juices flowing. The hymn, stately and tonal, is presented at the opening of *Ontslaan*, but before it has gotten very far the guitarists appear to drift apart rhythmically and mild chaos ensues. The players then gradually begin to introduce embellishments, at first reasonably idiomatic but then becoming increasingly strange; by about three and a half minutes into the piece the music seems to be proceeding in slow motion, with occasional detuning and retuning of the guitars. After a while the activity and energy starts to pick up again, but this doesn’t last long and things once more subside. We realize the tune has returned; it is as though the players, having temporarily lost the plot, have decided now to fulfill their initial intention. However, as we might suspect with Polansky, things are much more controlled and very much less random than this description implies. *Ontslaan* is, on one level, simply a set of variations on “Dismission” (of which the title is an approximate Flemish translation), which the composer worked out at the guitar and then wrote down. The resulting material was subjected to a process in which a computer program of his devising “time-stretched” the variations, rather like an unpredictable electronic delay system. The aural result of this process is what the composer calls “a heterophonic, non-determinate canon.” We might imagine a large congregation singing a hymn they do not all know, with individual singers drifting off the beat and others trying their best to second-guess the notes of the unfamiliar melody as they are singing it; alternatively, the heterophony of sung prayer in a traditional Jewish service.

*toovvivfor*, possibly pronounced “t(w)(o) five six for four”, written for ZWERM in May 2009, is an orchestration of an earlier piece, *ü-v-i*. It is a gradual modulation between three harmonic series arrays (on D, G and A). The guitars are all retuned three times each in the course of the piece, to different tunings, and play only open strings, harmonics, and notes stopped at the seventh and twelfth frets (producing perfect fifths and octaves). The piece has a steady, gentle pulse all the way through, which forms a basis for improvisation (within set constraints) by the players.

Solo electric guitar

Very soft. Mostly sul tasto. Very slow.

Measure 1: RH tap RH pluck. Tuning: VI to D. Fingering: IV, III, II, I (ossia: II).

Measure 7: RH pluck. Tuning: VI. Fingering: IV, III, II, I. LH pluck. Tuning: VI to D $\flat$ , VI to G. Fingering: II, I. **PPP** RH pluck. Fingering: II. RH don't pluck. vib. Tuning: VI (VI is G).

Measure 13: tap don't tap vib. Fingering: III, IV, II. (ossia: III). I. nat. art. Fingering: V, IV, III, IV, III, II. RH pluck. Tuning: VI to G. Fingering: VI, III, II, I. Tuning: VI to G $\flat$ .

Measure 17: RH pluck. Fingering: I. Tuning: VI to D. (VI is D). Fingering: II, III, V, VI, IV.

Measure 25: RH art. harmonic. Fingering: V. LH pluck w/ 1st finger. Tuning: VI to D $\flat$ . Fingering: III, I, IV, V, VI. RH strum w/ 3rd or 4th finger. Fingering: IV, V. RH tap. Fingering: I. RH pluck. Fingering: I, IV. (ossia: III).

Measure 31: RH pluck. Fingering: V. (ossia: II RH tap). Fingering: VI. Tuning: I to E $\flat$ . Fingering: V, VI. Tuning: VI to D $\flat$ . Fingering: V. (V). don't pluck (restrike lightly if necessary, or tap gently with LH).

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### 34 Chords (Christian Wolff in Hanover and Royalton)

The CD ends with a beautiful piece for solo electric guitar, played here by the composer. *34 Chords (Christian Wolff in Hanover and Royalton)* was written in December 1995 as a tribute to Polansky's friend and colleague, then celebrating twenty-five years at Dartmouth College. But behind this unprepossessing-looking single page of music lies a web of connections to earlier chapters of American music. The piece is, in Polansky's description, an "orchestration" of Morton Feldman's unaccompanied choral work *Christian Wolff in Cambridge* (1963), itself written as a tribute to—or at least as a meditation upon—the same friend and fellow composer, then still in his twenties. The harmonies of Feldman's work are retained more or less exactly (though always

revoiced) but new elements are used to translate the complex harmonies to the more intransigent harmonic world of the guitar, notably pitch bends (almost always downward), the tapping of the right hand on the fingerboard, and what Polansky calls “a kind of finger and hand independence” that allows the player to produce the radically revoiced chords. The journey from Feldman to Polansky is mediated by a tantalizing snippet of music history. In 1966 Feldman composed a solo electric guitar piece for Wolff, who performed it several times, and had the manuscript in his guitar case one day when case, guitar, and manuscript were stolen from his car in New York. The manuscript turned out to be the only copy; neither Wolff nor Feldman himself was able to reconstruct it from memory. (Long thought to be consigned to oblivion, the piece re-emerged in the form of a recording of one of Wolff’s performances, found in an archive in 2007 and now transcribed and published.) Polansky’s *34 Chords (Christian Wolff in Hanover and Royalton)*, written in the midst of the long period when Feldman’s piece was unavailable, thus seems an act of consolation, as though comforting Wolff with the thought that while he no longer had Feldman’s electric guitar piece to play, the earlier *Christian Wolff in Cambridge* could be made to work on electric guitar. The gesture seems typical of Polansky, a composer generous in his concern for American music old and new, and one who works hard to keep the spirit and legacy of that music fresh.

—Bob Gilmore

*Bob Gilmore is a musicologist and keyboard player born in Northern Ireland and presently teaching at Brunel University in London. He has twice been awarded the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award, first for his book Harry Partch: A Biography (Yale University Press, 1998), and subsequently for his edition of the writings of composer Ben Johnston, Maximum Clarity and Other Writings on Music (University of Illinois Press, 2006).*

**Larry Polansky** is a composer, theorist, teacher, writer, performer, programmer, editor, and publisher. He lives in Hanover, New Hampshire, teaches at Dartmouth College, and is the co-founder and director of Frog Peak Music (a composers’ collective).

**Toon Callier** (born 1983, Belgium) studied classical guitar and chamber music at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp. Afterwards he studied at the Conservatory of Ghent, where he completed a “Master after Master’s” degree in contemporary music. His teacher was Tom Pauwels, who is the guitarist and artistic advisor of the Brussels-based ensemble Ictus. Callier plays both classical and electric guitar and his repertoire includes the music of Hans Werner Henze, Fausto Romitelli, Steve Reich, Lois V Vierk, George Crumb, and Larry Polansky. He is a founding member of the electric guitar quartet ZWERM and is also artistic assistant to the Belgian contemporary-music ensemble Champ d’Action. He works as a freelance musician with such ensembles as the Brussels Philharmonic, Besides, and Nadar.

**Jutta Troch** (born 1985, Belgium) finished her studies as “Master in Music” at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp in 2008. Apart from her studies with harpist Sophie Hallynk, she attended master classes with Fabrice Pierre, Marielle Nordmann, Marie-Claire Jamet, Erika Waardenburg and Isabelle Perrin. She has played on baroque, classical and contemporary harps. With the support of the Ictus and Spectra ensembles she is currently pursuing a “Master after Master’s” degree in contemporary music at the conservatory of Ghent. Ms. Troch is co-founder of both the Belgian contemporary-music ensemble Besides and the What’s Next contemporary-music festival. As a freelance musician she often plays with such groups as Nadar, the Brussels Philharmonic, and the avant-rock group Dez Mona.

**Jeroen Stevens** (born 1984, Belgium) obtained his Master’s degree in classical percussion and chamber music at the Royal Flemish Conservatory of Antwerp in 2007. As a performing musician he works mostly in the improvisation/noise and rock scenes. He plays the drums in experimental rock bands such as I Love Sarah, Pawlowski, and Black Cassette. He improvises in groups like I Hate Camera and Voodoo Trance Sound System (with Eric Thielemans and Chris Corsano). Stevens often performs with contemporary music ensembles such as Champ d’Action and Besides. In 2009 he toured the world with Wim Vandekeybus and the Ultima Vez dance company’s production *NieuwZwart*.

**Stefan Prins** (born 1979, Belgium) is a performer, improviser and composer. The tension between these activities is essential to his music, in which he searches for contemporary relations between composer, score, performer, improviser, technology, audience and society. The use (and mis-use) of new technologies is of utmost importance in all this. He has received several national and international awards for his compositions and his music has been performed by musicians and ensembles in Belgium and abroad (Champ d’Action, Nadar, Ictus, collectief reFLEXible, ZWERM, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Matthias Koole). Future projects include premieres by Klangforum Wien and Nickel Ensemble a.o.

**W. Victor** is a low-voice singer from Belgium with an excellent reputation as a live performer. *Hotel International*, his third album, is a mix of European music and languages. He has also composed scores for short movies like *Vincent* (2002), *A Piece of Cake* (2004). Previously, he worked as a producer for world-music bands like Think of One.

The Belgian/Dutch electric guitar quartet **ZWERM** was founded in 2008. The starting point of the four musicians of ZWERM is their common interest in new music—composed, improvised, experimental and performative. The awareness of the similarities between these different elements and the challenge of presenting them in a meaningful way is very important. In the twentieth century the electric guitar has proved to be the instrument of “low culture” and underground music. Therefore, it has found its way to composed music only very recently. The gap between these two fields remains wide. In this context ZWERM aims to be a group that is able to work in both directions, erasing the former boundaries between “high” and “low” culture—one which links things, uses/abuses traditions, and navigates between the many styles, conceptions and stages which are representative of today’s music. [www.zwerm.be](http://www.zwerm.be)

The four saxophone players and percussionist of **[sic]** met each other in August 2005. Coached by the famous Belgian saxophone quartet BLINDMAN, they seek out unusual projects. The first result of this quest was Single Body Noise, a minimal program in a setting resembling a boxing ring. Subsequently, [sic] has provided live onstage accompaniment for Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, and been involved with the improvisation project Pidgin, a collaboration with the electric guitar quartet ZWERM, Stefan Prins and Richard Barrett. Currently, the group is working on a new heavy rock program with bass player Lieven Eeckhout. [www.siconline.be](http://www.siconline.be)

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*Change*. Artifact Recordings ART 122.

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(Available at <http://www.everglade.org/current.htm>)

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*Lonesome Road*. Martin Christ, piano. New World Records 80566-2.

*Movement in E Major for John Cage*. Miwako Abe, violin; Michael Kieran Harvey, piano. New World Records 80641.

*Piker*. Margaret Lancaster, solo piccolo. Included on *Io:Flute Music by Johanna Beyer, Joan La Barbara, Larry Polansky, James Tenney, and Lois V Vierk*. New World Records 80665-2.

*Simple Harmonic Motion*. Artifact Recordings ART 110.

*The Theory of Impossible Melody*. New World Records 80684-2.

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Producer: Toon Callier

Co-producer: Larry Polansky

*34 Chords* co-produced by Larry Polansky and Tom Erbe.

Tracks 1–9 were recorded at Studio Champ d'Action in Antwerp on December 22–23, 2008 by Roel Das.

Tracks 10–14 were recorded at Bji-lokestudio (Ghent Conservatory) on February 14–16, 2009 by Simon Vander Beken.

Tracks 15–17 were recorded at Studio Champ d'Action in Antwerp on December 22–23, 2009 by Dimitri Daggelinckx.

*34 Chords* was recorded and co-produced by Tom Erbe, at the University of California, San Diego in January 2010. Thanks to Bladimir Castro and Collin McAllister for assistance. All tracks mixed by Simon Vander Beken, except *34 Chords*, which was mixed by Tom Erbe. Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions, Inc., NYC  
Cover photo: Toon Callier  
Design: Jim Fox

Toon Callier plays a classical De Lepeleere (Belgium) guitar and a Godin electric guitar. Larry Polansky plays a Sadowsky electric guitar.

All compositions published by Frog Peak Music.

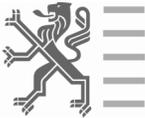
I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Tom Pauwels for his artistic advice, enthusiastic support, and faith in this project. Also many thanks to Filip Rathé for his musical thoughts on *for jim, ben and lou*; Champ d'Action and the Ghent Conservatory for the use of their studios, and the Flemish authorities for their support.

Thank you, Larry, for the music.

*(Toon Callier)*

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LARRY POLANSKY (b. 1954)  
*THE WORLD'S LONGEST MELODY*  
80700-2

1. *Ensembles of Note* (1998) 7:32
2. *tooytood 1: ≤too* (2000) :13
3. *tooytood 2: ≤too<—* (2000) :11
4. *tooytood 3: 2* (2000) :04
5. *tooytood 5: boo k (lullaby for anna)* (2002) :17
6. *tooytood 6* (2002) :04
7. *tooytood 7: iiviini* (2004) :06
8. *tooytood 9: loopitood* (2004) :24
9. *tooytood 11: onceaii* (2004) :13  
(tracks 2–5, 7–9 arranged by Toon Callier, 2009)
- for jim, ben and lou* (1995) 16:46  
(three pieces for guitar, harp & percussion)
10. Preamble (for Jim Tenney) 5:34
11. רוצ פלאע (Rue Plats) (Resting Place) (for Ben Johnston) 4:59
12. The World's Longest Melody (“The Ever-Widening Halfstep”) (for Lou Harrison) 6:03
13. “... getting rid of the glue ...” (1978) 4:06
14. *ivtoo* (2000) 11:12
15. *The World's Longest Melody* (ensemble version) (1992–3) 7:07
16. *Ontslaan (toontood)* (2009) 10:18
17. *toovivfor* (2002) 7:09
18. *34 Chords (Christian Wolff in Hanover and Royalton)* (1995) 3:07

Toon Callier, guitars (tracks 10–14); Larry Polansky, guitar (track 18); Jutta Troch, harp (tracks 10–12); Jeroen Stevens, live guitar tuning & percussion (tracks 10–12); W. Victor, voice (track 11); Stefan Prins, live electronics (tracks 1, 15)

ZWERM—electric guitar quartet: Toon Callier, Matthias Koole, Johannes Westendorp, Kobe Van Cauwenberghe (tracks 1–9, 15–17)

[sic]—saxophone quartet & drums: Bertel Schollaert, soprano sax; Eva Vermeiren, tenor sax; Thomas Van Gelder, baritone sax; Maarten Jan Huysmans, alto sax; Mattijs Vanderleen, drums (tracks 1, 15)

TT: 70:43

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