Single Side Only: Size Matters, But One Page Is All You Need

Amy C. Beal

The "one-page piece"—a written-down musical composition that fits on a single piece of paper —is appealing to a group like the Belgian/Dutch electric guitar quartet Zwerm (working in connection with deSingel Art city [Antwerp, Belgium]). From what I've heard, making these recordings proved both refreshing and fun. Zwerm and their collaborators took full advantage of the opportunity to create their own scores out of the one-page pieces, to allow their own creativity and compositional ideas to run free, to explore interesting sound worlds, and to seek out possible links between the pieces. These positive experiences are inherent to the format of the one-page piece: a composer provides a musical idea, in traditional notation, prose, graphics, or some combination of all three; sometimes this idea is rough or conceptual, sometimes more clear in its musical content and process. The rest is up to the musicians. Collaborative brainstorming is necessary, and many ideas might be tried out before settling on a particular way of realizing the piece; often, the possibilities seem endless, limited only by one's conventional training, adherence to idiomatic instrumental techniques, and musical sensibilities. This collaborative brainstorming works best when the ensemble is made up of adventurous musicians who trust each other.

One-page pieces fall into the category of *process pieces*. With roots in the history of American experimental music, both process pieces and one-page pieces are sometimes traced back to Terry Riley's minimalist masterpiece In C of 1964 (though that piece has been published in two pages —one for the 53 musical cells and one for the written instructions for how to play through them). Similar to the infinitely versatile form of a simple round, the beauty of the one-page piece is that the small space doesn't constrain creativity, but maybe encourages it in a new way. The page might contain a concise musical idea or a large musical structure. Doodles, humor, sonic experiments, conceptual folk songs, politically engaged manifestos, and other elements inspire musicians to transform these printed suggestions into living performances full of energy, intensity, beauty, and surprise. The recordings on this CD represent a crossover project in which Zwerm looks for connections between the sound worlds of blues, free improvisation, experimental rock, noise, minimalism, and many other contemporary musical ideas.

One-page pieces, and the independently-minded composers who create them, have frequently had to seek out or invent means of printing and distribution. A number of composer-driven independent publications and composer-collectives have helped these pieces find both a home and a community: Larry Austin's *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Garland's *Soundings*, Michael Byron's *Pieces*, Roger Johnson's *Scores: An Anthology of New Music*, Kenneth Gaburo's Lingua Press, Dick Higgins' Something Else Press, Larry Polansky's composers' collective Frog Peak Music, and uncountable numbers of self-published editions of beautifully printed one-page pieces by composers like David Mahler, and many others.

Zwerm's recordings of these particular one-page pieces encompass a wide range of human expression and emotion: the self-indulgent dreaminess of Alvin Curran's Underwater Princess Waltz and Her Waltzing with Her; the humorous arithmetic of Daniel Goode's The Red and White Cows; the hectic nervous energy of Joel Ford's Gauss Cannon, Larry Polansky's Tween, and Clinton McCallum's round round down; the impenetrable abstraction of Earle Brown's New York School classic December 1952 and Christian Wolff's epic Burdocks; and the playful brutality of Nick Didkovsky's Mayhem. The hypnotically circular, choral chant that closes the CD, Karl Berger's Time Goes By, might as well linger a little longer.

The individual works recorded by Zwerm and friends are discussed briefly below.

Joel Ford: Gauss Cannon (2006)

A reed player and improviser of great skill, composer Joel Ford is also an experienced ensemble player of indeterminate one-page pieces. He has embraced the form on a number of occasions in his compositional work. He explains *Gauss Cannon* as a part of a group of *Cannon Canons*, all based on real or fictional projectile weaponry featured in science fiction and gaming:

Gauss Cannons, or "Coil Guns," or "Rail Guns," operate on principles of magnetic acceleration that Carl Gauss represented mathematically. There are hobbyists who have made coil guns, and some high-end designs have been developed, but Gauss Cannons are pretty much a fictional weapon found in books and games and such. High-end designs involve the passing of a projectile through many stages of magnetic acceleration, which is why the piece repeats its main motive over and over with subtle changes on each play-through. The buildup of musical density is meant to imitate the buildup of magnetic acceleration, and the punctuated notes are meant to have a feeling of pushing the piece forward. I didn't want the music itself to accelerate so much, and I think of these *Cannon Canons* as presenting an elongation of brief moments in time.¹

Zwerm's realization starts with a circular improvisation based on the pitches notated in the score; guitarist Toon Callier then starts to play the melody as written, and the rest of the group follow (the drum part has been added). The drums drop out, and the guitars start to phase the melody, creating the canonic effect. At the end, the piece escalates toward textural chaos, illustrating Ford's imitation of "the buildup of magnetic acceleration."

Alvin Curran: Underwater Princess Waltz (1972) and Her Waltzing with Her (1972)

These two pieces are part of a larger set that Alvin Curran calls *Music for Every Occasion*. A selection of these pieces was first published by Michael Byron in *Pieces 3* (Ontario, 1977). Since both of these beautiful waltzes are similar in style (both marked "tempo di valse"), Zwerm determined that they would make the realizations as similar as possible, choosing to explore the idea of "non-variation" by using the same instrumental sound, and more or less the same tempo. (Callier admits that these realizations were inspired by an Otis Redding recording.) The musical saw adds to the dreaminess of these recordings, and underscores the surreal nature of the pieces' titles. The pieces are printed like lead sheets, with a monophonic melody and chord symbols. Alvin Curran offered these comments:

... In the mid-1970s, I made written-out arrangements (violin, piano, accordion, bass clarinet, cello) of [these pieces], which I then sent to the Zwerm group to use. While much of the *Music for Every Occasion* pieces are unusually simple or rather complex ... monodies, there is a section of the compilation that includes waltzes, foxtrots, tangos, etc., which I found myself writing for experimental theater and animated film works.... I wrote waltzes, ... thinking of course this is the farthest-out music I could write.... The archaic, aristocratic, bourgeois, and class-defying waltz... is a dance one dances to imagine they are in fact in some glittering castle, bastion of god-health-wealth-and happiness in the central Europe of the mind. So these pieces are, for me, as archaic as they are postmodern.²

¹ Joel Ford, correspondence with the author, June 24, 2013.

² Alvin Curran, correspondence with the author, June 25, 2013.

Nick and Leo Didkovsky: Mayhem ("the hammer"; "the arrow"; and "the blade") (2012)

One of the most radical scores included here, Nick Didkovsky and Leo "Satanfingers" Didkovsky's *Mayhem* is a drawing with violent imagery. Skeletons, monsters, ghosts, and ghouls attack one another with arrows, knives, daggers, and a menacing circular saw. The drawing is accompanied by the instructions: "Follow a line of action or focus on a detail and sonify it. Do not fear literal translation. Play for all of 60 seconds or a part of it. Confer with other players as to your plans, which may change from performance to performance. Be brutal." The elder Didkovsky describes the image and his choice of the piece for Zwerm's one-page-pieces project in this way:

A hooded figure with a buzzsaw faces off against an adversary wielding two swords whose tips spark with electricity. A skeleton runs in panic with a dagger embedded in its skull, while a second knife flies toward its screaming mouth. Another skeleton shoots an arrow that follows an almost whimsical and impossible trajectory toward a multi-headed winged beast. In 2004 Leo Didkovsky created this portrait of mayhem. The concentration and variety of catastrophic events was such an intense and unfiltered gush of a child's violent imagination, that I mounted Leo's drawing on my studio's wall and have kept it there for over eight years. When Zwerm asked for a one-page score, there was a moment when I turned my attention for the thousandth time to this scene and said to myself: now this would be something I'd like to hear.³

Zwerm offers three approximately one-minute interpretations of weaponry depicted in the score: the hammer, the arrow, and the blade.

Christian Wolff: Burdocks, Part VII (1970-71)

Christian Wolff's *Burdocks* "for one or more orchestras," dedicated to Merce Cunningham, was named for the edible root that grows prolifically in his home region of New England. It is a milestone in the history of indeterminate ensemble music. Comprised of ten different one-page pieces (so to speak), *Burdocks* contains a wide variety of notational styles, including prose scores. Part III, for example, consists merely of these instructions: "Orchestra of any number. Each player makes about 511 sounds, each sound different in some way." Other parts of *Burdocks*, including Part VII recorded here by Zwerm, make use of a unique style of graphic notation Wolff first started developing with pieces like *For 1, 2, or 3 People* (1964). This notation is based on an idea of interaction between the musicians, a kind of cause-and-effect game in which everyone's action is based on what they hear and how they are instructed to react. Part VII includes both graphic notation and prose, which reads as follows:

1 to 5 players play all the notes, making a distribution before they play. The 1, 2, 3 or 4 more than five play the notes between those assigned to (1) through (5). The two eighth- notes at the bottom of the page right and left can be played anytime in the course of the section by anyone. Lines indicate coordination (vertical = simultaneous, angled = following directly, as in hocket); unattached notes drop in where they appear in space. (Optional: vertical line extending up and down through a note or notes with no note attached at the ends = play on an agreed-on pulse.)⁴

³ Nick Didkovsky, correspondence with the author, June 24, 2013.

⁴ Christian Wolff, score to *Burdocks*, New York, C.F. Peters Corporation, 1971.

Zwerm's realization of Part VII includes percussion, saxophone, guitars, samples of old radio recordings, sinewaves, and other sounds.

Larry Polansky: tween (k-tood #2) (2002)

Zwerm recorded another one-page piece of Larry Polansky's, called *Ensembles of Note*, on their acclaimed CD of Polansky's guitar music called *The World's Longest Melody* (New World Records, 2010). *Ensembles of Note* was composed as a response to what Polansky jokingly calls "a bupkis commission" ("bupkis" is a Yiddish word for "nothing"), and consists of a single, repeating, highly syncopated, rhythmic ostinato in 5/4. Prose instructions explain how the players should gradually build up individual improvised melodies over the course of the ostinato's repetitions. This classic one-page piece has become increasingly popular among ensembles with non-standard instrumentation.

Polansky's 2002 set of pieces called *k-toods* (short for "kid toods," or "kid etudes") is a set of five pieces, originally written for piano four hands or two pianos. *tween* is *k-tood* #2 and is treated here as a one-page piece for guitar quartet. The piece consists of two two-measure sets of gestures in 11/8 and in two different key signatures. Phrased groupings and accents create a high level of polyrhythm. The players are instructed to "gradually, unevenly, morph" from one two-measure set to the other, and to move back and forth between them until all the players have synchronized on the same one. Polansky explains: "*tween* is a piece where humans are asked to do something I often try to do with a computer; clearly, it's more fun this way."⁵ A final measure notates a 15-note rolled chord, which abruptly ends the quartet's manic wandering.

Clinton McCallum: round round down (2012)

San Diego composer Clint McCallum dedicated his *round round down* to Zwerm. This interpretation offers a very literal translation of the score, which provides different retunings for each for the four guitar parts, rhythmic patterns, and canonical entries of the parts. The expressive marking at the beginning of the piece is "loud, harsh, grinding." The intervallic gesture is the same for each guitar, but the overlapping pitch content creates an incessantly spiraling staircase of sound. The performance devolves into maximum feedback.

Daniel Goode: The Red and White Cows (1979)

Between 1974 and 1993, Daniel Goode composed a classic set of two dozen process pieces explicitly titled *One Page Pieces* (perhaps the inspiration for this current project), which includes *The Red and White Cows*. Many of these pieces were originally written for Gamelan Son of Lion, including the raucously driving *Eine Kleine Gamelan Music*. Zwerm's blues-inspired version of *The Red and White Cows* is for four musicians: rhythm guitar, solo guitar, samples, and voice. All players start at the beginning of the score, but they don't start together; each starts with the sound sequence in an independent tempo. In order to maintain some measure of transparency, they allowed themselves the possibility of using silence as a "sound."

With regard to the paragraph preceding the instructions for the piece [see example of score], Goode remarks: "It's surreal, but real." He continues:

I composed [*The Red and White Cows*] during the time that we had a "systems group" with Tom Johnson (the most gung-ho of mathematical or deductive music composers), me, Phil Corner, Manfred Mohr (a mathematician-graphic artist, I

⁵ Larry Polansky, communication with the author, July 5, 2013.

believe), some others. It was composed for "Malcolm [Goldstein] to play, and Ann to enjoy." . . . Realizations are what it's about: it is formulaic. I found it in a compendium of infinite mathematical series by Neil Sloane (mathematician at Bell Labs).⁶

Earle Brown: December 1952 (1952)

This version of Earle Brown's graphic *December 1952* was created and recorded in a solo version by Matthias Koole, a former Zwerm guitarist who recently moved to Brazil. (Koole joins the elite ranks of the great pianist David Tudor, who also recorded a solo version of *December 1952*.) *December 1952*—"for one or more instruments and/or sound-producing media"—represents a high point in early mobile form and graphic indeterminacy, and was published in 1954 in a set of pieces called *Folio and Four Systems*. Inspired by the active, all-over art of Jackson Pollock and the mobile forms of Alexander Calder, Brown championed concepts of multi-dimensional compositional and performance space, and flexible compositional forms as part of the New York School during the 1950s.

Karl H. Berger: Time Goes By (1975)

Zwerm closes this recording with a tranquil, fifteen-minute meditation on the nature of time. Their instrumentation for Karl Berger's open-ended *Time Goes By* ("for any voices and instruments") includes percussion, electric guitar (with organ sound for the chordal accompaniment), and the ensemble members singing, using loops and multi-tracking to create the impression of a choir. Towards the end they add more solo electric guitars. All the sounds were captured by a looping delay system, and the loop becomes more and more diffuse toward the end. Zwerm concludes with only the resulting raw sounds of the loop, which continues on for some time, devoid of live instruments. "Quite some time goes by, goes by, goes by . . . ," they sing elliptically, again and again. It is an expansive interpretation of Berger's minimalist score, and a fitting close to this adventurous collection of one-page pieces.

Amy C. Beal is Professor of Music at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification (2006) and Carla Bley (2011).

Karl Berger is the founder and director of the Creative Music Foundation. He is active as a composer and soloist. Karl Berger became noted for his innovative arrangements for recordings by artists such as Jeff Buckley, The Cardigans, and The Swans, and for his collaborations with producers Bill Laswell, Alan Douglas, and Peter Collins. He has recorded and performed with Don Cherry, John McLaughlin, the Mingus Epitaph Orchestra, Dave Brubeck, Dave Holland, and many others. His recordings and arrangements appear on Atlantic, Blue Note, Elektra, EMI, Polygram, SONY, and others.

Earle Brown (1926–2002) was an American composer who established his own formal and notational systems. Brown was the creator of open form, a style of musical construction that has influenced many composers since—notably the downtown New York scene of the 1980s and generations of younger composers. He claimed to have been influenced by artists of the New York School such as Jackson Pollock and Alexander Calder. John Cage invited Brown to join him

⁶ Daniel Goode, correspondence with the author, June 24, 2013.

for the Project for Music for Magnetic Tape in New York. Brown's contact with Cage exposed David Tudor to some of Brown's early piano works, and this connection led to Brown's work being performed in Darmstadt and Donaueschingen. Composers such as Pierre Boulez promoted his music, which subsequently became more widely performed and published.

www.earle-brown.org

Democratic, irreverent, and traditionally experimental, **Alvin Curran** travels in a computerized covered wagon between the Golden Gate and the Tiber River, and makes music for every occasion with any sounding phenomena—a volatile mix of lyricism and chaos, structure and indeterminacy, fog horns, fiddles, and fiddle heads. He is dedicated to the restoration of dignity to the profession of making non-commercial music as part of a personal search for future social, political, and spiritual forms. Curran's music-making embraces all the contradictions (composed/improvised, tonal/atonal, maximal/minimal. . .) in a serene dialectical encounter.

www.alvincurran.com

Nick Didkovsky is a guitarist, composer, and music software programmer. He founded the rock band Doctor Nerve in 1983 and is a member of the Fred Frith Guitar Quartet. He has composed for Bang on a Can All-Stars, Meridian Arts Ensemble, ETHEL, and others. Didkovsky's Black Sabbath Guitar Lessons on YouTube have been received with great enthusiasm by metal fans all over the world. His metal band Häßliche Luftmasken premiered in June 2011. With Phil Burk, he designed the experimental computer music language JMSL.

Joel Ford is an award-winning composer and performer of a wide spectrum of musical styles. He finished his B.A. and M.A. in music composition from UC Santa Cruz. His works include a number of pieces for saxophone and string quartets, as well as mixed chamber works, solo and choral vocal works, musical theater and opera, jazz ensemble, symphonic band, and pieces for guided group improvisation and game music. www.joelford.com

Daniel Goode, composer and clarinetist, was born in New York. His solo, ensemble, and intermedia works have been performed worldwide. He is co-founder/director of the DownTown Ensemble, formed in 1983. He has been a performer and composer with Gamelan Son of Lion since 1976. In 2004 he initiated the Flexible Orchestra, a rethinking of the symphony orchestra. He has composed six works for the Flexible Orchestra in various orchestrations. His music has been performed on national and international festivals including New Music America and Bang on a Can, Sounds Like Now. http://danielgoode.com

Clinton McCallum (b. 1980) is a composer, performer, poet, essayist, and teacher. He grew up in Denver, Colorado, studied music in Oberlin, Ohio, and lives in San Diego, California. His current work seeks to investigate the limits of human subjectivity through exhausting performance techniques, high volume levels, harmonic sequences, and invented technology. It incorporates influences from the western musical avant-garde, 1970s American performance art, underground noise music, 1950/60s free jazz, horror films, disco, and J.S. Bach, among others. www.clintophonics.com

Larry Polansky is a composer, performer, guitarist, writer, theorist, editor, publisher, and teacher who lives in Santa Cruz, California. He is the founder and director of Frog Peak Music (A Composers' Collective), and has taught at the Mills College Center for Contemporary Music, Dartmouth College, and currently, at UC Santa Cruz.

music.dartmouth.edu/~larry/

Christian Wolff was born in 1934 in Nice, France. He studied piano with Grete Sultan and composition, briefly, with John Cage. Though mostly self-taught as a composer, the work, of John Cage, Morton Feldman, David Tudor, and Earle Brown have been important to him, as well as long associations with Cornelius Cardew and Frederic Rzewski. A particular feature of his music is the various freedoms it allows performers at the time of performance as well as the variable results possible for any one particular piece, for which various new notations have been invented. Underlying notions in the work are shared freedom, self-determination, and democratically-spirited collaboration. He has worked with Merce Cunningham, Takehisa Kosugi, Steve Lacey, Christian Marclay, Keith Rowe, William Winant, the group AMM, Kui Dong, and Larry Polansky. In 2004 he received an honorary Doctor of Arts degree from the California Institute of the Arts. Academically trained as a classicist, Wolff was professor of classics and music at Dartmouth College from 1971 to 1999.

Zwerm is a Belgian-Dutch electric-guitar quartet founded in 2007. Their first CD, *The World's Longest Melody* was well received by The Wire magazine and considered "an obvious contender for album of the year 2010." They have concertized in the UK, Europe, Mexico, and the United States. They have played at festivals and venues such as the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music, November Music, Ars Musica, Ostrava New Music Festival, Rainy Days Festival, Holland Festival, Festival International Chihuahua, The Stone, Issue Project Room, and Café Oto, among others. Zwerm is Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, Bruno Nelissen, Johannes Westendorp, and Toon Callier.

Matthias Koole (b. 1982) studied classical guitar in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and Belgium, where he focused on the electric guitar in contemporary music and free improvisation. He was a founding member of Zwerm and maintains the classical guitar duo Oh Mensch with Kobe Van Cauwenberghe. He has worked with several ensembles and artists such as Champ d'Action, Ictus, Mario Del Nunzio, Stefan Prins, Henrique Iwao, Jean-Pierre Caron and many more. In August 2012, Kaul moved back to Belo Horizonte, Brazil where he is starting two new ensembles called SCHLAG! and Infinito Menos.

This is the debut voice-over for **Thomas Moore** and his deep-cheesy-radio-announcer-voice. He is pleased to be able to share his innermost self with the guitarists of Zwerm and their audience. Moore was born in the United States and now resides in Antwerp, Belgium. He is also a professional trombonist.

Bertel Schollaert studied classical saxophone at the Conservatory of Brussels. He performed with BL!NDMAN, Ictus, Zwerm and is a current member of Nadar and Champ d'Action. Besides his activities in the contemporary music scene, he also joins experimental and world music bands such as [sic] and Va Fan Farhre.

Eric Thielemans is a genre-crossing percussionist/drummer working from a classically-trained ear via jazz, free improv, and all sorts of contemporary musics toward his own realms in music and performance. Thielemans has worked with a wide range of artists, performers, and dancers such as Maak's Spirit, Ben Sluys, Trevor Dunn, Jozef Demoulin, and his own group EARR.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Earle Brown

Selected Works 1952–1965. New World Records 80650.

Alvin Curran

Maritime Rites. New World Records 80625. (2 CDs) Solo Works: The '70s. New World Records 80713. (3 CDs)

Nick Didkovsky

Ice Cream Time. New World Records 80667.

Daniel Goode

Annbling. New World Records 80744 (forthcoming).

Larry Polansky

Lonesome Road. New World Records 80566. The Theory of Impossible Melody. New World Records 80684. The World's Longest Melody. New World Records 80700.

Christian Wolff

8 Duos. New World Records 80734. (2CDs)
10 Exercises. New World Records 80658.
Long Piano (Peace March 11). New World Records 80699.

Producer: Toon Callier

All tracks recorded and mixed by Mark Dedecker at Artcity deSingel, Antwerp, Belgium in April 2013, except Clinton McCallum's *round round down*, recorded and mixed by Bruno Nelissen at his home in Antwerp, Belgium, and Earle Brown's *December 1952* recorded and mixed by Matthias Koole at Georgette Zona Muda, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC

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UNDERWATER PRINCESS WALTZ A COLLECTION OF ONE-PAGE PIECES

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 Joel Ford (b. 1977) Gauss Cannon (2006) 8:36
 Johannes Westendorp, Bruno Nelissen, Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, guitars; Toon Callier, guitar, bass guitar; Eric Thielemans, drums

2. Alvin Curran (b. 1938) Underwater Princess Waltz (1972) 1:29 Johannes Westendorp, Toon Callier, guitars

3. Alvin Curran
Her Waltzing with Her (1972)
2:39
Johannes Westendorp, Toon Callier, guitars

4. Nick Didkovsky (b. 1958) and Leo Didkovsky (b. 1996)
Mayhem (the hammer) (2012) 1:01
Johannes Westendorp, Bruno Nelissen, Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, Toon Callier, guitars; Bertel Schollaert, saxophone

5. Christian Wolff (b. 1934) Burdocks, Part VII (1970–71) 7:02
Johannes Westendorp, Bruno Nelissen, guitars; Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, guitar, objects; Toon Callier, samples; Bertel Schollaert, saxophone; Eric Thielemans, percussion

6. Larry Polansky (b. 1954) *tween (k-tood #2)* (2002) 6:21 Johannes Westendorp, Bruno Nelissen, Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, Toon Callier, guitars

7. Nick and Leo Didkovsky Mayhem (the arrow) (2012) 1:01
Johannes Westendorp, Bruno Nelissen, guitars; Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, guitar, voice; Toon Callier, banjo

8. Clinton McCallum (b. 1980) *round round down* (2012) 3:08 Bruno Nelissen, guitar

9. Daniel Goode (b. 1936) *The Red and White Cows* (1979) 6:41 Johannes Westendorp, samples; Bruno Nelissen, steel string; Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, guitar; Thomas Moore, voice-over; Toon Callier, vocal 10. Earle Brown (1926–2002) December 1952 (1952) 8:18 Matthias Koole, guitar

11. Nick and Leo Didkovsky Mayhem (the blade) (2012)
1:06
Johannes Westendorp, Bruno Nelissen, Toon Callier, guitars; Kobe Van Cauwenberghe, bass guitar; Eric Thielemans, drums; Bertel Schollaert, saxophone

12. Karl H. Berger (b. 1935)*Time Goes By* (1975)14:31Johannes Westendorp, guitar, bass guitar, vocal; Bruno Nelissen, vocal, loopstation; Kobe Van
Cauwenberghe, guitar; Toon Callier, guitar, vocal; Eric Thielemans, drums & percussion

TT: 62:23