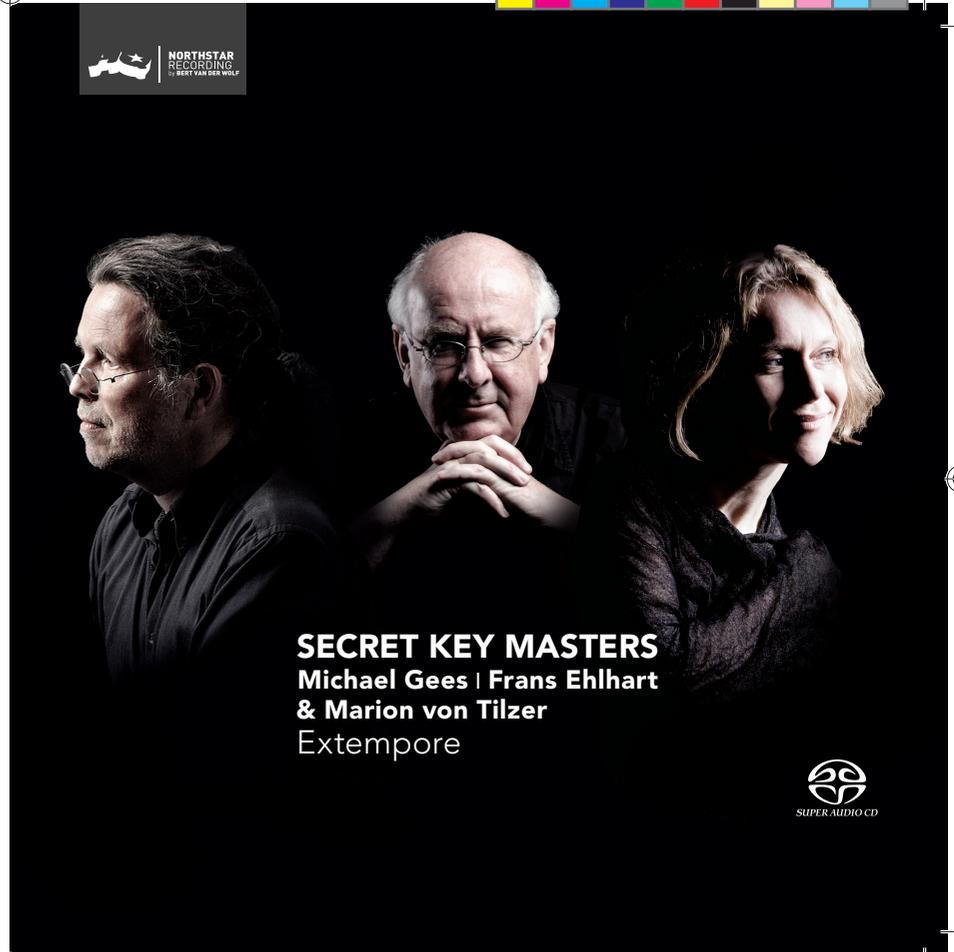


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SECRET KEY MASTERS
Michael Gees | Frans Ehlhart
& Marion von Tilzer
Extempore





A&R Challenge Records International: Anne de Jong & Marcel van den Broek
Executive producer: Bert van der Wolf
Recording: Northstar Recording Services BV
Recording location: Galaxy Studios, Mol, Belgium
Recording dates: 26-27 March 2014
Recording producer, engineer, editing & mastering: Bert van der Wolf
Recording assistant, location photography & cinematography: Brendon Heinst
Liner notes: Michael Gees, Frans Ehlhart & Marion von Tilzer
Translations: Abigail Prohaska & Brendon Heinst
Booklet editing: Hedy Muehleck
Photo Michael Gees: wildundleise.de
Photo Frans Ehlhart: Brendon Heinst
Photo Marion von Tilzer: Marco Broggreve
Product coordination: Boudewijn Hagemans
Graphic design: Juan Carlos Villarroel
Art direction: Marcel van den Broek

www.challengerecords.com / www.spiritofturtle.com



This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



www.northstarconsult.nl

SECRET KEY MASTERS **Michael Gees | Frans Ehlhart** **& Marion von Tilzer** Extempore



MICHAEL GEES (1953) **FRANS EHLHART** (1946)
MARION VON TILZER (1968)

MICHAEL GEES
[1] Extempore I

MARION VON TILZER
[2] Counting the Stars (dedicated to Auke Bijlsma)

FRANS EHLHART
[3] Chicken Dance

MARION VON TILZER
[4] Apollo 14*

MICHAEL GEES
[5] Extempore II

FRANS EHLHART
[6] Floating Stream

MARION VON TILZER
[7] Ballade über die Enttäuschung

6:19

2:51

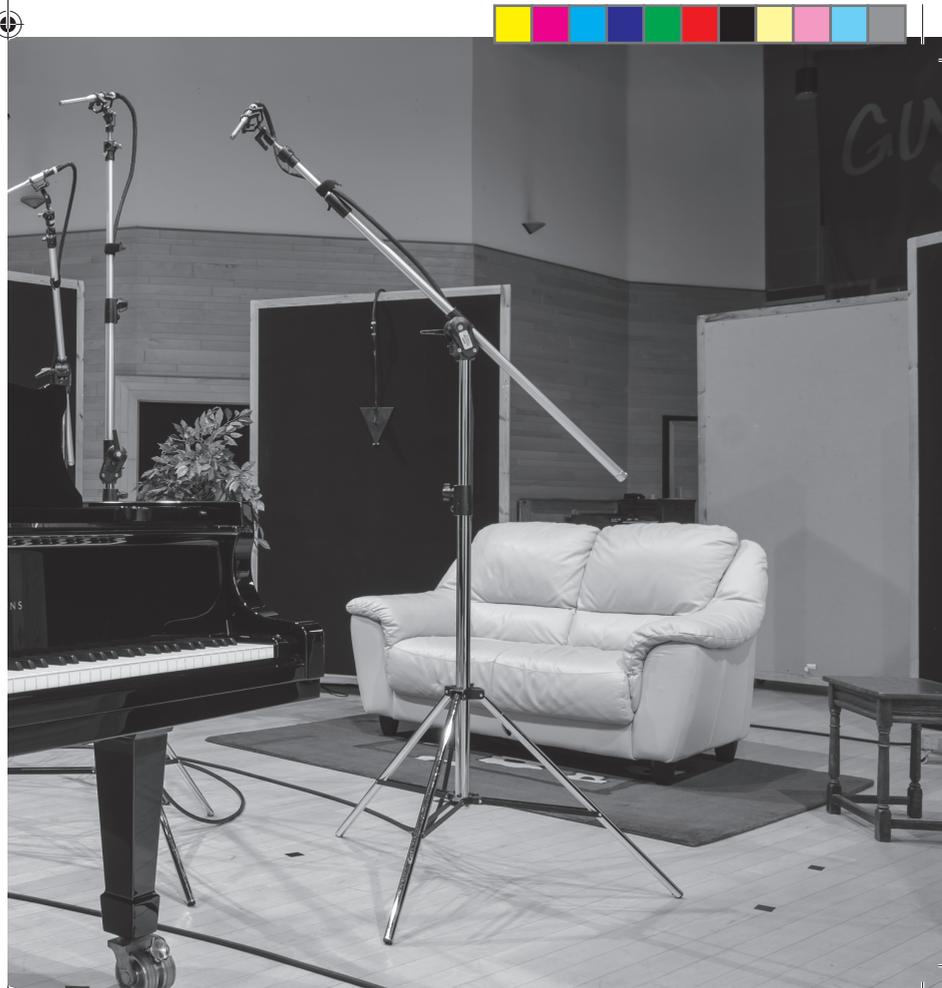
3:54

7:08

7:03

4:31

5:48





MICHAEL GEES

[8] Extempore III

4:41

FRANS EHLHART

[9] In MeMirjam

5:43

MARION VON TILZER

[10] Little Story about Love**

7:43

FRANS EHLHART

[11] Reshuffling Things

6:08

MICHAEL GEES

[12] Extempore IV

7:07

FRANS EHLHART

[13] Autumn Morning

3:04

MARION VON TILZER

[14] Neighbour's Delight

5:49

total time 77:56



Foot notes

*Instead of an intellectual search, there was suddenly a very deep gut feeling that something was different.

It occurred when looking at Earth and seeing this blue-and-white planet floating there, and knowing it was orbiting the Sun, seeing that Sun, seeing it set in the background of the very deep black and velvety cosmos, seeing - rather, knowing for sure - that there was a purposefulness of flow, of energy, of time, of space in the cosmos - that it was beyond man's rational ability to understand, that suddenly there was a non rational way of understanding that had been beyond my previous experience.

There seems to be more to the universe than random, chaotic, purposeless movement of a collection of molecular particles.

On the return trip home, gazing through 240,000 miles of space toward the stars and the planet from which I had come, I suddenly experienced the universe as intelligent, loving, harmonious.

Edgar Mitchell, Astronaut on Apollo 14

**Inspired by *Klein Verhaal over Liefde* by Marit Törnqvist



like garlands and arpeggios. Sometimes beginning small and slowly turning into an almost Rachmaninov-like exposure. A joy to listen to! And even though at times it was quite emotionally confronting for me personally – as I have dedicated many of my pieces exclusively to my late wife, and really for her – we have, listening to one another, experienced some very extraordinary days. Thanks to my music-making colleagues for sharing their music with me, Bert and Brendon, and thanks to The Spirit of Turtle for making this possible for us.

Frans Ehlhart
2014



our differences and resemblances in a fantastic recording studio, with a great Steinway D grand piano, in an atmosphere of calmness and reassurance of having a beautiful sound. A sound in the Spirit of Turtle!

It was very special to listen to Marion von Tilzer's extraordinary way of playing. Delicate in sound and tone, composed pieces that I initially experienced as minimal music. However, there's always something happening in her music other than just motives, something that is commonly done in minimal music. I experience her pieces as circle-shaped, meaning you can hear repetitive patterns, but with much development within the framing that is presented. Apart from her Chopinesque harmonies I could hear all the irregular times. Her music tends to work in a motive-following way but is also strongly dependent on harmony. Not only her spirituality, but also her love for ever-changing chords and harmonies is something we have in common.

Michael Gees, even though I think he still had some precomposed motives in his back pocket, started his recordings from scratch. Starting with a chord at most, wrapped in a small rhythmic figure, or maybe even starting with a kind of pulse, evolving before our ears into magnificent and awesome forms of music. I myself experienced his way of creating music as a process of cell division. At first, that small little pulse, or a tiny piece of rhythm-encapsulated harmony, then, developing something next to it, above it, underneath it. Very interesting and extremely moving. Sometimes his improvisation stays very small and subtle, sometimes exploding to something huge. Sometimes Satie-esque, sometimes in Bill Evans' domain harmony-wise, sometimes Baroque-ish with harpsichord-



The Secret Key Masters represent a childhood memory or dream for me...

There is this clear imprinted image in my mind, sitting behind the upright piano at our home as a 3 year old boy, touching the keys, trying out combinations of tones and pedals. The sun shines through the window on my hands and I am immersed by the wonderful sounds, colours and woody scents that radiate from this mighty instrument. It embraces me with its beautiful carved wings and ornaments in the woodwork around the ivory and ebony keys.

As young as I was, I for some reason strongly felt the possibilities, the potential and the meaning of it all, and I can remember this until this day vividly.

The happiness I felt, without having the verbal and mental tools yet at such a young age to define this joy, stayed with me for all the following years in my life. It probably determined my future and my destiny of becoming a music recording producer. Now, every day of my life, I am again immersed by wonderful sounds and my clear guidelines in making musical and auditive decisions always are these happy thoughts like I had back then.

Like Peter Pan I seem to be able to fly, having these happy thoughts, and overcome the difficulties of the daily struggle, for life in particular and for intense recording and production work.

I have tried hard to master playing the piano, but somehow it never became my main goal in life, and I never managed it to the level needed to play my inner thoughts or even actual compositions. The feeling or vision of what I remembered always has been more abstract. When I met The Secret Key Masters, all on separate occasions, I was struck by a feeling of coming home

Frans Ehlhart

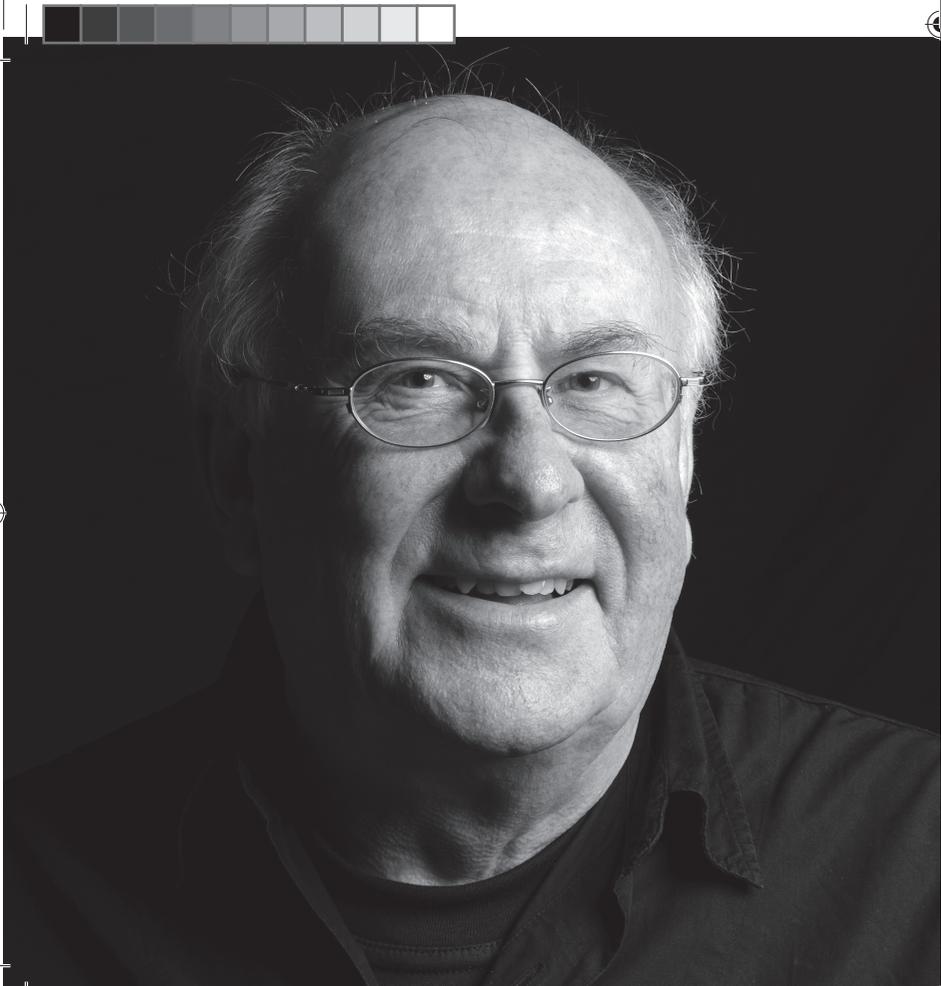
An extraordinary day, a day where three pianists that have never seen each other were gathered at Galaxy Studios, on an invitation from producer and sound engineers Bert van der Wolf and Brendon Heinst.

It was Bert's dream to bring us, the three pianists, together, and to record each others work as one project. All three of us with a completely different style from one another, but also something in common. All three of us have a classical background but with very different influences. Michael Gees, a pianist who mainly accompanies singers with Lieder but has a very improvisatory style as a soloist.

Marion von Tilzer, composer pur sang, having written a lot of music for ensembles and orchestral pieces, influenced by mainly Indian music. I myself come from the world of theatre, as a pianist and accompanist, theatre writer and composer. As a composer, I'm influenced by classical music, jazz, and pop. Apart from solo piano pieces like the ones on this project, I also create soundscapes and synthesizer music and write songs (for example the cycle *Ek herhaal jou*, on 23 poems by South-African Ingrid Jonker and Charlotte Margiono).

So what made this project, these two recording days, this event, so special? Well, first of all, the fact that we were invited by one of the most outstanding sound engineers to fulfil his dream, the three of us as individuals and pianists together recording our pieces. But it also turned out to fulfil our own dreams as well. It was just very special to be able to listen to each other, to experience





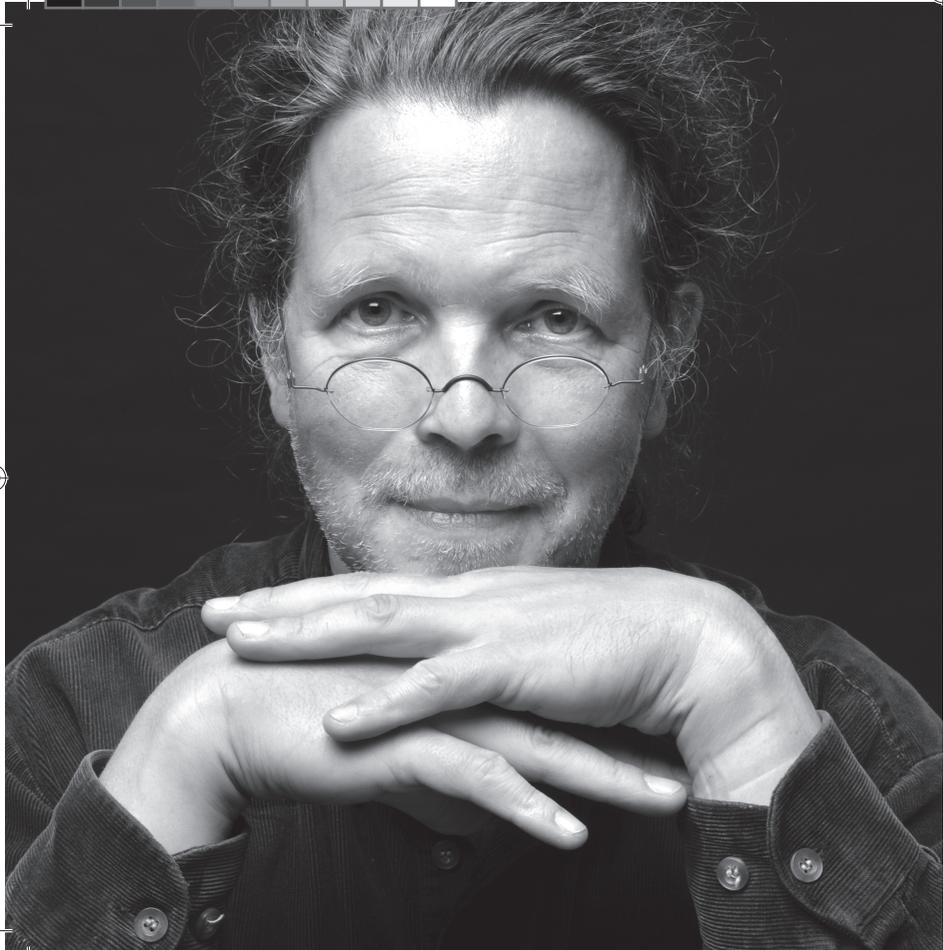
and realized I had the perfect tool in hand to create this ultimate time travel and go back to this little boy behind the keyboard...

The style of playing and the choices of notes of these three composing performers, improvising and playing their own music, comes so close to my heart that I had to investigate initiating a project, bringing them together and see what would happen. After years of half-appointments and lingering intentions, my dream finally came true as I was sitting next to a grand Steinway, listening to their art. The Secret Key Masters playing for me... It felt like the sun was shining on me like in my dream. They played their heart out and gave me their musical paintings. I was in heaven, as I would imagine heaven to be.

It was the most happy musical moment in 50 years for me and I was spiritually flying and feeling ultimately relaxed and fulfilled! From at least 8 hours of music I distilled these 14 tracks and a good 77 minutes of seamless playing where The Secret Key Masters merge into the most wonderful piano recital I can imagine. Time and space become one and there is just music with no stylistic boundary.

Thank you Michael Gees, Marion von Tilzer and Frans Ehlhart, for lifting my spirit. I will treasure these recordings for the rest of my life.

Bert van der Wolf
2014



Listening to Frans Ehlhart and Michael Gees was very inspiring. With each piece Frans played, I heard a different story unfolding; it felt like a journey through a landscape of many different emotions. Every piece has its own architecture constructed by an ever-changing, surprising and rich harmony and rhythm. Michael for me is like a magician who took me by the hand; together we walked through secret places of tonality, texture and rhythm. One by one we opened doors, revealing new secrets, new light and new colours, leading to new doors... I lay on the floor of the studio, listening; it was like a mystical experience.

Thank you, Bert.

Marion von Tilzer
2014



Marion von Tilzer

I was delighted, curious and honoured when sound engineer Bert van der Wolf invited me to be part of his recording project together with two other pianists Frans Ehlhart and Michael Gees. 'The three of you have something in common, both musically and spiritually,' he said. Later, in the studio, Bert revealed to us that our music struck a deep chord with his own inner music.

Different life events happened within the group so the project kept being delayed, but a few weeks ago, it all materialized. Bert and his colleague Brendon Heinst, Michael, Frans and myself met at Galaxy Studio in Belgium and spent two days playing, listening and sharing our music, ideas and stories. For me, this recording session turned out to be a very unique musical encounter. Bert's openness created a space for us and for the music to unfold naturally; there was no time limit, nothing particular had to be achieved; it was very much a Zen-like experience of letting the music evolve according to its own rhythm.

Besides, spending time in the studio working with two other pianists on the same project doesn't happen too often I feel so lucky to have met these wonderful musicians with whom I would love to share more music and time in the future. For me it was a very intimate experience to play in the presence of Frans, Michael, Bert and Brendon. Never before have I experienced such an open atmosphere in a studio situation. And although I did meet some of my inner demons while playing, I found I could let them go and be immersed in the music.

Michael Gees

Bert usually sits behind the glass. That's his job. That's why he yearns now and then to get back to his roots, to go home – on the other side of the glass.

Home to people like Marion, Frans and Michael, who play the piano, as he used to, long ago, selflessly and dedicated. Whose behaviour struck him for the same reason, yet independently of each other: in breaks between the takes they don't prepare for the next take, for instance, but somehow get lost in music that has nothing at all to do with the recording. The "Secret Key Masters" as he calls them don't even know one another, or hardly, but have faith in the originator of the project that he has brought the right people together, and have accepted his invitation to trust the microphones with their secrets, their mysteries, for one evening and one whole day.

The experience they gave us turned out to be unforgettable.

For example in Marion von Tilzer's enigmatic-cool harmonic idiom, which hides rather than expresses its questioning-soaring meanings. Or in Frans Ehlhart's merrily yarn-spinning music, which forcefully and indefatigably challenges the unbounded floods of the possible.

Does music tell us something about its inventor? Perhaps. But what? We can't fathom our personal circumstances out of music's essence. Its mystery is something quite different: that music grasps us and makes us into its





instrument, transcending our peculiarities, in front of and behind the glass.
That in music we recognise ourselves as fundamentally different from one
another and simultaneously as profoundly related.

That in it we feel a conciliatory thankfulness (for it).

That in it we are sad and joyful at the same time.

How does it do it, music, how does it make colleagues into friends in only
36 hours?

Michael Gees
2014

