

**Michael Fahres: piano. harfe (ECM New Series 1281)**

[January 10, 2012](#) [July 18, 2021](#) | [Tyran Grillo](#)

Michael Fahres

[piano. harfe](#)

**Polo de Haas** piano

**Gyde Knebusch** harp

**Paul Godschalk** live electronics

**Hans Stibbe** live electronics

Digital Recording, August 1982, Tonstudio Bauer, Ludwigsburg

Engineer: Martin Wieland

Produced by Manfred Eicher

German-born, Netherlands-based composer and sound installation artist Michael Fahres flirted with ECM for the duration of this single album only. Simply titled after its two central instruments, this vinyl-only rarity gives healthy intimations of the electro-acoustic depth for which he is now so highly regarded.

We find in both of these early pieces a sense of self-directed wonder, as if one's reflection has come to life and danced a version of the future. The low note that spawns a taped echo in *piano* sets just such a tone. A crack in the window of our desires spiders its way to the edges, falling into the garden when it has nowhere else to go. Every shard sprouts legs and trips through the underbrush. Foxes and moles—each a clouded memory returning with soft vengeance—nip at their ankles like herding dogs. The live piano stares into a digital mirror. Thus confronted with its mortality, it grows still, like a foot poised above a landscape of eggshells. Behind closed eyes, it falls into looped miracles. The jangle at the periphery, never clear before, is now crystalline. Voices tremble, a flock of rubber bands falling one at a time into a synthetic gallop. Veins resonate, each the tube of a televised existence. Your hand passes through childhood like the illusion it is, a canopy of little legs kicking above its Alvin Lucier-like current. They crawl over one another as high as they can, growing more distorted with every promise, until there is only shadow to hold you.

But then, in *harfe*, strings are touched by flesh, each unfolding a city map. Streets hum like birth. (The atmosphere reminds me of a Zeena Parkins performance I once attended as a teenager: an undercurrent of restless comfort bedding naked scrawls.) Between watery ascents and muddy stumbles, someone speaks: "The voice of reason is the one that achieves distance." There is a beating of the string, subtle and barely noticeable. A knock at the door of a museum where only the debris of earthquakes is shown. A meditation without eyes, a prickling of hairs, an imploding temple. There is something sacred implied here. Its transcendence melts into a single piece of candy, placed on a serpent's tongue. The trees buckle their knees in guttural pathos, every torn root a string plucked by green hands. The sky awakens, pouring its flood into a restorative nightmare. *Finis*.

In spite of my unsettling impressions, I would never characterize this album as such. There is something hopeful about its inventiveness. In exploring the contours of ruin, it holds itself aloft, away from those whose only desire is to crush music into a dark key. The lock to that key is nowhere but here, floundering like a fish cradled back into a sea of twilight.