

# electronic OCTOBER 2015 sound

## KRAFTWERK

40 YEARS OF RADIO-ACTIVITY



DESTINATION DÜSSELDORF

**A JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF  
ELECTRONIC MUSIC'S POWERPLANT**

WOLFGANG FLÜR. PROPAGANDA. DAF. RUDI ESCH.  
NEW ORDER. CHVRCHES. JOHN FOXX. BLANCMANGE.



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# WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND OCTOBER 2015

"New York, London, Paris, Munich, everybody talk about pop muzik" is how the song goes, right? It's all about location, location, location. The blues from the Mississippi Delta, jazz from New Orleans, Motown from Detroit, The Beatles from Liverpool...

Electronic music has its geographical hotspots, too. Sheffield gave the world The Human League, Heaven 17, Cabaret Voltaire and Warp Records. New Order, 808 State from Manchester, OMD from Liverpool, Mute Records from London, Detroit for techno. The list goes on...

But the one place they all have in common is a wealthy industrial city in the west of Germany: Düsseldorf, the home of Kraftwerk, arguably the wellspring of electronic pop music, and certainly the primary influence for most of the synthesiser toting artists who followed them.

How did this place produce a band like Kraftwerk? And while we're at it, how did the city birth acts as diverse as Propaganda and DAF? In this month's issue we try to get some answers by taking a trip to the heart of Düsseldorf, arriving via the old Trans-Europe Express route, how else? It's a trip that finds our writer Jools Stone stood at the former site of Kraftwerk's legendary Kling Klang studio, describing it as "my Cavern Club, Brill Building and Salford Lad's Club all rolled into one".

We continue our exploration of the city by celebrating the 40th anniversary of 'Radio-Activity', the darkest of Kraftwerk's five masterpieces, and talking to Düsseldorf resident Wolfgang Flür as he releases his first solo album, a mere 30 years or so after leaving Kraftwerk. We tell the remarkable tale of Propaganda's 'A Secret Wish' album and catch up with DAF's Gabi Delgado on the release of his extraordinary new solo album. We also take a peek inside the old Kling Klang studio itself, courtesy of Die Krupps' Rudi Esch.

It's like being in Düsseldorf, without leaving the comfort of your own home. Sit back and take in the views...

Electronically yours,

**Push & Mark**



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### RUDI ESCH

As a key player in the Düsseldorf music scene since 1983, who better to ask than all-round Electri\_City champion how his hometown became the epicentre of electronic music... and how it's planning to stay there

### KRAFTWERK TRAVELOGUE

Join us on the TEE and head to Düsseldorf in search of the spirit of Kraftwerk. Does the journey tell us anything more about Ralf and Florian's roots? It's in the air for you and me...

### 'RADIO-ACTIVITY'

As the darkest of Kraftwerk's five masterpieces celebrates its 40th anniversary, we get up as close as we dare and tell the album's full story from conception to reaching its four-decade milestone

## FEATURES



### GABI DELGADO

He pretty much drew the blueprint for industrial electronic music with DAF in the late 1970s, and has just released a heavy new solo album. We talk to him about those Düsseldorf days, and where he's headed now



### PROPAGANDA

When Ralf Dörper quit Die Krupps to head up a new musical project back in the early 1980s, few would have predicted that 'A Secret Wish' would be the direction he'd take. Read the full story in all its strange glory



### WOLFGANG FLÜR

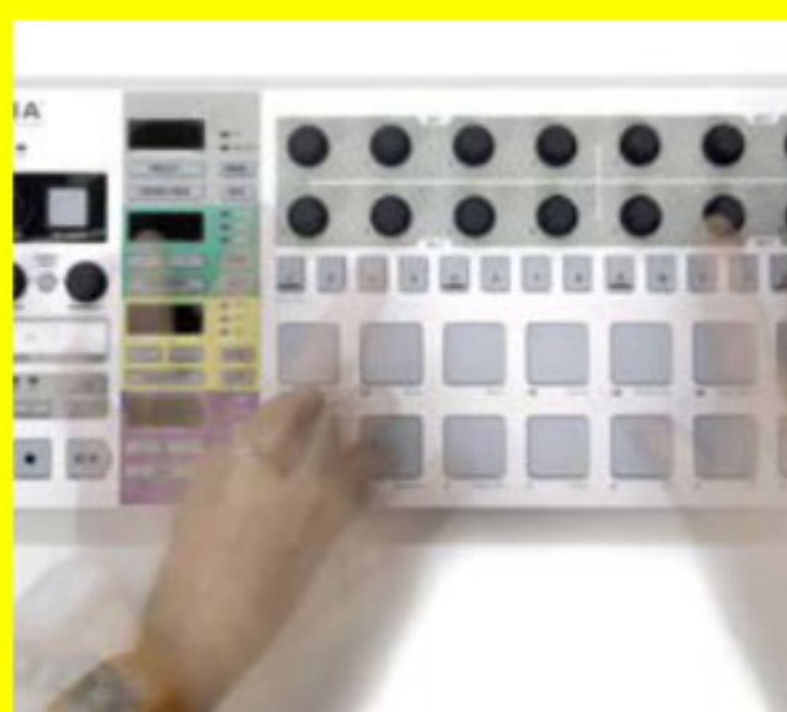
On the eve of the release of his complete works, his name remains synonymous with the golden age of Kraftwerk, and probably will be forever more. But underestimate him as an artist in own right at your peril



## TECH

### BEATSTEP PRO

A controller, performance sequencer and composing tool all in one? Why, if such a thing existed, that'd be a sequencing powerhouse would it not. Oh, look...



### TINY SYNTH

We had this little synth. And we got it signed by the good and the great of electronic music before selling it as part of our successful Kickstarter campaign earlier this year. This is its story



### SYNTHESISER DAVE

A poorly Italian synth, the SIEL DK 80, gets the once over from our very own synth doctor. Prognosis? Wob-wob-wob-wob-wob... beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep. We're losing it, charge, clear... WHOMP. Bip-bip-bip



### READERS' SYNTH

While the Electronic Dream Plant Wasp sounds like a particularity off-the-wall dream, it was actually a synth. Guess what? One of our readers owns one...



### APPS ROUND UP - PART TWO

Back by popular demand, now with even more apps... which is sensible for an apps round up. We continue on the synthy app trail featuring offerings from Korg and Arturia among others...



## ALBUM REVIEWS

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# WHAT'S INSIDE



## UP THE FRONT



### OPENING SHOT

Although Kraftwerk's famous KLING KLANG studio closed its doors in 2009, fans regularly turn up expecting a shrine, only to find...



### TIME MACHINE

When DEATH IN VEGAS headed off to the US on tour in late 1997, their itinerary included an MTV appearance in New York. What happened next is quite a tale



### PULSE

Ears bored? Need some aural refreshment? This month we are very happy to introduce you to CONNIE CONSTANCE, INTROVERTED DANCEFLOOR, ZAFLON and KRAKAUR



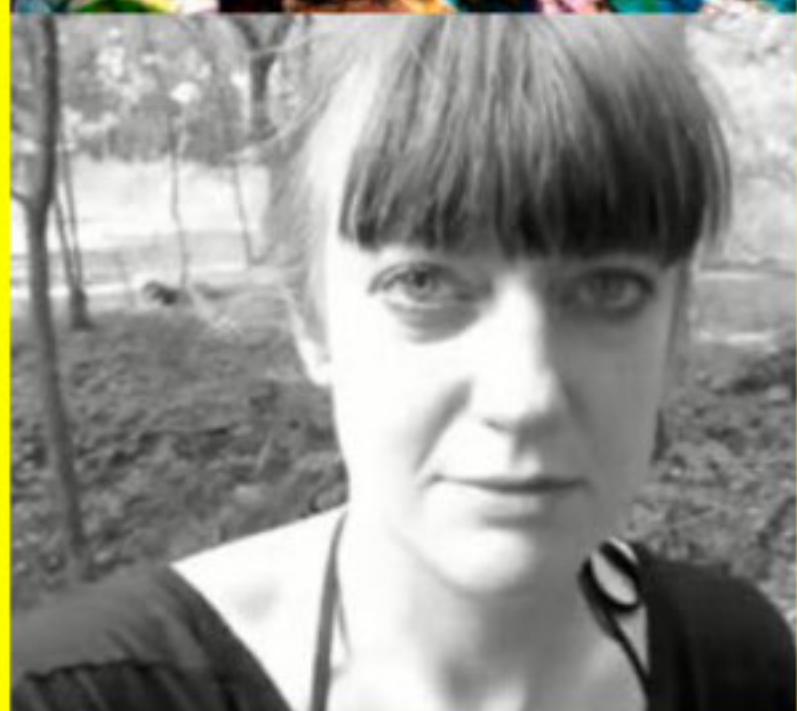
### BURIED TREASURE

Classic albums, nearly forgotten, just waiting to be re-discovered. This month: FRAGILE STATE's 2004 opus 'Voices From The Dust Bowl'



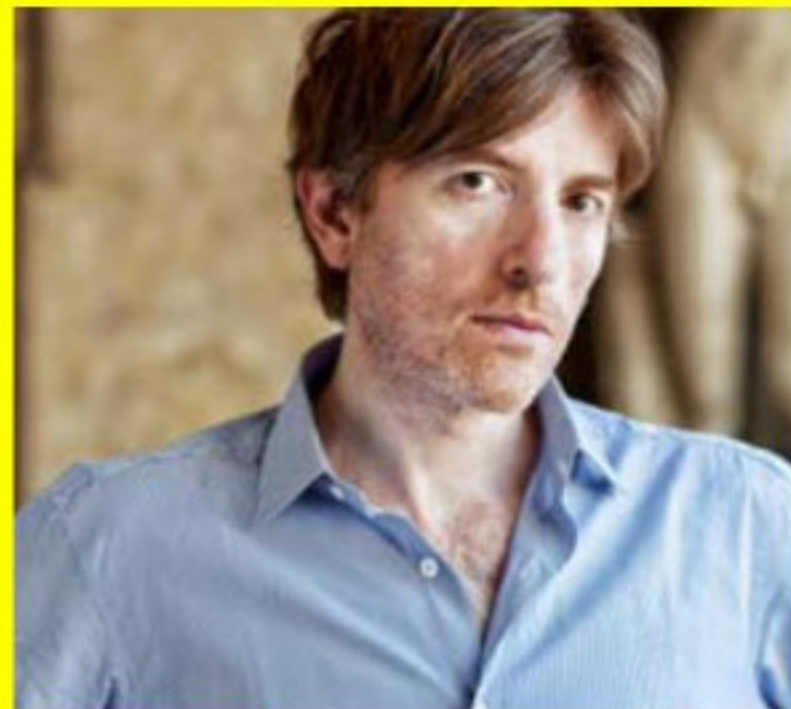
### FAT ROLAND

Fats often sounds like a stuck record. And like a stuck record he'd probably benefit from a firm whack. Which is what APHEX TWIN would probably do if he ever got hold of him



### 60 SECONDS

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### UNDER THE INFLUENCE

NICOLAS GODIN of AIR talks through the music and the architecture that have inspired him through his life, and particularly during the creation of his debut solo album 'Contrepoint'



### JACK DANGERS

The first-ever machine to be called a synthesiser was built by RCA in the 1950s. You can hear it on the 1955 album, lifted from Jack's collection, 'THE SOUND AND MUSIC OF THE RCA ELECTRONIC MUSIC SYNTHESIZER'



### NEEDS MUST

This month our KRIS NEEDS wraps his ears round a mounting pile of tuneage. Which sounds more farmyard than we intended. He listens to a lot of records and tells us which ones are good



### THE REMIX REVIEW

This month's pick of the remixes is RHYTHMATIC's rubdown of EDZY's '1-Six-7-Nine-1'... Edzy? The Unique 3 trailblazer? The very same



### ANATOMY OF A RECORD SLEEVE

Oh look, it's like a photobooth exploded all over the sleeve of SKRILLEX & DIPLO PRESENTS JACK Ü. What can it all mean? We've taken a good look and then made up some answers



### LANDMARKS

OMD's Andy McCluskey is on fine form talking about the making of 'ENOLA GAY'. Made on a synth bought a synth out of his mum's catalogue, paid for it in installments out of their dole cheques



THE OPENING SHOT

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Patser





## THE STUDIO FORMERLY KNOWN AS KLING KLANG

**LOCATION:** 16 Minopstrasse, Düsseldorf

**DATE:** 6 July 2015

**Photo:** Jools Stone

When the architect Mary DeNadai said “old building are like memories you can touch”, she certainly wasn’t referring to an anonymous and slightly clapped out workshop on a Düsseldorf backstreet. However, 16 Minopstrasse is where Ralf, Florian, Karl and Wolfgang called “work” from 1975, Ralf continuing to clock in here until 2009, arriving in the late afternoons to put in their shifts at Kling Klang. It’s here that ‘Radio-Activity’, ‘Trans-Europe Express’, ‘The Man Machine’ and ‘Computer World’ were recorded. Oh, and ‘Electric Café’ (or ‘Techno Pop’ or whatever that album is called). And ‘Tour De France Soundtracks’ (or ‘Tour De France’ or whatever that album is called). And for the Kraftwerk-obsessed, this is the holy of holies, the mysterious inner sanctum.

The exterior of Kling Klang never appeared on a Kraftwerk sleeve, its address was never widely known, so there aren’t legions of fans recreating any iconic Kraftwerk imagery, unlike Beatles’ fans risking life and limb and irritating the drivers of St John’s Wood for their very own Abbey Road snapshot, nor is the wall covered in fan graffiti. But when Jools Stone visited for Electronic Sound there was a traffic cone perched on the metal stairs. An oblique reference to early Kraftwerk iconography left by a pilgrim, perhaps? Look closely, and written in black Sharpie on the metal is a word. What does that say? ‘Patser’? It means ‘show off’ or ‘braggart’ in Dutch. Which leaves us none the wiser. Kraftwerk’s Kling Klang mythology remains as elusive as ever...



THE FRONT

BACK WHEN  
THINGS  
WEREN'T  
HOW THEY ARE  
NOW

# TIME MACHINE

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# DEATH IN VEGAS ON 'MTV FASHIONABLY LOUD'





It's 1997 and guess who's been invited to play on MTV's leading catwalk-cum-rock concert crossover show? Only psychedelic big beat electro-grunge pioneers, **DEATH IN VEGAS**...

Words: **NEIL MASON**

"I don't remember all the details," laughs Mat Flint, Heavenly Social DJ and Death In Vegas bassist. "It was the 90s and I was playing in Death In Vegas. It was a bit crazy."

Message received and understood. There are perhaps more bizarre stories to be had from the shenanigans of Mr Fearless and Co, but few tales will beat the undiluted oddness of 5 November 1997 when they arrived in New York to record an edition of 'MTV Fashionably Loud'.

Death In Vegas had released their debut album, 'Dead Elvis', into the eye of the big beat storm in the spring of 1997 while 'Dirt', released the previous year as a single, had been building a head of steam with heavy rotation on MTV thanks to its memorable video that caught the attention in a post-apocalyptic, pigs on leads, vampire Nazi, school girl, animal mask, naked dancing, dead mannequins kind of way.

"It was an incredibly exciting time around that era," says Mat. "There was quite a big buzz about us. We were supporting The Chemical Brothers on a three-week tour of the States. They were already massive, 'Block Rocking Beats' was everywhere so we were playing big venues, it was a phenomenal experience really."

"When you're on tour you do all sorts of promo. You turn up and play at a radio station or in a record shop. Our tour itinerary had 'MTV Fashionably Loud' pencilled in at The Roseland Ballroom. I thought, 'Oh that's just turning up at MTV and doing a song', I didn't know what it was or even ask."

It wasn't until they arrived at the famous West 52nd Street venue that the concept was explained to them. They'd do a couple of songs live, the singles 'Dirt' and 'Rocco (Sing For A Drink Mix)', and while they were doing that there'd be a 10-minute fashion show by John Bartlett, one of the US's most talked about fashion designers.

"I don't think we took it in until we saw the dressing rooms," says Mat. "Cindy Crawford was in one room. And it wasn't until we went out to do the soundcheck that we realised it was quite a big thing."

The show was a spin-off from MTV's hugely popular 'House Of Style' series that premiered in 1989 and ran for 11 years. Presented by Cindy Crawford, it was aimed squarely at the US's increasing appetite for all things supermodel. 'MTV Fashionably Loud' managed to shoehorn those very models into an annual live fashion show soundtracked by the current hot ticket acts playing live (interestingly, one of the show's directors was Bruce Gowers, a name pop video anoraks will recognise as he directed Queen's groundbreaking 'Bohemian Rhapsody' promo).

'MTV Fashionably Loud' was a prime time, coast-to-coast broadcast and featured The Roseland kitted out in full fashion show regalia, complete with a vast, triangular catwalk that passed in front of the stage where the bands took their place. While none of us are supermodel experts, the show is studded with them – is that Helena Christensen? Jodie Kidd? Linda Evangelista? Eva Herzigova? It was indeed quite a big thing.

Along with Death In Vegas, the show – which while recorded in November 1997 didn't air until the following February – also featured a heavy rap presence with Method Man and Redman, EPMD's Erick Sermon, Def Squad's Keith Murray and The Crystal Method, as well as some bloke called Fatboy Slim.

"It was pretty easy to put bands like us and Crystal Method on because there was no singer," believes Mat. "It was ideal music for looking at something else."

As if to prove the point, a year earlier the line-up had included Elastica and The Prodigy. YouTube is your friend here and you'll see models flummoxed when confronted with a) being upstaged by Keith Flint b) trying to walk all swishy to Elastica's 'Connection'.



Mat is no stranger to the limelight having been frontman with early 90s shoegaze trailblazers Revolver, along with Hamish Brown who went on to forge a very successful career as a rock photographer. Here, on bass in a red T-shirt, jeans and Adidas Shell Toes, Mat is inadvertently the focus of attention once again. TV cameras in his face, supermodels gliding by in front of him – what was going through his head?

"Usually when we played live, there was a film show behind the band and that was what you'd look at," he explains. "But for this, the cameras were on me and guitarist Ian Button because we were either side of the stage at the front. I didn't know whether I was supposed to be looking at the models or trying to play normally. It was a very strange thing to find yourself in the middle of."

You'd guess by the looks of the over-the-top dancing that very few of the rent-a-crowd audience knew who Death In Vegas were. Still, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. But what about the band, did they enjoy it?

"I think I enjoyed it," offers Mat. "It was over quite quickly and we were all like, 'Was that good? Was that fun? I'm not really sure, I think it was'. One of the weirdest things was that these extremely successful models were really getting in to it by the end. They probably didn't know who Death In Vegas were either, but towards the end one of them took her top off and swung it round her head... I thought that was quite funny. I gave one of my friends my camera while we went on and my mate, bless him, managed to get that one."

So with all those supermodels in one place, did they backstage it for the aftershow?

"We tried it for a bit," laughs Mat. "But I don't think anyone in the band was particularly comfortable in those kind of situations, it was pretty schmoozy. We knew a lot of people in New York at that point so we went out and did something a bit more degenerate."

These days we expect everything, ever, to be on YouTube, but the ubiquitous video channel only came into being in 2005 and back in 1997 a usable form of the internet in the home was still years away.

"Over the years there have been various Death In Vegas TV appearances that I'd look for," says Mat, "and one by one they've all appeared online. This was the one thing that I've always remembered and wondered if it was ever going to be appear online. It's taken until now for someone to finally upload it."

The segment was recorded off the TV onto a good old fashioned VHS and only uploaded to YouTube in August by long-time Death In Vegas fan, Jason Hall.

"It was a great performance," says Jason.

"I taped it off of MTV when I was about 13. 'Dirt' was one of my favorite songs, seeing them play live instruments in addition to synthesizers and sequencers was mind-blowing to me at the time. I came across it when I was converting some of my old VHS tapes to MP4 files. Many of the other 'Fashionably Loud' performances had been put online, but the Death in Vegas one wasn't there for some reason. I'd seen tweets and people on message boards asking if anyone had it so I figured I'd put it up on YouTube."

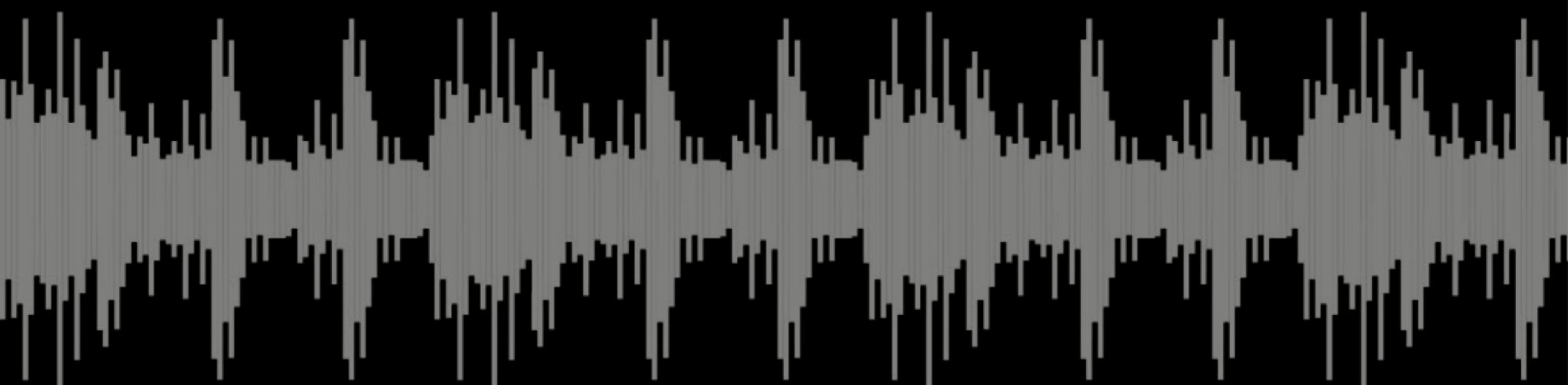
"Thank goodness for Jason Hall, eh?" laughs Mat. "It's a piece of history and these people are keeping it alive. It was great to see it."

## WATCH THE VIDEO

[WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/EMBED/PBODQH4U1Y](http://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/EMBED/PBODQH4U1Y)







# PULSE

Hitching a ride on our very best new music bike are the  
blissed-out urban missives of **CONNIE CONSTANCE**,  
the squonky upside-down disco of **INTROVERTED**  
**DANCEFLOOR**, kitchen sink drum'n'tronica from **ZAFLON**  
and the low and slow chilly beats of **KRAKAUR**



# CONNIE CONSTANCE

Metropolitan mysticism and downtown dream pop

## WHO SHE?

Model, singer, songwriter, all round cool gal: 20-year-old Connie Constance has it all. Born and raised in north west London, her musical career was kickstarted last year when she met producer Blue Daisy. They instantly became friends and Connie's new EP, 'In The Grass', is a result of that relationship.

## WHY CONNIE CONSTANCE?

The blissed-out urban dreamscapes of the EP's opening track, 'Stars', are irresistible. Gentle piano, an urban drawl, gorgeous imagery of a fantastical London – it's a sumptuous mix of dreamy pop from Connie and Fever Ray-esque weirdness from Blue Daisy. 'Euphoric' shows a much more pared back approach, with the vocals sounding Winehouseian at times, albeit with a unique Constance twist. Blue Daisy's beats sidle up to Connie's poetic lyrics as their voices – one harsh and pitch-bent, the other pure and heartfelt – intertwine and echo each other.

## TELL US MORE

Connie's recording cohort Blue Daisy, aka Kwesi Darko, is an artist in his own right with an R&S record deal to boot. His imminent sophomore album, the brooding

'Darker Than Blue' features our Connie returning the favour guesting on the thrilling duet 'Alone'. Blue Daisy describes his work with Connie on this EP as "the initial flint to spark a long-lasting flame": here's hoping that's the truth, and that there's much more beauty to come from this partnership.

ROSIE MORGAN

The 'In The Grass' EP is available to download from Black Acre now







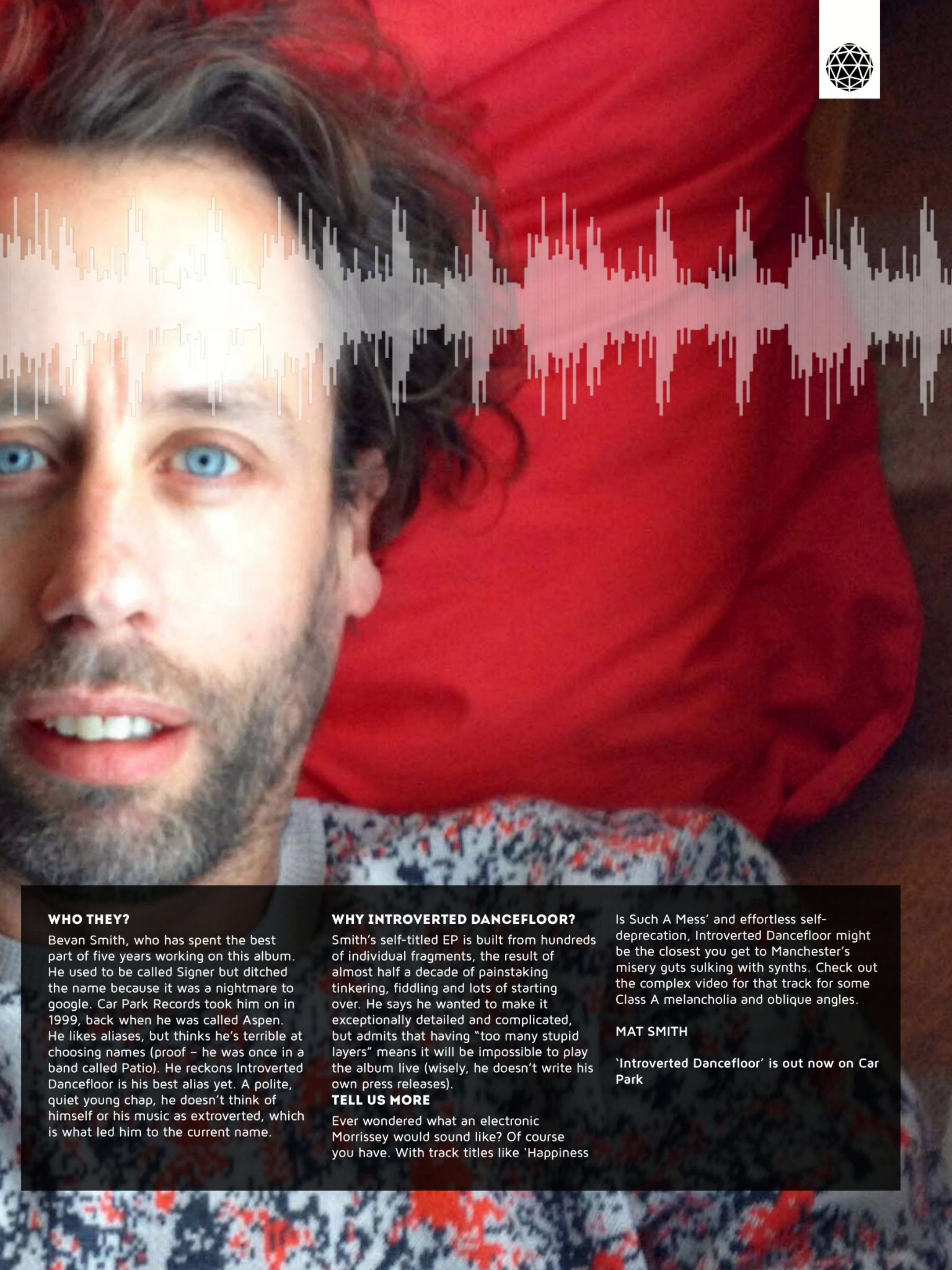
THE FRONT

# INTROVERTED DANCEFLOOR

Soft-spoken, slow-working New Zealander tries to turn electronic music inside out







#### WHO THEY?

Bevan Smith, who has spent the best part of five years working on this album. He used to be called Signer but ditched the name because it was a nightmare to google. Car Park Records took him on in 1999, back when he was called Aspen. He likes aliases, but thinks he's terrible at choosing names (proof – he was once in a band called Patio). He reckons Introverted Dancefloor is his best alias yet. A polite, quiet young chap, he doesn't think of himself or his music as extroverted, which is what led him to the current name.

#### WHY INTROVERTED DANCEFLOOR?

Smith's self-titled EP is built from hundreds of individual fragments, the result of almost half a decade of painstaking tinkering, fiddling and lots of starting over. He says he wanted to make it exceptionally detailed and complicated, but admits that having "too many stupid layers" means it will be impossible to play the album live (wisely, he doesn't write his own press releases).

#### TELL US MORE

Ever wondered what an electronic Morrissey would sound like? Of course you have. With track titles like 'Happiness

Is Such A Mess' and effortless self-deprecation, Introverted Dancefloor might be the closest you get to Manchester's misery guts sulking with synths. Check out the complex video for that track for some Class A melancholia and oblique angles.

#### MAT SMITH

'Introverted Dancefloor' is out now on Car Park





THE FRONT

# ZAFLOON

The new school of “chuck it all in and give it a good stir” drum ‘n’ tronica

## WHO HE?

Londoner Dan Clarke is a man who understands the value of decent kitchen sink. In it all goes, electro, hip hop, grime, garage and drum ‘n’ bass and out pops ‘Blink’, the juicy first fruit from your new favourite electronic magpie.

## WHY ZAFLOON?

“No matter how authentic the tune starts out, whether it be drum ‘n’ bass, hip hop or post-rock, it always ends up as a mutated, bastardised version of what it originally was,” says Clarke, who is set to release his debut EP in late November. First listen to ‘Blink’ says it’s drum ‘n’

bass like the olden days. Kentucky’s self-proclaimed genre chameleon Mina Fedora on floaty vocals over Clarke’s swollen chord rumble intro is all Diane Charlemagne... but not for long. Acid squelching, runaway sequencers, ocean of strings and in among it all little glistening pools of melody. Dark, crisp and sharp, it’s quite the delight.

## TELL US MORE

As an in-demand producer and engineer, he should know a thing or two about picking a pair of pipes having worked with some serious up and coming types including left-field voice of choice, Jamie Woon, and fast rising soulboy Royce Wood Junior. And yet the cornerstone sample is, apparently, the work song of a Korowai

man. The Korowai, who live in isolation mainly in tree houses in southeastern Papua, were oblivious to the existence of anyone else in the world until the 1970s. Just imagine the state of their record collection. We’ll be posting Zafloon’s newie to them forthwith.

NEIL MASON

‘Blink’ is out on 9 October







# KRAKAUR

Chilly downtempo beats upstate New York style

## WHO HE?

Dan Krakaur, student at SUNY Purchase, a liberal arts college in New York state, has been releasing music for just over a year, with his first official release coming via Youngbloods – a new boutique label focusing on downtempo house and garage.

## WHY KRAKAUR?

The project started out in 2014 with a series of three EPs uploaded to Bandcamp. Plenty of Krakaur's production tics were there from the beginning – soft ambient pads, acoustic touches, heavily processed vocals, and gently loping beats. But the fittingly named 'Bleak' EP is on another level. Krakaur's atmosphere is resolutely nocturnal, though the tone

shifts disarmingly between comforting and foreboding; the warm crackling of a fire can swiftly become the cold hiss of the factory. Mostly ambient, there are a couple of more beat-driven tracks such as 'Bleak 2', an idiosyncratic take on footwork, with deep bass pulses surrounded by an orchestra of pots and pans.

## TELL US MORE

Aside from the EP, there's a few other Krakaur loosies floating around. He's linked up with Brooklyn MC Yoh The Shaolin, whose smoky voice perfectly laces their joint track 'Thunder'. Krakaur has also contributed 'Phantom' to Youngbloods' ambient compilation, 'Hollow Forms'. If you like what you've heard so far, the good

news is that you won't have to wait too long for more material. Youngbloods are planning a Krakaur full-length for early 2016. For such a new label, they already have a remarkably well-defined aesthetic, and Krakaur is leading the way.

## COSMO GODFREE

'Bleak' is out now on Youngbloods







# 00:00:60 SIXTYSECONDS

German composer and producer **BARBARA MORGENSTERN** gives us a typically idiosyncratic one-minute video self-portrait and answers a few questions about her new album

<https://youtu.be/qJzgLZKXMj4>



**NAME:** Barbara Morgenstern

**BORN:** 19 March 1971, Hagen, Germany

**SHALL WE START WITH AN INTERESTING FACT ABOUT HAGEN?**

If you insist. Nena, Mousse T and comedian Henning Wehn all hail from Hagen. Not bad for the 41st biggest city in Germany. Must be something in the water, right? "Hagen is a small town at the edge of the huge industrial area called the Ruhr," says Barbara. "Abandoned industrial buildings shaped the townscape. Growing up there was so boring, you had to do something to escape the tristesse. There were a lot of parties and the music scene was very vivid. Oh, and Nena's father was my biology teacher at school."

**BARBARA'S NEW ALBUM, 'DOPPELSTERN', IS ALL ABOUT "DOUBLE STARS", OTHERWISE KNOWN AS DUOS...**

"My 'let's-do-something-together' list was getting longer and longer," she explains. The resulting record features collaborations with the likes of Justus Köhncke, Gudrun Gut, Hauschka and Coppé. "I was simply curious to make an album with lots of different people," continues Barbara. "I wanted to find out what the similarities were in our ways of working and whether I could develop something new with each artist. It was a long, interesting and inspiring process."

**SHE MUST HAVE A FAVOURITE DUO, THEN?**

"Turin Brakes, the UK folk band. The way the two singers come together is just perfect. Their voices work so organically, they seem to create a new third voice. They were my huge inspiration for me."

**AND A FAVOURITE DUET?**

"My favourite duet of all time is 'Up Where We Belong' by Joe Cocker & Jennifer Warnes. The sound of that song is burned into my music memory and the way their strong solo voices melt together builds up into something completely new. It's very 80s, but that was the period of my musical socialisation."



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**TO FIND OUT MORE**



THE FRONT

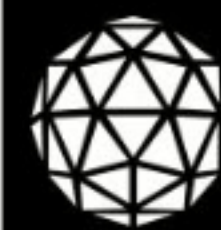
# BURIED TREASURE

## IN SEARCH OF ELECTRONIC GOLD

The late 1990s and early 2000s threw up a slew of Air-style ambient masterpieces – but **FRAGILE STATE**'s 2004 classic 'Voices From The Dust Bowl' was criminally overlooked. It may just well be the UK's 'Premiers Symptômes' of the era

Words: **KIERAN WYATT**





Horizontal listening has always appealed to me, from those early days with a vinyl copy of 'Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld' to streaming the latest weird gear from Loop Zeppelin. And the last 20 years in particular have thrown up a smorgasbord of ambient and easy listening gems, some that have deservedly gone on to sell zillions and others that haven't but should have. Fragile State's 'Voices From The Dust Bowl' is one such criminally missed diamond.

Fragile State were two men: keyboardist, Zero 7 collaborator and all-round jazzman Neil Cowley and Blues & Soul magazine journalist and top compilation compiler Ben Mynott. They'd already made waves with their 2002 debut 'The Facts And The Dreams', a long-player that featured in many end-of-year lists, but it wasn't until the release of the follow-up, 'Voices From The Dust Bowl', that they really delivered the money shot. Here, at last, was the British answer to Air, an album so drenched in strings (of life) and sweeping cinematics that it made Moby's 'Play' sound like a studied exercise in minimalism.

As much as Cowley and Mynott were clearly fans of both John Barry and downtempo electronica,

theirs was also sound suffused with soul, blues and jazz. Some tracks really swung, like the Balearic groover '600 Bliss' and the breakbeat funkathon 'Overcurrent'. Meanwhile 'Paper Smile' has the sort of life-affirming chord progressions that should be available on prescription the NHS; the remix 'Paper Tiger' added extra beats for an even more potent dosage. Duff filler tracks? None. Strings so sci-fi you'd think Philip K Dick was at the controls? Oh yes.



I've heard at least half the album as a soundtrack to the sunset at beachside bars on Ibiza's west coast (especially the epically spooky 'Train Time'). The rest have cropped up in a variety of compilations and mixes. But as a whole, 'Voices From The Dust Bowl' still stands up and deserves a complete listen. Eleven years old it may be, but it still sounds as strong, together and solid as it did back in the mid-2000s. It sounds real – a collection of proper songs rather than a mish-mash of random samples.

When the album was first released I reviewed it for some American magazine and, with typically flowery prose, I said it "cocooned your ears in mellifluous mellowness" and begged readers to buy it. And as much as I hate to say "I told you so", well, I did. Buy, buy, buy.



THE FRONT

$$\sec^2 x dx + \left( \frac{4}{y^3} - \frac{3}{y^4} \right) dy$$

$$a_0 \frac{d^2 y}{dx^2} + a_1 \frac{dy}{dx} + a_2 y = f(x),$$

$$\frac{1}{\kappa} \frac{p}{p^2} - m = \frac{2}{\kappa} \frac{p}{p^2} m$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial t} = k^2$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} + 2y \tan x = 2x \cos^2 x.$$

$$y = e^{r_2 x} \int \varphi(x) e^{-r_1 x} dx,$$

THE FRONT





$$\left[ \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial z^2} \right],$$

$$K = \frac{EG - F^2}{2}$$

$$ds^2 = e \sum_{i,j=1}^n g_{ij} dx^i dx^j$$

$$2 \frac{d^2 y}{dx^2} - 6 \frac{dy}{dx} + 4y = e^{-3x}.$$

$$dy + ky dt = 0.$$

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = \frac{y}{x} - \frac{1}{x^2}$$

# FAT ROLAND BANGS ON

$$y = \int f(x) dx + c,$$

$$K = \left[ 1 + \left( \frac{dy}{dx} \right)^2 \right]^{-3/2} \frac{d^2 y}{dx^2}$$

Our resident columnist is back from his stint at the Edinburgh Festival. We reckon you ought to be seeing him on 'Mock The Week' any day now. In the meantime, he's demanding a pay rise and going on about **APHEX TWIN** again

Words: **FAT ROLAND**

Illustration: **STEVE APPLETON**

Aphex Twin turns off his Casio synthesiser. The display blanks out with a click. He powers down his Nokia. He pulls the plug on his PC. Light switch by light switch, he envelops the room in darkness. He checks that the curtains are closed tight.

In the quiet murk, Aphex Twin thinks of the 92nd floor of the Warp Records offices, where suited execs run bejewelled fingers through their expensive toupees. "Where's the Twin?" they shout, chomping down hard on their cigars. "We can't make our millions without the Twin." Their tears waterfall into their jacuzzis.

Aphex Twin grimaces. He'll show them. They've profited from his music long enough. If he hides, their empire will crumble and they will be forced to beg on vomit-stained pavements as commuters walk by, lost in headphoned Spotify. Aphex Twin's face spreads into a satisfied leer.

The months pass. Hiding Aphex Twin lives off spiders and dust. Sitting in the gloom, a new melody sometimes enters his head. Sometimes it's a fragment of a rhythm section.

He pours glue into his ears to prevent the ideas getting in. He seals his mouth with No More Nails. He stuffs Blu-Tack up his nostrils and up his butt. Hiding Aphex Twin imagines himself as a distant island in a raging sea. An undetected country at the end of time. He lets the solitude enclose him. A cocoon of silence. And yet the ideas keep coming.

Ten years pass. The seasons rise and fall.

Hiding Aphex Twin is still in his room, wide-eyed and a little mad. His mouth sealant is cracked. Sweat pours off his shaking body. And the ideas still keep coming.

Hiding Aphex Twin tries to picture the record execs, but their faces are long forgotten. His mind races with drum fills and frequencies and filters. He mumbles something angry, writhes in desperation. In the darkened room amid piles of unplugged samplers, something snaps inside Hiding Aphex Twin.

The adhesive substances rupture in his gummy orifices and a torrent of music tsunamis out of him. It fills the room and bursts into blinding light. Beats and melodies stream from his mouth as dirty glitter and sparkles. Mathematical equations flow from his ears. From his eyes, tiny teddy bears cascade down his astonished face. Every Aphexian idea from the past decade gushes from his shuddering, exploding body.

And somewhere far from here, in a jacuzzi filled with £100 notes, a gold-chained, cigar-chomping record exec cackles – and announces the return of the Twin on the Warp Records website.



THE FRONT







# UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Ex-Air man **NICOLAS GODIN** talks us through the often refined inspirations for 'Contrepoint', his new solo album

Interview: **NGAIRE RUTH**  
Picture: **THOMAS HUMERY**





## “ THE GARDENS OF VERSAILLES

I grew up in Versailles and I've been going to the Gardens of Versailles since I was born, so this place has given me some of my strongest memories. I had most of my earliest experiences there and it's where I first found inspiration to make music later on. It's a timeless landscape dating back to Louis XIII and you can imagine that you're somewhere in 'Alice Through The Looking Glass' – it takes you out of the real world and it's very pure, really Zen. Every day you can walk there and take a different route.

Everything in the gardens is parallel and geometrical. Even the trees are square. It's all about the parallel lines for me, they're totally amazing. The lines are not supposed to cross one another but they do, they change with your perspective, so it's like a magic trick, and it gives you a feeling of weightlessness. I always say that Air has a free spirit that never lands, and being in the gardens is like that. If you listen to any Air album and go there, you'll see that we made a soundtrack of this space. I think it's very unique.

I live near to the gardens and I drive there all the time. I go there for inspiration. I take my car and my dog, and sometimes I'll spend the whole weekend there, renting a room at the hotel that's in the gardens. At night, I just feel it even more. It's a very strong magnetic place. It's one of the strongest energies I know.



## ARCHITECTURE

I like it when architects or designers build worlds that have nothing to do with reality and sort of make you live a fantasy world. The Biba store in London was an example of this. It's terrible to think it has been destroyed and I'll never get to step into it. I love my home in Versailles too, because the architecture is French classical with very pure lines – combining geometry and l'art de vivre, you could say.

I used to live in the Castel Béanger in Paris, a masterpiece by French architect Hector Guimard, who later designed the entrances to the Paris metro. The building exemplifies his art nouveau style. He wanted to construct a manifesto, an embodiment of his vision, and he built the Castel to show people his concept of modern architecture and modern living. It's like a reference building – I knew it before I lived in it. I was passing one day and saw there was a place to rent in it. I thought, "Oh my god". So I took it.





### **JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH'S 'THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER'**

Bach is the god of music, you know. Bach is everywhere. Any song you hear on the radio, on the TV, when you go into a store, any melody that exists on this planet is in Bach's 'The Well-Tempered Clavier' book, which is a collection of keyboard pieces. It's like the air. There is nothing you can add to that.

If you are a musician, 'The Well-Tempered Clavier' is written in the greatest creative language. It's like the grammar book of music. It has something like 96 songs, all the minor and major harmonies you can have in music, and all the tricks you can do. It was after playing through this book that I came up with the idea for my new album, 'Contrepoint', which is named after the technique that Bach was the master of.



### **GLENN GOULD**

Glenn Gould is a Canadian pianist who, in my opinion, revealed something about Bach that had previously been hidden. He played the melodies in a completely different way. He created something new, but it was still connected to the past – and that was my aim with 'Contrepoint' too. I learned about this approach from watching two documentaries on Gould that my friend Bruno Monsaingeon directed, 'The Alchemist' and 'Hereafter'.

I watched these two movies while I was on tour with Air and it was then that I decided to make 'Contrepoint'. My main aim was to produce something I thought Glenn Gould would approve of and the song 'Glenn' is my homage to him. Bruno Monsaingeon, who is quite elderly now, came to my apartment to listen to the album and he told me that Glenn would have been very intrigued by this new version of Bach. I don't know if he was just being polite, but it was enough for me. After I heard that, I could move on to something else. It was a loop and the cycle was finished.





# JACK DANGERS' SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

**Jack Dangers digs out another gem of early electronic music: 'The Sounds And Music Of The RCA Electronic Music Synthesizer', a demonstration disc of the monstrous RCA Electronic Music Synthesizer from 1955, on both 12-inch LP and seven-inch box set formats**

The RCA Electronic Music Synthesizer was the first synthesiser; or, at least, it was the first machine that was actually called a synthesiser, or 'synthesizer' – the American spelling. It filled a room, in that classic 1950s way new technology had of being terrifyingly huge. RCA was the Radio Corporation of America, which was originally part of General Electric, but became an independent company in the 1930s. It was involved in radio and television broadcasting and the manufacturing of vacuum tubes, or valves, and in 1949 they released the first-ever 45rpm record.

RCA is absolutely at the heart of the development of electronic music. They had manufactured the RCA Theremin, which was the first commercially available electronic instrument: working with Léon Theremin, its Russian inventor, they created the first theremins for sale in 1929. RCA only ever made 500, but as Dr Robert Moog said, "The theremin specifically, and Léon Theremin's work in general, is the biggest, fattest, most important cornerstone of the whole electronic music medium. That's where it all began."

The synthesiser was built by Harry F Olson, who was RCA's expert in acoustics, and another RCA engineer called Herbert Belar. It had 12 oscillator tubes, one for each note in the scale, and a load of filters and envelope generators to create any sound. They had to program the synthesiser by using a typewriter keypad that punched holes into a roll of paper that was then fed into the machine, which would read the information and reproduce the sounds.

Every element of the sound's character had to be programmed in this way – the pitch, tone, attack, decay, sustain and release, everything. They made a Mark II and teamed up with Columbia and Princeton universities to create the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center where composers would get access to it and write music using it. Composers would often record the RCA Synthesizer part on tape, and then replay the tape during a performance with an orchestra.

Bob Moog got started by making theremin kits and selling them via mail order, and the RCA Synthesizer was also a direct influence on him. He took the principles of the RCA Synthesizer and miniaturised them, turned them into modules you could patch together, and commercialised the lot. Vladimir Ussachevsky was one of the main composers who used the RCA Synthesizer, and he was the one to tell Bob Moog about ADSR control, one of the main components of every synthesiser. So we have the RCA Synthesizer to thank for that. "You'll need an ADSR envelope generator on your new thing, or it won't work..." or words to that effect.

The RCA Electronic Music Synthesizer is still there, in New York. 'The Sounds And Music Of The RCA Electronic Music Synthesizer' are demonstration discs, showing what the machine was capable of, with lots of commentary and technical information. A fascinating document from the birth of the modern synthesiser.







# NEEDS MUST

Our regular round-up of the best electronic trackage out there, this month with references to roosters, snorkels and Godzilla's bollocks

Words: **KRIS NEEDS**

Last month saw the return of my Needs Must column after a gap of 18 years. And it was a blast. If that was a toe-dipping exercise to ease me back in, this time the aim is take the full plunge. So without further ado...

## LOLA DUTRONIC

### Lost In Translation

LD PRODUCTIONS | Album

Why not start with the best electronic pop album of 2015? Obviously the shallow, grating racket which trades under that banner today uses technology to camouflage flimsily derivative desperation, but transatlantic boy-girl duo Lola Dutronic grab similar ingredients then strip them down and sex them up to present a riveting, orgasmic vision of how pop music should really bombard the 21st century. The pair's previous album, 2012's 'Everyone's A Star', was the last personal mission of legendary Red Star label honcho Marty Thau, who saw the band as a logical step in a musical journey that started with 60s bubblegum pop and also included the New York Dolls and Suicide.

Expat British producer-composer-multi-instrumentalist Richard Citroen recorded the music for 'Lost In Translation' in Toronto then sent it to Stephanie B in Dusseldorf, who recorded her vocals for him to edit and mix. With influences such as Jane Birkin, Giorgio Moroder, St Etienne, Goldfrapp and Suicide, Lola Dutronic produce pure pop lightning bolts which they infest with gutter sleaze, street attitude and sexy playfulness. Their unique combinations of electro-ballad desolation, eurodisco allure and classic French stylings, as found on tracks like 'Harley Davidson', 'Go Fuck Yourself' and 'Modern Suicide', spawn unspeakably gorgeous neon-pop skyline serenades, perfectly complemented by their lustrous post-apocalyptic take on Skeeter Davis' 'The End of The World'.

## METAMONO

### Dystopia

SERAGLIO POINT PRODUCTIONS | Download

James Kumo first appeared in 2008 and has released sparkling deep techno on labels such as Ann Aimee and Metamorphic, as well as his own KMusic imprint. Here he uncurls a lustrous floater marked by cloud-like synth swirls, under which he constructs intricate webs of morphing riffs and cosmic latrine detonation, plus a spacier dub version. Dan Curtin, another inestimable Detroit legend and a man responsible for many of the major electronic peaks of the 1990s, is on ferocious form for his remix, steeling up the groove to bring out the track's central spectral ectoplasm. Liverpool's Binny meanwhile lovingly injects uncanny Detroit production touches into a second remix, with tone bends, moth's underpants percussion tickles and flickering textures.





## MARK BROOM

Stunned (97 Mix) / Decay

M-PLANT | 12-inch / Download

I first met Mark Broom in a Nottingham studio in 1992 when he was a young techno-head who'd just released his first records on GPR. Since then, he's carved a relentless path as one of the UK's most creative, uncompromising electronic producers. It's a mark of the regard in which he's held that his latest single – a tweaked-up live mix of a track originally released on his Pure Plastic label in 1997 – is here on Detroit legend Robert Hood's M-Plant imprint. 'Stunned (97 Mix)' is stark and dark on the surface, but laced with subtly shifting riffs and gauzy sounds which come and go under the propellant kick, like ghosts in a colossal future ruin, while the flip is a glowering new missile.

## SANTIAGO SALAZAR

Chicanismo

LOVE HOW YOU FEEL | 2x12-inch album / Download

Since 1990, the revolutionary spirit of electronic music has rarely been so passionately expressed than in the bunkers of Detroit's Underground Resistance, who hijacked rave, deep techno and jazz soul to present a defiant message against the inevitable corporate stifling of clubland. UR's ethos was always about affiliates and messengers such as Santiago Salazar, who released UR tunes and performed with Los Hermanos before returning to his home in LA in 2006 and later launching Ican Productions as well as recording tracks for a list of respected electronic labels.

'Chicanismo' is Santiago's debut album and it shows a wide-ranging sensibility, producing deliriously euphoric Detroit techno on 'Varrio 2 Varrio' while the title track burrows deep as the unfathomable mole's stiffie. Another highlight is the percolating tone poem 'The Farce', which delivers a message about the US government's treatment of Latin Americans, showing that conscious electronic music is alive and kicking.

## FALTYDL

Rich Prick Poor Dick

NINJA TUNE | 12-inch

After the far-flung foraging of his recent album, 'In The Wild', the Brooklyn producer returns to the dancefloor with an energised 147 bpm turbo-scorcher, peppered with strange frequencies and melon-massaging satellite emissions. On the B-side, 'Bookaloo' adds bongo underpants and further machine flatulence throws familiar motifs off-balance.

## SLOWBURN

LDRX2 EP

LUNAR DISKO | Download

A lovely little EP here from Irish duo Dave Hargadon and Phil Long. First of all, Phil uncorks his fearsome 'Nat909'. While the top layers mate soaring Detroit strings with the plinky lone piano sound found on early Strictly Rhythm tunes, down below the drum machine of the track title rumbles and crunches like Godzilla's bollocks cut loose from their monster-pants, demolishing tall buildings and, especially, dancefloors. In contrast, Dave's Hargadon's 'Solace' is a poignant brew of wistful early Sven Vath strings and flickering melodies. The EP rounds off with two lush deep house knees-ups from the pair together, showing a fabulous grasp of the time-stopping early 90s Nu Groove sound, Detroit funk sensibility and old school Chicago stealth, which they blend with style and an essential sense of space.

## WORKER/PARASITE

Depth Charge EP

CLASSICWORKS | Download

I'm a sucker for the inimitable magic of the Roland 303, the little silver box that started so much. As technology throws new tones into the synthesised arena, it's easy to overlook that humble bass synth, which is one reason why Bay Area producer Worker/Parasite's new five-track squelchathon comes as such a welcome burst of fetid alien air. The likes of 'Alam al-Mithal' and 'Bene Gesserit' follow the time-honoured template of whipping up a lethal acid riff then letting fly, but thanks to Ben Versluis' knack for killer dynamics and subtle groove embroidery, the man comes out with a winner, drop-kicking the old school firmly into the 21st century, screaming only occasionally.

## KONRAD BLACK

The Scorched Earth EP

MEANDER | 12-inch

Meander are on a mission to release records influenced by the universe, deep space and consciousness. Inspired by recent meteorite events, Berlin-based Konrad Black makes his debut fully kitted out for that task, unfurling otherworldly textures and cavernous melodies over concise breaks on the skeleton-fusing 'Silene Dust', the eerily weightless 'Chelyabinsk Afterglow' and the whisperingly Can-like floatation funk epic that is 'Sycho Te Alyn', which becomes something of a modern masterpiece as it unfolds inside its own black hole. Suitably pressed on 180g wax, this marvellous EP might be how Drexciya would have sounded if they had looked to the skies instead of their snorkels.



# THE REMIX REVIEW

IN ASSOCIATION WITH PRISM SOUND

You can't beat a bit of bleep. And our favourite remix this month brings together one of the pioneers of this distinctly British sub-genre with another kingpin of the early UK rave scene

Words: **BEN WILLMOTT**

## Mic to Monitor UK



**Attend Free Seminars** - delivering key insights into modern recording and mastering techniques and dispelling popular myths surrounding these processes





Artist: EDZY  
Title: 1-SIX-7-NINE-1  
Remixer: RHYTHMATIC



Edzy was a member of the legendary Unique 3, those early innovators of bleep and breakbeat house. The Bradford group's 'The Theme', issued as a single in 1989, is the opener on Warp Records' 10th anniversary 'Influences' compilation album and was cited as a major inspiration by The Chemical Brothers.

'1-Six-7-Nine-1' has a classic feel harking right back to that era, nodding to techno in its simple, preset sound palette and spacious, minimal arrangement, but equally embracing house music's irresistible syncopations and uplifting feel. The record is the first release on Soundtracs, a new label set up by Edzy and fellow late 80s/early 90s pioneer Mark Gamble, aka Rhythmic. As well as recording together as Dope Test Cheats and remixing each other's work, the pair having been busy assembling the bleep house supergroup The Originators.

Rhythmic's remix of '1-Six-7-Nine-1' leans a little more towards techno than house, starting with a swamp of soft-edged, eerie chords before a hyperactive arpeggio cuts in and kicks the track into orbit. The beats come from the sharp and metallic world of drum machine hardware. Those trademark bleeps are very much in evidence too, but despite its icy sounding ingredients, a truly inviting soulful vibe and infectious funkiness emerges as the mix takes hold. If you loved LFO and Nightmares On Wax, or the earlier work of Orbital and Aphex Twin, this should be right up your street.

"The remix started with a simple sample of the main riff using the new sampling feature in Omnisphere 2," says Mark Gamble. "Once that audio was on screen, I fired a huge analogue bass patch through it, and programmed and EQ'd through a Jade desk, using an array of old Dolby units. Following on from Edzy's structure, the track basically built itself! My objective was to achieve a mix that complemented the deep, solid feel of the original. To do that, I chose a minimal approach which, from reading the promo reports from DJs and radio stations, I think I just about achieved."

"Having such a luminary in UK dance music as Mark Gamble to call on as remixer is not a bad position to be in," laughs Edzy. "The fact that the two of us have spent all year recording together as Dope Test Cheats and have recently joined with three of our music making pals – Mark Archer [Altern 8], Gez Varley [LFO] and Winston Hazel [Forgemasters] – to form The Originators means Mark and I have been spending far too

much time together lately. I can get him to agree to remixing anything if enough alcohol has been poured down him."

"Edzy's original was recorded in his own Funk Labs Studio, carrying with it those trademark sounds we have come to expect from his solo releases and his work in Unique 3," adds Mark. "Having recently launched the Soundtracs label, we were separately scouring through hard drives of audio, looking for a project to work on for the first release. But our search was cut short after just a few days, while we were away rehearsing the new Originators live show. On the second night, Mark Archer kept us – and most of the hotel – awake by blasting out '1-Six-7-Nine-1'. We'd found our first release."



Listen to The Remix Review radio show on the first and third Thursday of each month at 3-5pm GMT at [www.hoxton.fm](http://www.hoxton.fm)

Internationally renowned manufacturer of high quality analogue and digital studio products, PRISM SOUND is supporting the B-SIDE PROJECT, which promotes new artists and provides additional platforms for live electronic music and remix productions. You can register to be involved in the B-Side Project network by visiting [www.b-sideproject.org](http://www.b-sideproject.org)

Prism Sound are continuing their Mic To Monitor tour in the UK after successful events in the US in early September, with a series of free educational seminars and workshops taking place in key UK cities throughout October. Aimed at anyone involved in music production, from students to professionals, the Mic To Monitor events are designed to dispel the many myths surrounding the recording process. Each seminar features presentations from recording professionals, who will answer audience questions about technology and techniques. There will also be an opportunity to demo and win recording equipment. For more information and to sign up, search for forthcoming events at [www.prismsound.com](http://www.prismsound.com)



# ANATOMY OF A RECORD SLEEVE

In which our man FAT ROLAND uncovers the hidden meanings of classic electronic album covers. This month, 'Doctor Adamski's Musical Pharmacy'. That's by ADAMSKI, that is

Justin Bieber designed this bit of the cover while playing hockey with a moose. He's SO Canadian

"We need a fancy logo. Needs to look professional. Oh and it has to look like a frog climbing into an eyeball"

Reet modern, innit. I remember when this part of the album cover was just fields

Diplo. You know Diplo. What? No, you're thinking of the dinosaur. What? No, that's that big Lego stuff. Oh never mind

Seriously, you've never seen Diplo before? He produced that song. About that thing. No? Suit yerself

An album cover for the Instagram generation. A decade ago, this would have just been a picture of MySpace Tom

Justin Bieber designed this bit of the cover while scribbling happy faces in Anne Frank's diary. LOL! Sigh

Someone says "bum" about 37 minutes in. Tee-hee. I just said "bum"

Justin Bieber's underwear designed this bit of the cover. Yes, it's sentient. Yes, the skid marks will kill us all

You can tell this is Skrillex because he sounds like his music is trying to escape a particularly unusual hostage situation

You can tell this is Skrillex because it looks like his hair is trying to escape a particularly unusual hostage situation

Endless pictures of Skrillex and Diplo together. Skrillex and Diplo. Diplo and Skrillex. It's like their Facebook feeds have had seizures

Worst. Game. Of. Where's. Wally. Ever

Er, EXCUSE ME, Husker Du would like their dots back, thank you very much

US label responsible for the viral YouTube hits 'Leave Gangnam Alone', 'Sneezing Chocolate Panda Rain' and 'Some Bloke Dancing And That'

They call themselves Jack U, Jack being the one with the pigeons in Coronation Street. No not Norris. The other one. Can't remember his name

I can't believe you've never heard of... What? No, he's NOT related to J-Lo. Now you're being ridiculous

This is an example of a popular EDM album. EDM, of course, stands for Er, no thanks, I'll listen to Depeche Mode instead

Contains guest vocals from all the young stars of today: Vera Lynn, Jive Bunny, The Roly Polys, Trev And Simon...

That's right, someone trademarked the smiley face. Skrillex now owns your smile. That's why he's sitting on your face

The average age of the Jack U production team is so low, if the number was a temperature, it would freeze the sun



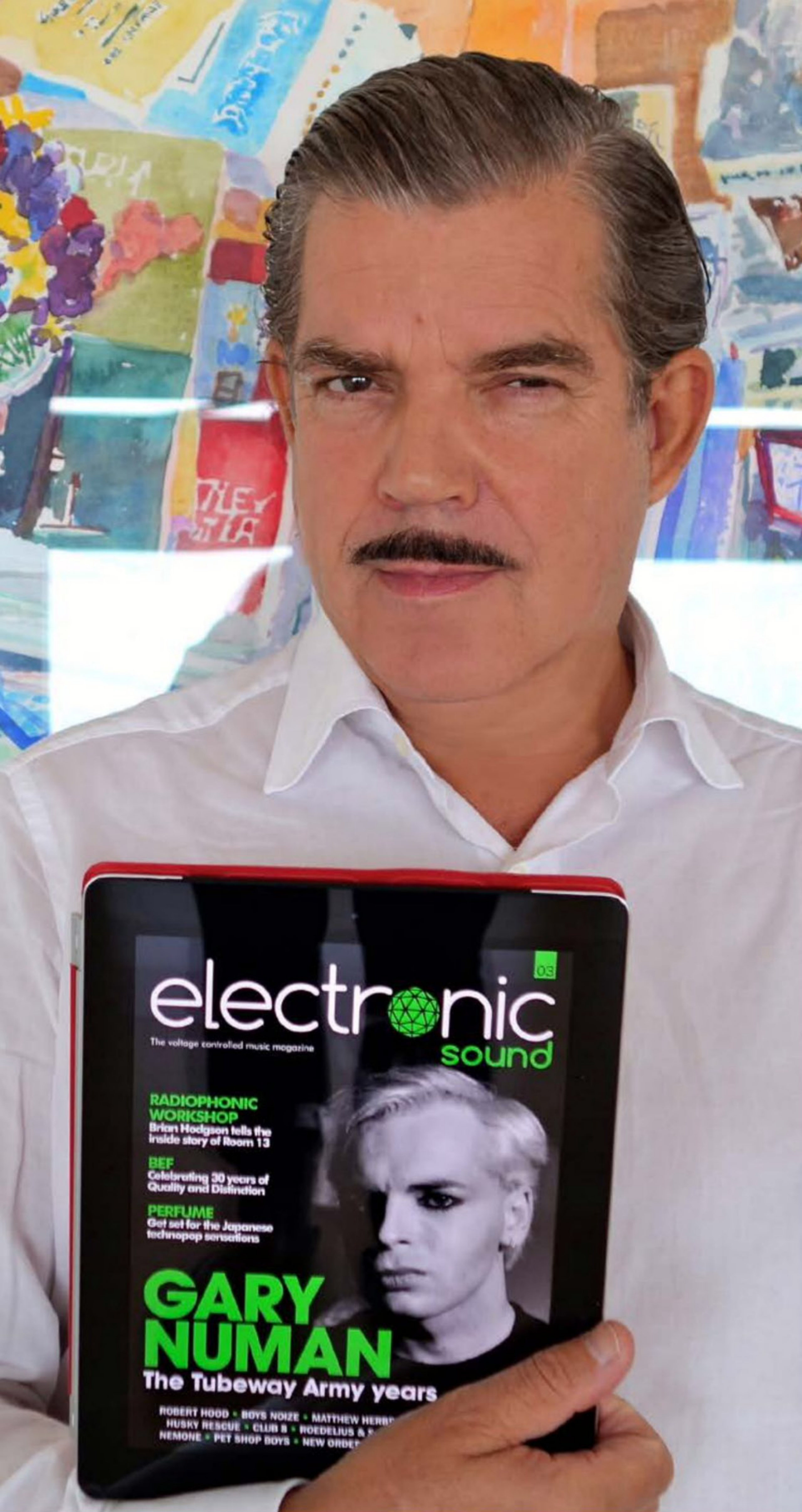
This particular U was licensed from Prince, aka The Artist Now Known As Prince, aka The Artist Sadly Never Known As King Of The Purple Sex Pixies

Music for young people. This ain't for you, gramps. Get back to whittling your zimmer frame

Artistic director's note: "Max Spielmann darkroom explosion"



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# LANDMARKS ORCHESTRAL M 'ENOLA GAY'

Looking back through the mists of time to 1980, **ANDY McCLUSKEY** talks us through the making of **OMD's** smash hit single. Synths out of a catalogue, a scandal with 'Swap Shop', Airfix models – it's a tale that's got it all

Interview: **MAT SMITH**

I had wanted to write a song about Enola Gay for some time. Both Paul Humphries and I grew up being fascinated by Second World War airplanes and were complete Airfix anoraks. If you're interested in Second World War aircraft, you eventually come to the Enola Gay B-29 Superfortress, which, despite being the most technologically-advanced pressurised aeroplane, was still somewhat primitive and Heath Robinson-esque in comparison to modern planes, and I think that was part of the fascination.

When you start to research the story, it has a very complicated human and moral – some would say immoral – dimension, the most bizarre thing about it being that Enola Gay was the name of the pilot's mother. He believed he was doing something that was morally right. Things are done in warfare that are beyond the normal understanding of humanity, morals or ethics. The Enola Gay story was a very, very deep subject, and yet I was quite concerned not to deliver the lyrics in a purely didactic way. I did want to make them slightly more obscure. To this day I don't know why I chose to wrap the lyrics in what could be conceived as careful metaphor, to the point where some people thought it was a love song.

The music was completely intuitive. I'm not a trained musician, I can't read or write music, so it was all done by ear. I sat down at an organ in the back room of Paul's mum's house – he was on a YTS scheme and had to go and rebuild a swimming pool – and I just sat there and I played the four chords in my usual three-fingered crabbed way, and started writing the melody. To this day I still can't play the melody at full speed. All of the harmonics were just the notes that sounded right to me.

One of the most iconic parts of the song – the drum machine pattern on the Roland CR-78 – was actually the very last thing that went on the track. I can't even remember why we decided that we wanted a drum machine. We thought it was maybe a bit boring to have a straight drum kit. The CR-78 was the first programmable drum machine. Most drum machines in those days had Rock 1, Rock 2, Waltz and so on, and you just pressed buttons and it played the rhythm, but the 'Enola Gay' pattern was completely programmed by us on the CR-78, it wasn't a preset.







# MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK

There are acoustic drums on the song, but they were not played as a live kit. Our poor drummer Malcolm Holmes was driven to distraction by this because we didn't want the drums playing in a rock 'n' roll, clattered style. We insisted that he put down each drum separately, and no cymbals were allowed, and that took a long time. That actually created a problem, we had to add in the big fill that comes back out into the last melody, because he'd missed a beat. We refused to go back and fix it because it had taken so long to put the drums down.

Everything on 'Enola Gay' was played by hand. It was before computers and sequencers and before MIDI. Everything was following the CR-78 drum machine. The melody is triple-tracked which gives it its fat harmonic sound, but because it's all played by hand, each note doesn't land in exactly the same place. It means it's got a slightly wandering, multi-timbral fuzziness to it.

We used a Korg Micro-Preset and a Roland SH-09 for the melodies. We also used an old 1960s Vox Jaguar organ banged through a load of reverb and harmonisers to make it sound less tinny. We bought the Korg from my mother's catalogue. It was £7.36 for 36 weeks, which was all we could afford out of our dole money. It is one of the most primitive synthesisers you will ever come across. It's got a series of buttons for different instrument sounds, but it doesn't matter what button you press, the synth just goes 'ennnnhhhhhhh'. That's one of the reasons our early synth parts are triple-tracked and swamped in reverb, to try and make the sound slightly less like an electronic kazoo!

We recorded the track with Mike Howlett. Mike was put in with us because we were a bit crash-bang-wallop in the early days. We didn't really know what we were doing and so he was installed to slow us down. He did a good job, produced three of our biggest singles, but he also allowed us to do it our way. We did things in a way that no other band would do, partly because we refused to follow what we perceived to be rock 'n' roll clichés and partly because we didn't know any better! He didn't come in and say, "That's not the way you do it". If a producer had come in and done that, first we'd have probably had an argument with them, and second it wouldn't have sounded as distinctive.

[Saturday morning BBC TV children's show] 'Swap Shop' did ban the track. They were concerned about the use of the word "gay", that the song was some sort of surreptitious way of trying to corrupt the youth because they couldn't work out what the lyrics were about. They thought it was a homosexual anthem masquerading as a pop song, but yet apparently about an aeroplane to make it seem like a red herring. Another of the issues that we encountered at the time was people saying we had a song that was about something that was frankly appalling and yet it was in the charts, people were dancing around to it, it had a jolly, bright candy floss melody – how could I justify that? Frankly I couldn't. My only defence of writing a cheerful pop song about such a dark period of human history was to say that it's less strange and surreal than it is to drop an atom bomb from an aeroplane named after your mother.

'Enola Gay' is absolutely a song I still enjoy. I don't really understand the mentality of people who feel that their hits become some sort of albatross. It's a blessing to you, you should celebrate it and when you have an opportunity to play it live you should treat it with the respect that it deserves, and which the audience are going to give it. Don't go out there and make excuses and mess around with it by doing some acoustic version of it. Go out there and play it the way you wrote it and the way it's supposed to be heard. I have no time at all for people who whinge that they're bored of playing their hits. It's like saying you're bored of your eldest child. I don't understand it at all.

OMD's 'Dazzle Ships Live At The Liverpool Museum' DVD is out now





RÜDIGER ESCH

# DESTIN DÜSSE







# RELATION WORLD OR F





Kraftwerk, Neu!, DAF, Die Krupps, Propaganda and Der Plan are just some of the superb groups the German city of Düsseldorf has given us over the years. So what the heck are they putting in the water there? **RÜDIGER ESCH**, the bass player of **DIE KRUPPS** and the author of '**ELECTRI\_CITY – ELECTRONIC MUSIC FROM DÜSSELDORF**', begins our journey to the heart of electronic music's powerplant with some invaluable inside knowledge

Pictures: **MARKUS LUIGS**

As Ralf Hütter says on 'Techno Pop', "Es wird immer weiter gehen, Musik als Träger von Ideen", which translates as "Synthetic electronic sound, industrial rhythms all around".

Just like Memphis for rock 'n' roll, Düsseldorf is regarded as the Mecca for electronic music. Groundbreaking tracks like DAF's 'Der Mussolini' and Die Krupps' 'Wahre Arbeit, Wahrer Lohn', as well as chart successes such as Kraftwerk's 'The Model' and Propaganda's 'Dr Mabuse', established Düsseldorf's success almost overnight, but why was that?

In hindsight, bands like Kraftwerk, Neu!, DAF, La Düsseldorf and Rheingold gave Düsseldorf a haunting aural image of a post-war industrial city that became a melting pot for music, fashion, art and design. It was the liberal state of mind in this most western part of Germany that attracted artists like Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik to teach at our art academy, located right next to the big party district of Altstadt.

As well as the Berlin school of electronic music, there has always been the Düsseldorf school, which was more minimalistic and more modernistic. And so in between the art academy and the party district, grew a highly vibrant music scene based in experimental electronic music. The fashion industry, with its fairs and its photographers and so

on, was traditionally based in this part of the city too. It is no coincidence that 'The Model' is a song about a fashion model.

For many years, we had no attention, nor appreciation, for our musical heritage. There was a huge gap between the myth and the reality of being a musician here. It was only by travelling to other places that you are able to learn about your home town.

When I was touring with Die Krupps, I was surprised by the reactions we got outside of Germany. We liked travelling to play shows in the UK, the Low Countries and Scandinavia more than playing in our own country. To begin with, nobody understood our music at home. Because without recognition in the wider world, you're nobody at home. It was a lesson we learned the hard way. It was only when there was a Die Krupps record on the shelves at Rough Trade in London or Tower Records in New York that we started getting free drinks in Altstadt.

I explore the idea that Düsseldorf is the capital of electronic music in my book 'Electri\_City – Elektronische Musik Aus Düsseldorf'. It's an oral account of the early electronic scene in the city in the words of the musicians who there, as well as the bands that inspired by them. The book has been very well received in Germany, a reaction that took my rather





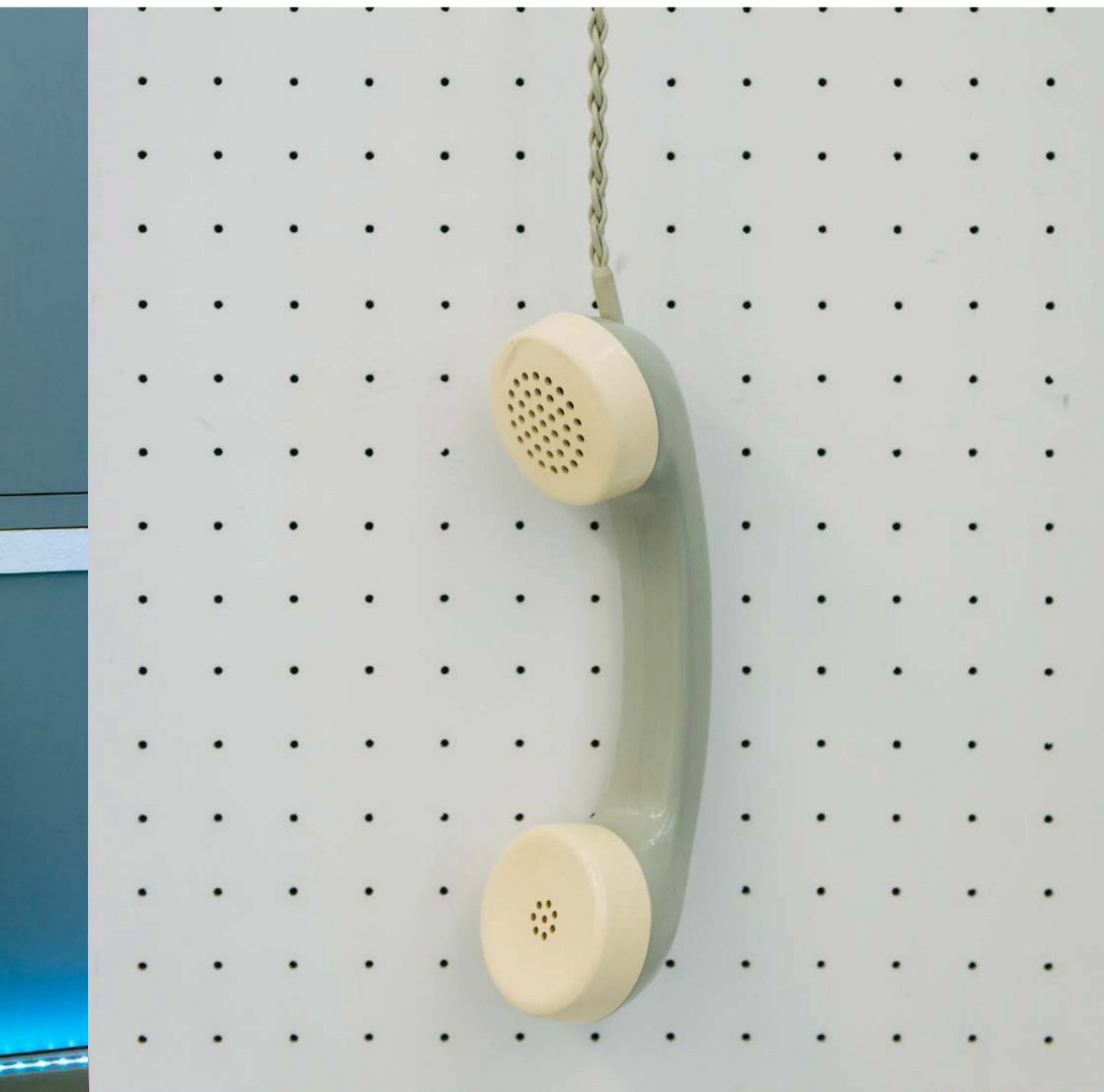
## ABOUT RÜDIGER ESCH

Born in Düsseldorf in 1966, Rüdiger Esch studied Modern German Literature and Philosophy at the city's Heinrich Heine University, specialising in Aesthetics. He has been an active part of the Düsseldorf music scene since 1983, playing in several punk outfits and forming a band with Klaus Dinger from Neu! and La Düsseldorf in 1987. Rudi Esch joined Die Krupps the following year and has been responsible for bass guitar duties in the band right through until today.

conservative publishing house in Berlin by surprise. They thought 'Electri\_City' would only be of limited appeal, but it turns out that many people who bought it were interested in it as a blueprint for the DIY, experimental punk and new wave spirit of the late 1970s and early 80s.

'Electri\_City' talks about how you can create something unique and outstanding by experimenting with new technology – and that is essentially the story of Düsseldorf. We always believed there was a brighter future in music besides all the 12-bar blues patterns in the world. People like Ralf Hütter and Michael Rother were looking for an exciting new German sound, looking for a Volksmusik for the 21st century. And this is what the bands of the fourth generation of the city's electronic scene are still doing. They transform their ideas into music for the future and we have many great young artists keeping up that spirit.







# THE ELECTRI\_CITY *Conference*

Rüdiger Esch is one of the organisers of the Electri\_City Conference, which takes place in the city between 29 and 31 October, where Düsseldorf's music tradition and its future will be explored.

The three-day event will focus on the global importance of Düsseldorf's pop cultural history and will include lectures, discussions, concerts and DJ sets, featuring many musicians and cultural producers from the city's electronic music scene, as well as a number of international guests. The bill includes Andy McCluskey, Daniel Miller, Martyn Ware, Peter Hook and Michael Rother. Registered visitors will be able to look around the site of the old Kling Klang studio, which while now an empty space still has a great vibe.

## WATCH THE VIDEO

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=YIEYTIKW4KS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIEYTIKW4KS)

## 'ELECTRI\_CITY' LINKS

### Facebook

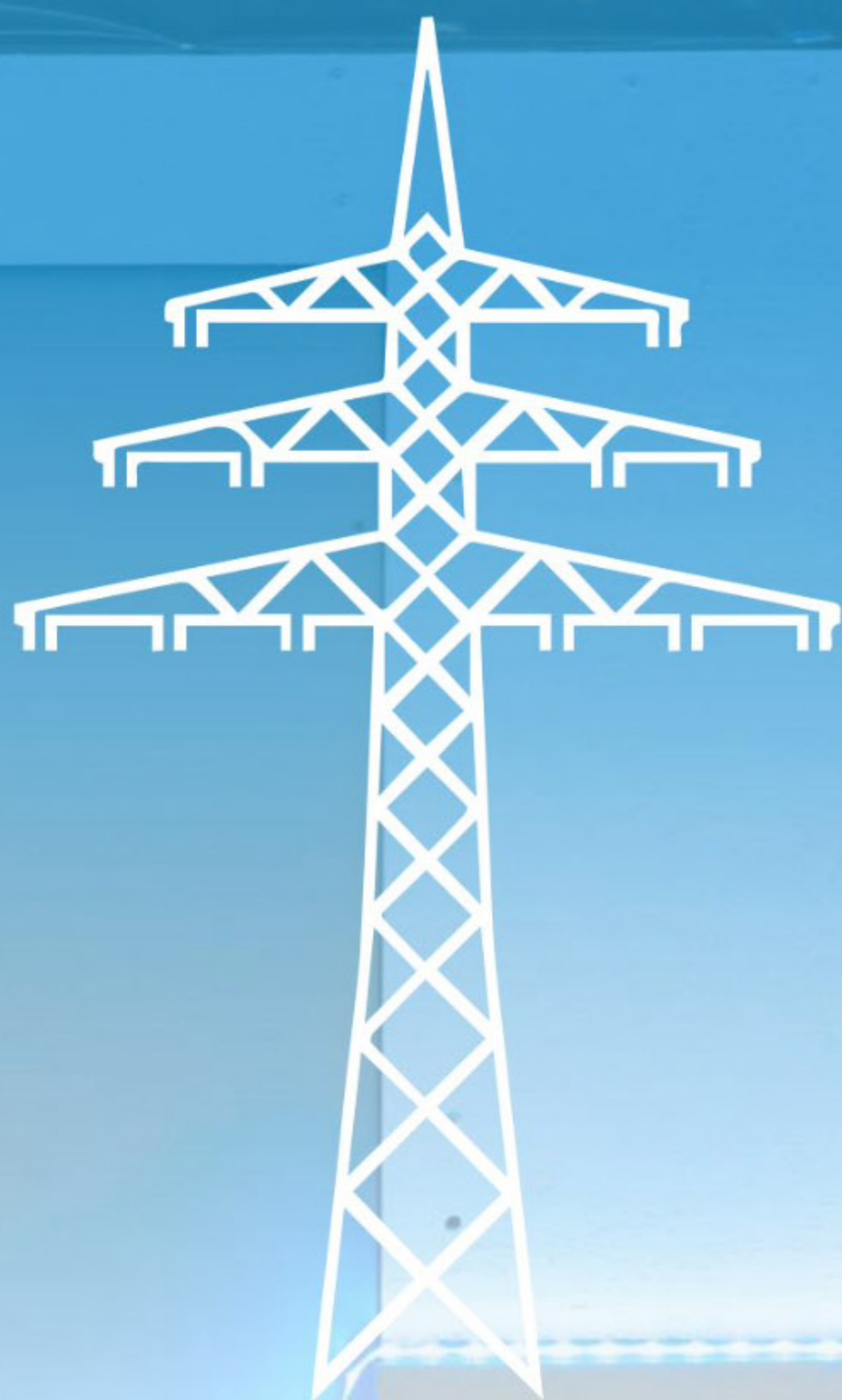
[www.facebook.com/Electri.city.Esch](http://www.facebook.com/Electri.city.Esch)

### Düsseldorf conference, 29-31 October

[www.electricity-conference.com/en/](http://www.electricity-conference.com/en/)

### 'Electri\_City' on Amazon

[www.amazon.co.uk/R%C3%BCdiger-Esch/e/B00H41JTKU/ref=ntt\\_dp\\_epwbk\\_0](http://www.amazon.co.uk/R%C3%BCdiger-Esch/e/B00H41JTKU/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0)





# TAKING THE TRANS EUROPE EXPRESS

From Paris to Vienna to Düsseldorf, our very own man on the train follows the route laid out on 'TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS' for a unique **TOUR DE KRAFTWERK**

Words: **JOOLS STONE**







I got my first hi-fi for my 15th birthday, in the sweltering summer of 1989. It was Amstrad's finest, a symphony of clackety plastic and rickety draws, with fetching pink and grey decals. With my hardware patently lacking in sophistication, I compensated with a careful selection of discs to road test it. My relatively late blooming as a record buyer means I can proudly answer the question "What was the first record you bought?" with a resounding "Kraftwerk's 'Tour De France' 12-inch, the François Kevorkian remixes, bought from Soho's Reckless Records, since you're asking" (worry not, my first cassette albums – Nick Kershaw's 'The Riddle' and a-ha's 'Hunting High And Low' – swiftly deflate any cachet).

That same summer, I tested the jerky action of the CD draw with 'Trans-Europe Express'. I vividly remember being blown away by the breaking glass effect on 'Showroom Dummies'. It was the closest I'd got to experiencing 3D sound and felt as though I'd still be picking shards of audial Plexiglas out of my hair for weeks to come. Two years later, my very first bona fide gig was Kraftwerk at the Brixton Academy in London, when they were touring their 1991 greatest hits remix package, 'The Mix'.

It's fair to say that Kraftwerk are irrevocably entwined with my personal musical DNA and have had a huge emotional impact on my life in countless ways. As someone who went on to also develop a passion for travelling by train, it's tempting to muse on how much of that can be attributed to hearing 'Trans-Europe Express' in those formative years.

For a teenager living in self-imposed bedroom isolation in suburban Bromley, never having ventured any further towards the glittering shores of continental Europe than Broadstairs, "Parks, hotels and palaces / Europe endless" sure sounded like an impossibly glamorous proposition. I was especially intrigued by Düsseldorf, the mothership and home to the hallowed Kling Klang Studio, my Cavern Club, Brill Building and Salford Lad's Club all rolled into one.

A few weeks ago, I decided it was high time I made the ultimate music pilgrimage and walked the very allees and strasses where my personal Fab Four strutted their synthesised stuff. Following the route of the old Trans-Europe Express, a rather niche Destination Düsseldorf InterRail adventure is about to begin.

### STATION TO STATION

Forgive the brief trainspotter interlude here, but it may interest you to know that the Trans Europe Express was not a single train journey. It was actually an entire European rail network, stretching from Copenhagen to Italy's Messina Strait (north to south) and from Barcelona to Vienna (west to east). At its height, it took in some 130 destinations.

Established in the late 1950s, the TEE service was aimed squarely at well-heeled business travellers, with First Class only cars and schedules making same-day returns entirely feasible. In an era long before budget airlines criss-crossed the map,

before Europe's first high-speed trains were introduced, and when vast swathes of the continent lay shrouded behind the Iron Curtain, the TEE seemed to express a sense of exciting possibilities and hope for the future. Like the Kraftwerk song itself, it managed to be both nostalgic and futuristic all at once.

Although the TEE network was surpassed by the mid-80s, today's high-speed trains like France's TGV and Germany's ICE keep the spirit of the enterprise very much alive. Their spacious, civilised and often surprisingly affordable services are arguably the envy of Europe. These are the trains that I am taking, following the journey documented by Kraftwerk, from Paris to Vienna to Düsseldorf.



# KRAFTWERK TRANSEUROPAEXPRES



Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof Station



TGV JOURNEY



### LEAVE PARIS IN THE MORNING

Once Kraftwerk had enjoyed a little international success, they gravitated towards Paris, a city where they remodelled their image away from their staunch Teutonic roots towards a decidedly more European aesthetic. It was here that they were styled and photographed for the 'Trans-Europe Express' album cover and where they introduced fragments of French to their linguistic armoury. Paris was also where they first met Iggy Pop and David Bowie, who took them to chichi nightclubs to rub shoulders with the rich and famous.

After all, what self-respecting mid-70s European flâneur wouldn't want a "rendezvous on Champs-Élysées", a byword for cosmopolitan urbanity? Nowadays, the boulevard's last vestiges of glamour are overshadowed by the over-familiar Quick Burgers and Gap stores. The over-priced bistros are still there, but the placements of beggars prostrating themselves on all fours along the pavement may make your fillet mignon a little harder to swallow. Ignore the tall box hedges and Tricolores, squint a bit, and you could easily be on London's Oxford Street.

The definitive Parisian stop on the Kraftwerk map is Le Train Bleu, the opulent restaurant on the upper floor of Gare de Lyon. With its high ceilings, rococo interiors and old school service, it speaks of the elegance and allure of international rail travel in a way that few modern station eateries do. Despite the heady surroundings, you can enjoy a three-course dinner here for 60 euros a head. So I do just that, treating myself to the house specialty rhum baba, which was accompanied by a bottle of Saint James rum, casually left on the table.

From one side, you can look out onto the train platforms ready to whisk you to Nice, Geneva, Milan and beyond. From the other, the open windows give views of the plaza and the neon signs of L'Européen Bistro. This was the spot where, over dinner with their friend Paul Alessandrini, Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider hit upon the idea for the 'Trans-Europe Express' album. You can well imagine how the rarefied environment of Le Train Bleu inspired excitement for the concept, especially at a time when Kraftwerk's career and international profile was really gathering diesel. They even celebrated the release of the album by commandeering an entire vintage train for a press junket, shuttling critics to Reims and back, the album's shimmering contours blasting out from the tinny speakers.

Thinking about it, this also marks the point where the band's obsession with modes of transport took a greener turn, going from cars to trains before eventually getting to bicycles. If Ralf Hütter ever deigns to spend some time in the studio again, perhaps Kraftwerk's next opus will be a hymn to the joys of speed walking.







ARCHITECTURAL EXCESSES OF THE RINGSTRASSE



BISTRO ON THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES

## IN VIENNA WE DRIP...

Vienna poleaxes me with an insufferable soup of humidity. I take shelter in the shadow of the Riesenrad, the big wheel at the Prater Amusement Park, where Orson Welles gave his famous cuckoo clock speech in 'The Third Man'.

Like a late summer wasp, I stagger around the wedding cake-like architectural excesses of the Ringstrasse in a daze, searching in vain for the Franz Schubert Memorial. I finally give up the ghost and settle down for an al fresco pizza in the Stadtpark, a handsome sprawl of greenery with a deep river basin, dotted with crumbling white remnants of almost Romanesque statuary.

Late night cafés are one Viennese institution that's very much alive and kicking, ranging from lavish hotel drawing rooms serving tea and Sachertorte (a type of chocolate tart) to humbler, more bohemian places where the intelligentsia browse newspapers in cosy booths over steaming bowls of goulash. Sadly, I fail to find one, having banked on discovering a gem by Vienna Meidling station, where the night train to Munich awaits. The area is a virtual wasteland and the closest I get to recreating this key part of my journey is the McCafe by some roadworks next door to the station.

Such are the realities of whistle-stop InterRail trips. The best laid plans of mice and mensch are often taken hostage by mundane practicalities, personal energy levels and basic map reading competency. If only Europe really was endless and life was timeless...

## ABZUG MUNICH

Munich doesn't actually feature in 'Trans-Europe Express', but it makes a sensible journey marker none the less, breaking up a 12-hour trip with a utilitarian, but entirely comfy, Hungarian-run night train.

The city does not reveal many obvious Kraftwerk landmarks, but the funny thing about embarking on a laser-focused odyssey like this is that, after a while, everything seems to glimmer with a certain Kraftwerk sheen anyway. One of Munich's prime tourist attractions, for instance, is the resolutely corporate and palatial BMW Welt. And among all the gauche supercars and F1 testosterone engines sits a humble vintage VW Beetle, as seen through the car windscreen on the original German artwork of 'Autobahn'.

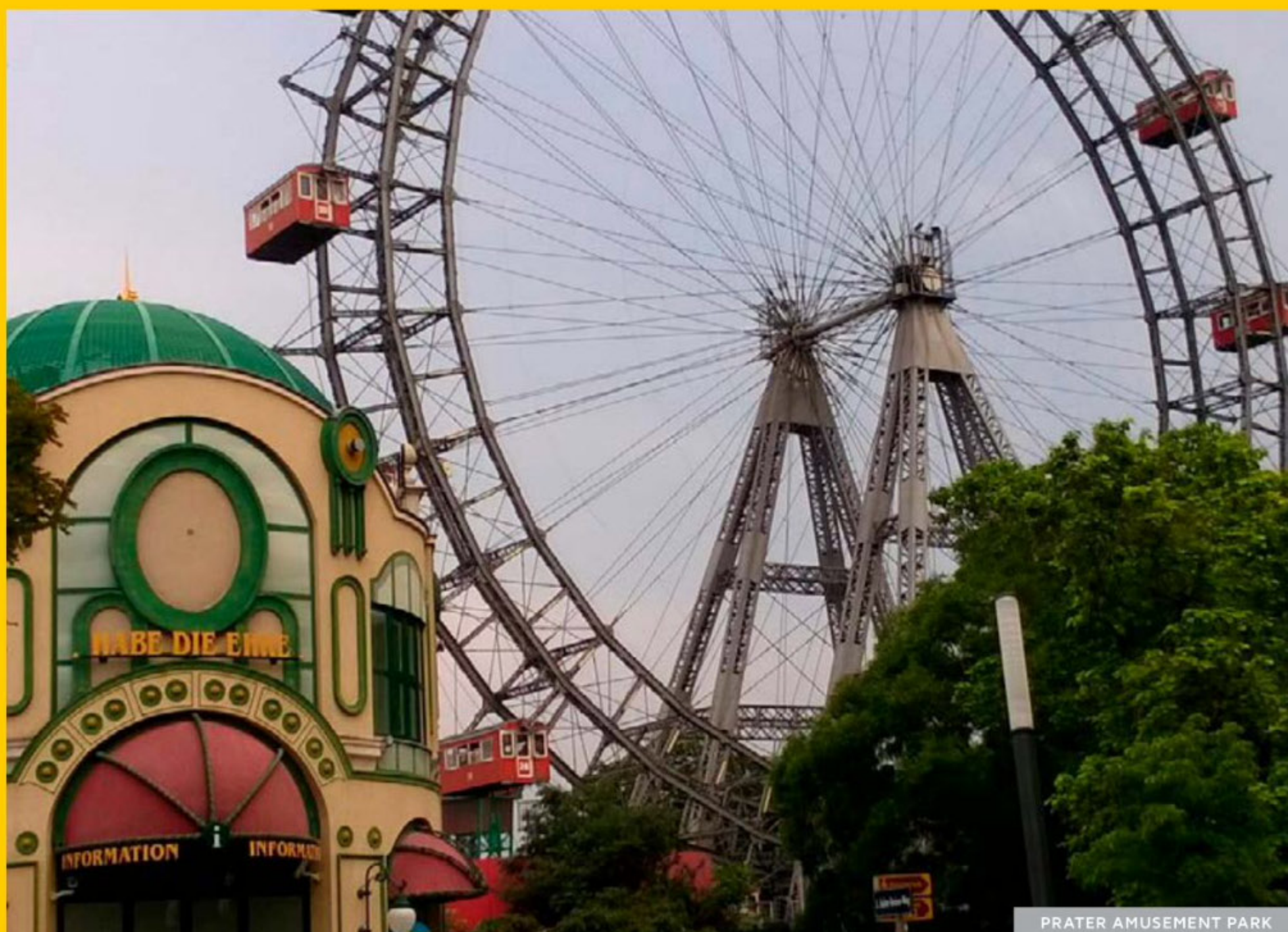
In the city's excellent contemporary art gallery, the Lenbachhaus, which houses surrealist paintings of men hunched over transistor radios and surgeons examining their own freshly dissected eyeballs, there's a room showcasing the disturbing work of Joseph Beuys, one of Düsseldorf's most influential artists. Meanwhile, on the platform of one of the brightly lit U-Bahn stations, my attention is immediately arrested by what is clearly a poster for Kraftwerk... which turns out to be a furniture showroom.



## DESTINATION DÜSSELDORF

A pair of ICE trains finally deliver me to Düsseldorf in eight hours, via a stop-off at Frankfurt Flughafen, another deep warren of corporate chrome and steel that echoes the BMW Welt. Exiting Düsseldorf Hauptbahnhof under a pregnant sky, I'm greeted by a statue of a suited figure wielding a camera mounted on a poster case, a temporary art project by Christoph Poggeler. First impressions reveal a city that is as strikingly modern (there are precious few pre-war buildings) as it is multicultural.

There are rows of 24-hour imbisses (kebab shops, as we know them) and shisha bars flanking the streets around the station and an extensive Japanese district where even the butcher shops serve sashimi steak labelled with kanji. Japanese electronics businesses arrived in the nearby industrial Ruhr Valley in the 1950s, but a sizeable Japanese population chose the more amenable city for their home, which might explain Kraftwerk's willingness to record Japanese language versions of some of their tracks, such as 'Pocket Calculator' (recalibrated as 'Dentaku').







## DIGITAL DELTA

If Düsseldorf is the “Memphis of electronic music”, then the Rhine is surely the equivalent of the Mississippi. Like the Mississippi, it is broad, powerful and churning. The main Düsseldorf crossing, the Theodor Heuss Bridge, recalls the classic design of San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge.

Like every German city worth its sauerkraut, Düsseldorf has a TV tower, the Rheinturm. This one has the world’s largest digital clock, made by Seiko, with an illuminated counter on the exterior giving a precise (if convoluted) read-out, which again seems eminently Kraftwerky. From the bar at the top of the tower, you get a proper sense of the city’s scale and industrial clout. The bar’s neon strip lighting creates laser rays that reach out across the bold Frank Gehry buildings, the construction work bursting from every corner and the freight barges constantly plying the river.

I stop in at Verige, one of the city’s oldest bierhalls, where my request for a coke is gruffly demurred, before ending the night in the boho Bistro Zicke on Berger Allee, the very street where the four robotniks shared a house during their mid-1970s prime. The building at 9 Berger Allee is long demolished, but the bench outside the gastrobar is decorated in homage to Fritz Lang’s ‘Metropolis’. True to form, Kraftwerk have been characteristically elusive on this pilgrimage, but their ghosts are everywhere.



LENBACHHAUS GALLERY



## KRAFTWERK IN CONTEXT

Surprisingly, there is no official Kraftwerk guided tour of Düsseldorf, so I take the next best thing – the tourist board's We Love Music Tour. It was instigated on the back of the city hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2011 and it seems that I'm the first person to take the tour in English. Kraftwerk may share the limelight on this tour with other notaries, such as Die Krupps and DAF, but it's a great way of mapping out the cultural context from whence they came.

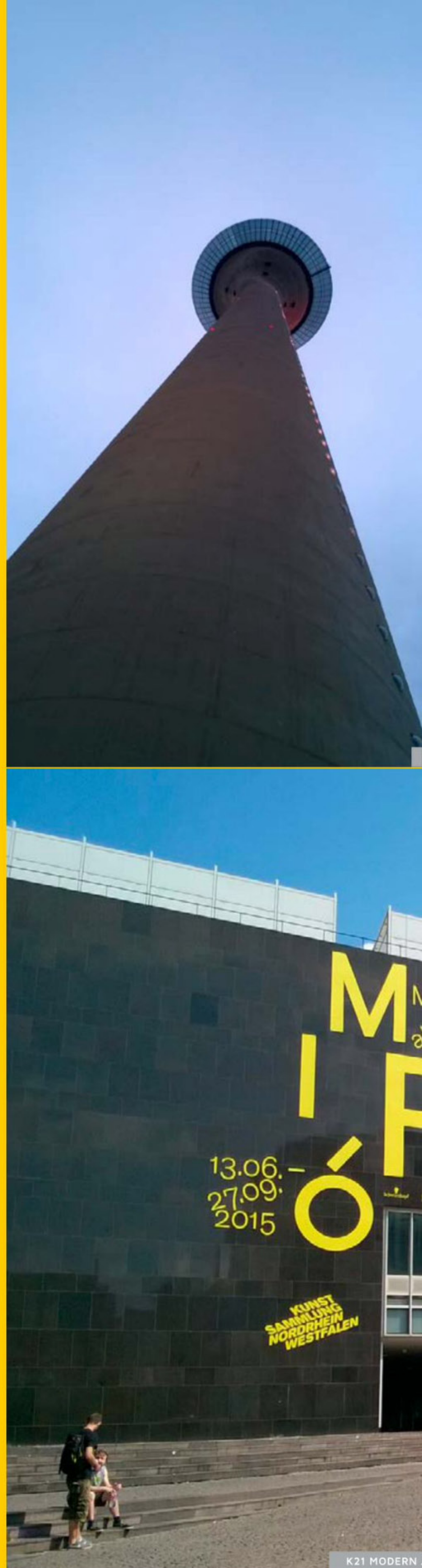
The Rhine river walk is one of the city's main tourist drags, lined with seafood restaurants, bars and cabaret clubs. On the horizon, you can see the skyscraper built by Florian Schneider's architect father. Across the water, just along from a rickety funfair, is the upmarket district of Oberkassel, where both Hütter and Schneider still live. The tour guide says they do so in virtual anonymity, the city's youth largely unaware of their existence let alone their influence on the bulk of their listening matter. I ask the guide about the local kids' jam of choice. "Oh, you know, just the usual R&B shit" comes her off-hand reply.

## SHOUTING SCHLAGER SCHLAGER SCHLAGER

In the window of a funeral parlour, there's an intriguing display in tribute to Udo Jürgens, a much-loved local schlager singer. Schlager was Germany's contribution to easy listening, a folksy strain of Eurovision-friendly pop. Unapologetically schmaltzy and desperately uncool, it signifies the musical vacuum from which Kraftwerk and their contemporaries emerged.

In an increasingly rare interview, this time with Rolling Stone magazine, Hütter recently proclaimed that "We came from nowhere". We know this to be true in terms of Kraftwerk's groundbreaking musical palette, of course, but his Year Zero stance somehow seems all the more valid knowing the state of German post-war pop. That said, and though I'm sure Hütter would be horrified to hear it, there are arguably traces of schlager in some of the band's charmingly naive English vocals on the likes of 'Computer Love' and 'The Model'.

Aside from schlager, Anglophonic music dominated Düsseldorf's pre-70s musical landscape, thanks largely to the influence of British Forces Radio. Even Wolfgang Flür started out in cover bands like the Beethovens, bashing out ersatz Mersey beats in the sweaty pubs and clubs of the Altstadt district. The area is the main entertainment zone of the city and has been described as "the world's longest bar" on account of the number and density of its watering holes.







## BEUYS KEEP SWINGING

Düsseldorf's wider art scene was far more progressive and experimental, providing another crucial piece of the Kraftwerk puzzle. Our old friend Joseph Beuys played a pivotal role by setting up the legendary Cream Cheese club, a venue for underground art happenings where the band staged their first multimedia shows.

What was once one of Europe's hippest joints is now a fairly anonymous office building, but you can still see Beuys' controversial stove pipe sculpture sprouting surreally from the exterior wall of the Kunsthalle Museum. I'm no art historian, but to me it seems to say, "This is modern art, growing unlovingly from the concrete and industrial grime that surrounds us and shapes us, whether you like it or not". It's an unfussy manifesto that Kraftwerk would surely endorse.

Later on, I pass the Conservatoire, where Hütter and Schneider first met, and the piano-shaped K21 Modern Art Museum, which played host to one of Kraftwerk's eight-night 3D residencies in 2013. It was the first time the group had played in Düsseldorf since 1991. I also visit Königsallee, the centre of the city's fashion district, avoiding the steely glares of the sharp-suited doormen guarding the Hermes and Prada stores on the elegant Parisian-style boulevard. It was here that Claudia Schiffer was discovered. Fashion has long been one of Düsseldorf's key industries, providing plenty of inspiration for the likes of 'The Model' and 'Showroom Dummies' no doubt, not to mention the band's own iconic sartorial style, exemplified on the sleeve of 'The Man-Machine'.

## NO FLIM FLAM, JUST KLING KLANG

Kraftwerk's original Kling Klang studio is easily found in a drab courtyard down the decidedly unprepossessing Mintropstrasse, a street bordered by a small island of car tyres and given over to grubby-looking betting shops and strip bars. The building, which is apparently now managed by Schneider's daughter, still houses a variety of music, film and creative studios with evocative names like Staub Audio and Akustik+Tontechnik.

The old Elektro Müller sign is still there, but there is no fanfare, no plaque, no obvious attempt to commemorate the spot where Kraftwerk slaved over a hot mixing desk for some 35 years, siring most of their classic albums. The only visual clue is a single red and white traffic cone resting beside an orange plastic chair by the courtyard entrance. Coincidence or an oblique nod to those in the know? As ever, the Kraftwerk enigma remains deliciously intact. Outside there are bags of junk on the street alongside a discarded video player and a Hoover. Maybe these are part of the impromptu "tribute installation" too?

Turn left out the courtyard and it all makes perfect sense. Within a few steps, you can see the imposing brown brick tower of Düsseldorf Hauptbahnhof, leaving you with no doubt that Kraftwerk's recording sessions would have been punctuated by a regular backing track of the trains' grinding brakes, screeches and, well, metallic klings and klangs. The rhythms of the rails must have been etched onto the group's psyche before the 'Trans-Europe Express' album was even a glint in Hütter and Schneider's ears.

Leaving the Kling Klang building behind me, I start thinking about what a fascinating trip this has been. Kraftwerk themselves remain as remote to me as ever, but I now have my own personal mental route map to accompany a record that still sounds wonderfully fresh yet intractably alien more than 25 years after I first alighted on it.

Visit Düsseldorf Tourism [www.duesseldorf-tourismus.de](http://www.duesseldorf-tourismus.de) For InterRail and all point-to-point train tickets, including Eurostar [uk.voyages-sncf.com/en](http://uk.voyages-sncf.com/en) With thanks to Hotel Sir Lord & Lady Astor, Düsseldorf [www.sir-astor.de](http://www.sir-astor.de)



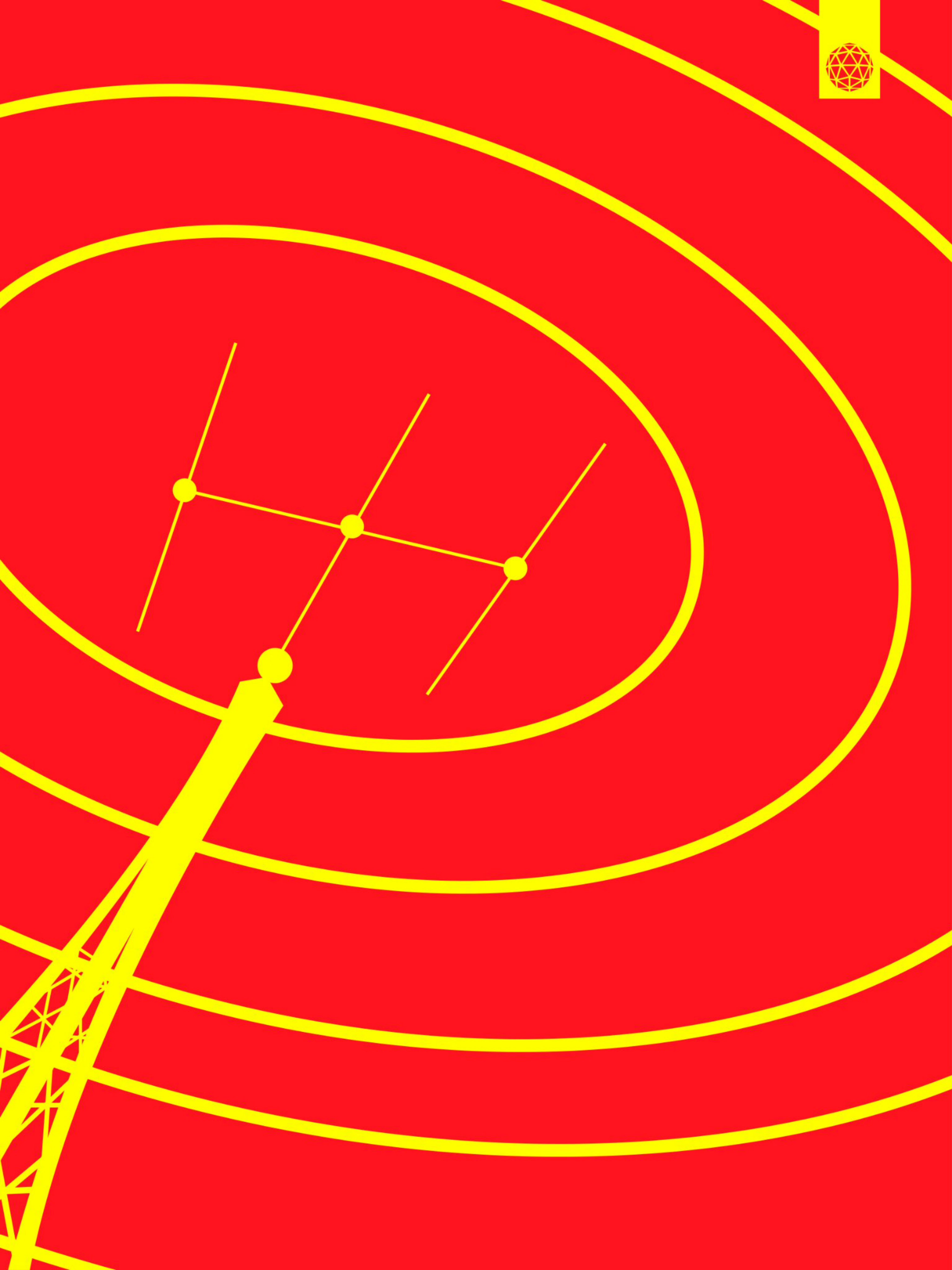
RADIO-ACTIVITY

# 1975: KRAFTWERK THE NUCLEAR POWERPLANT

Forty years since the release of Kraftwerk's 'Radio-Activity', we take a close look the dark horse of the five-album masterwork the band produced between 1974 and 1981

Words: **MARK ROLAND**







Forty years ago, Kraftwerk's fifth album 'Radio-Aktivität' was released, followed in short order by the UK version, 'Radio-Activity'. It was the first Kraftwerk album to have both German and English lyrics, and the first (but not the last) to be stuffed with puns, double meanings, ambiguity and a lightness of touch that belied a subtle complexity. The album seemed almost to poke fun at the burgeoning (especially in Germany) anti-nuke movement by celebrating nuclear power (or at least, not condemning it), while making jovial and literal observations about radio waves, wrapped up in a series of tracks that swerved between all-electronic pop, abstract sound design and musique concrete. As an album from four German guys wearing suits and short hair in 1975, when the top selling artists in the UK included Status Quo, Rod Stewart and the Bay City Rollers, it was a pretty bold bid for pop stardom.

"It was like our dedication to the age of radio, and radiation at the same time, breaking the taboo of including everyday political themes into the music," Ralf Hütter said in 1981 during an interview with – what else – a radio station (in this instance the British local station Beacon Radio).

But beneath the surface of a pæan to the golden age of radio lurks a more unsettling interpretation of the album's themes, never mind the nuclear energy controversy: the radio set featured on the cover was Nazi-era technology, the DKE38 or the Volksempfänger's smaller variant, the Deutscher Kleinempfänger. The radio set, which was also known as 'Goebbels schnauze' (which roughly translates as 'Goebbels' gob', Joesph Goebbels being Hitler's Reich Minister of Propaganda), was originally adorned with the Nazi's swastika and eagle logo, and was purposefully lumbered with a limited reception range of 200km so German citizens would not easily be able to access non-German broadcasts, while receiving Nazi propaganda with crystal clarity.

In that context, the ambiguous lyrical mentions of radioactivity "in the air, for you and me" apparently both innocent and uplifting, becomes imbued with deeply sinister undertones. Nuclear power was going to provide cheap, clean electricity and radioactivity enabled a huge breakthrough in medical treatments, but is dangerous to the point of threatening the extinction of mankind; radio, that helped to popularise Kraftwerk across America, and the joyful life-affirming rock 'n' roll revolution before them, but was used to spread the evil propaganda of the Nazi regime in Germany.

Later, Ralf and Florian came off the fence and made explicit

their feelings about nuclear power, adding a list of locations of nuclear accidents to the lyric in the intro of album's title song when it was played live, intoned by the scary Kraftwerk robot voice, as well as the word "stop" before every mention of radioactivity, and a new couplet: "Chain reaction and mutation / Contaminated population". Perhaps radioactivity itself is a metaphor for Nazism, casting it as a spreading darkness, that poisons all life. Maybe that's too literal an observation, or too convenient, or just lacking subtlety, but there's no doubt that 'Radio-Activity' is, both literally and figuratively, the darkest album in the Kraftwerk katalog.

In 1974, post-'Autobahn', hopes were high in the Kraftwerk camp. They'd left the august but stuffy label Phillips, which saw their albums released in the UK by the label's hip and slightly underground progressive rock subsidiary Vertigo. "We were a little embarrassed all the time with the German record company," said Ralf Hütter in 1981. "At that time they didn't understand where we were. They were in Hamburg, which is a very reactionary German town, very historically-oriented." As a side note, Kraftwerk were the third band Phillips signed, their labelmates Ihre Kinder and Frumpy, were bands who were essentially prog rockers firmly at the hippy end of what would later be dubbed krautrock by the ever-sensitive British music press.

Ralf and Florian had added their signatures to a new record deal with EMI and sister label Capitol in the United States, the home of The Beatles. And, like The Beatles with the Apple label, they'd been given their own vanity imprint – Kling Klang Schallplatten. Düsseldorf's Fab Four were going places and the reason for all this change and optimism was the surprise hit in the UK and the USA that Kraftwerk had enjoyed with the radio edit of the previous year's 'Autobahn' track.

The success of 'Autobahn' meant that Kraftwerk toured outside Germany for the first time, performing to unsuspecting audiences in the UK and, crucially, the USA. The bricolage of musicians that had come and gone during the band's experimental and hairy early years had inevitably evolved into a stable four-piece of clean-cut young men in suits. Ralf and Florian had been joined by Wolfgang Flür and Karl Bartos as full-time band members and the outfit had achieved the clean symmetry of a four-piece pop group.

Everything was set fair for Kraftwerk to do some serious business. 'Autobahn' had shown the world – and Ralf and Florian themselves – that there was an international market for short, catchy electronic pop songs, a lucrative





one outside of the long hair prog types who made up most of Kraftwerk's audience prior to the single's success. They just needed to create the right concept for the sleek new visionary Kraftwerk to introduce itself to the record buying public.

It was in America that the concept for 'Radio-Activity' started to come together. According to David Buckley's book 'Kraftwerk Publikation', Ralf and Florian first encountered the term "radio activity" in Billboard magazine, where America's all-important airplay charts were collated under that title. Our research turned up a section in 1975 called Radio Action, but the term "radio activity" was used repeatedly in the magazine – and the wider industry – to describe which records were hits with the nation's hundreds of radio stations. The USA then, with its network of all-important music radio stations encountered on the band's first US tour in April and May of 1975, was the key to Kraftwerk's future direction and ambition.

"Sometimes you have to leave your country and gain success somewhere else," says Wolfgang Flür of the American tour. "When we played the Beacon Theatre, the German papers who called us 'cold' and 'idiots' before, came across the ocean because we were playing in New York, so they thought, 'There must be something to them after all'. And then suddenly it was, 'Our boys electrify America! We knew all along!'. And when we were there, Ralf and Florian had to give many radio interviews, it was this radio activity that gave them the idea."

It's also noteworthy that Emil Schult accompanied the band on the US tour. Schult was Kraftwerk's confidant, sometime lyricist, one-time member (he played guitar and electric violin on a short summer tour of Germany in 1973) and general art consultant. Hütter once described Schult as the band's "guru", and he remains a Kraftwerk insider to this day.

Schult was first brought into the Kraftwerk sphere by Florian Schneider who saw him playing an electric violin in a band. He had studied under Joseph Beuys at Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie (at the nearby Music Academy, the sound that rang out to alert students of break time was composed by Stockhausen). Beuys, a former Luftwaffe pilot, was a radical tutor and exposed his students to the idea of art as performance and the artist's commitment to their work. Schult has said that "Bauhaus was omnipresent in Beuys' classes" and the influence of the Bauhaus has often been noted in Kraftwerk's output. Schult had been to the World Expo in New York in 1964 and seen its 'Futurama II'

exhibition, General Motors' extravagant sci-fi vision of life in the future, a large-scale model/ride that served to show Americans how motorways would connect their cities of the future.

"I started to buy vinyl electronic music from Phillips," Schult recently told Electronic Beats magazine. "There were only a couple of albums available in the 1960s, and I played them to death. It seemed as if it took ages before more than just a few bands started to experiment with synthesisers."

It's pretty obvious that Schult's influence on Kraftwerk cannot be overstated, and possibly his experiencing 'Futurama II' 10 years earlier even had a hand in Kraftwerk's 'Autobahn' breakthrough. Schult also brought humour to Kraftwerk, first with the artwork for the band's third album, 'Ralf And Florian', in November 1973. The record came with a poster of amusing comic drawings and photo collages and above a black and white portrait of Ralf and Florian, which looks like a satirical take on a stiff captains of industry portrait, their names were rendered in classical German gothic typeface. Perhaps their first wry joke at the expense of Germany's international image.

The theme for the new album was discussed on the flight home after the US tour, the band and Schult exploring the ideas that would become 'Radio-Activity'.

"We had often talked about radioactivity," says Wolfgang, "about its benefits and negative impact on human societies."



EMIL SCHULT, RALF HÜTTER AND FLORIAN SCHNEIDER





And it came up again on the plane when flying back from the US that year. Ralph was sitting next to me. We spoke the whole flight about the results of the tour and our future. Ralf was still studying architecture at Aachen TH [technical high school] and I was still an interior designer at a Düsseldorf architect's office. Ralf promised me: 'Wolfgang, you don't need to worry about the future. We both don't need to work in any architect's office in the future. We're Kraftwerk and will be very successful'.

"Then he explained the new theme of the activities of the mid-band [FM] radio stations in America that made us famous because they had played our 'Autobahn' song all over the country and made it a big hit, and that this radio communication theme would be the new theme for the next album. I liked this idea immediately. However, I still had to work in the architect's office a while longer because my fee in Kraftwerk was lousy in those years. I never had a contract of employment, I was always a freelancer."

But the trigger for the album's concept – radio and its central role in the popularisation of pop music – was already an established idea in the Kraftwerk world. It featured in the lyric of 'Autobahn': "Jetzt schalten wir das radio an / Aus dem lautsprecher klingt es dann" ["Now we put the radio on / From the speaker comes the sound"]. And when so many of the few carefully chosen words they did sing on that record were devoted to the idea of radio, you know it was a powerful image for them. "We were boys listening to the late night radio of electronic music coming from WDR [Westdeutscher Rundfunk] in Köln... they played a lot of late night programmes with strange sound and noise," Ralf Hütter told Beacon Radio.

Flür also makes a romantic mention of listening to the

radio as a child in his autobiography: "With the light in our room having already been put out," he remembers, "only the magical green glass pane of the station indicator would weakly illuminate the chest of drawers on which the radio stood". He later saw a transistor radio in a shop window, and saved up for weeks to buy it. "It was made of white Bakelite, with a tuning disc set behind a magnifying glass. It was so modern and made me look good in front of my friends. It had an earpiece so I was able to sift through the stations in bed at night, hidden from my brothers... it brought new sounds from faraway places to me."

Radio itself, as well as being the primary channel through which rock 'n' roll changed the world, is also at the very roots of electronic music, and this was well-known to Ralf and Florian. The first commercially available voltage controlled oscillators, electronic circuits that create the pure electronic waveforms that are the starting point for synthesisers were built as test equipment for radio stations. And the state-owned radio stations of Europe attracted composers and thinkers who started using the electronic sound generating equipment and tape recorders found in the studios to create a new kind of music. In 1951, the first electronic music studio, the Studio For Electronic Music (at WDR), was established in Cologne just a 30-minute train ride from Düsseldorf and it started broadcasting those strange sounds and noise across the nation.

"We grew up in a sort of crossroads between France and Germany," Ralf told Melody Maker in 1974. "So we were exposed to the musique of Paris, as well as the electronic music of Cologne. That is what opened up our ears in the late 1950s."

The broadcasting of the music being created by the likes





of Herbert Eimert and Stockhausen in the Westdeutscher Rundfunk studio also had a political motivation, the music supported by the state as a kind of cultural bulwark of high art against the output of the communist East Germany, which was ideologically opposed to any sniff of elitist “difficult” music. It also served as a part of West Germany’s attempt to put some distance between it and the conservative and retrogressive cultural paralysis of the Nazi era. It was an activity Kraftwerk and many of their musical peers were actively engaged in, which was also encouraged by the state broadcaster – hence the unusual amount of German television and radio coverage of early experimental line-ups of Kraftwerk and other new groups of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Radio then was one of the drivers of technological change in the 20th century, the first mainstream and widely adopted communication device: “Travel / communication / entertainment...” as the computerised voice would intone on ‘Computer World’ six years later. Radio was the catalyst for electronic music itself. What could be a more perfect concept for Kraftwerk to explore?

Emil Schult remembers that once the new album’s concept had been settled, he and Ralf drove around Germany in the summer of 1975 in Ralf’s Volkswagen, the pair of them hunting down the right vintage radio set for the artwork. With recording underway, and a UK tour booked for the autumn, it was a busy summer.

Kling Klang was now home for Kraftwerk, an undistinguished semi-industrial unit rented on Mintropstrasse, Düsseldorf, below a unit occupied by an electrical installation company called Elektro Müller, whose sign still hangs above the entrance to the courtyard. Just a couple of minutes walk from the railway station, Kling Klang would become Kraftwerk’s own private sound creation world; part studio, part electronic workshop. It would gradually become hermetically sealed, impenetrable to outsiders and central to the Kraftwerk mythology. But in 1975, it was just Kraftwerk’s new home where they would start self-producing their albums. Conny Plank, the genius at the centre of so much of electronic music’s development in the 1970s and who had produced all of Kraftwerk’s albums up to this point, was jettisoned, paid off for his considerable contributions thus far, and work began in earnest on the new album without him.

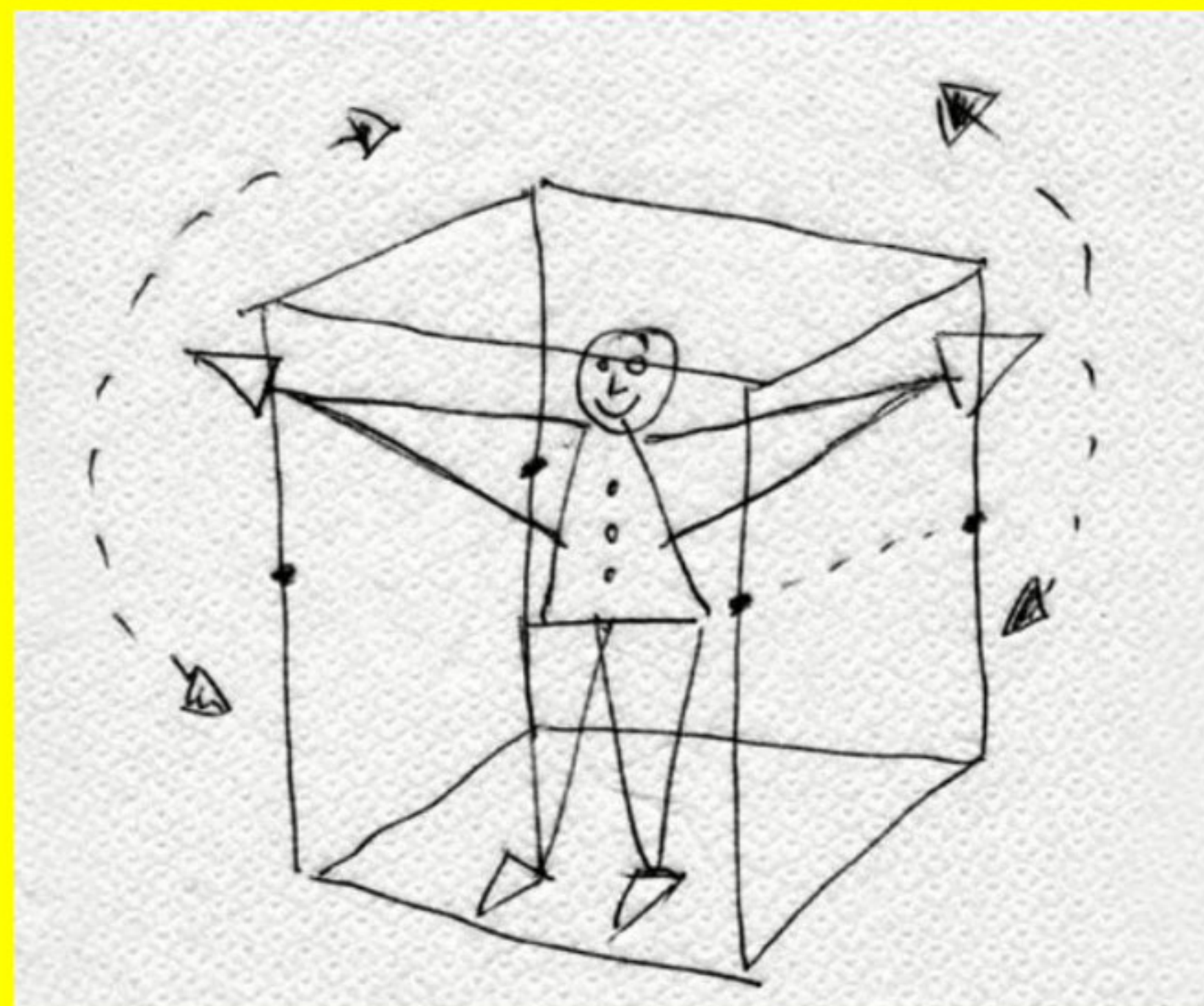
According to Wolfgang Flür, the studio was sparsely equipped to begin with. “We were playful and clever enough to organise our work and technique for the upcoming themes,” he says. Ralf, Florian and Emil Schult worked initially on the melodies and arrangements for

the album and then called in Karl Bartos and Wolfgang to add their parts. “The rhythms were easy and minimal, like before. They were quickly recorded on an eight-track tape machine that had been bought from the manager and producer of the German comedian Otto Waalkes.”

Work didn’t start before four in the afternoon, setting the leisurely pace of night-time recording, punctuated by regular breaks for visits to restaurants and cafés that would become the band’s habit for the next decade. Despite this slightly louche lifestyle, ‘Radio-Activity’ was recorded very quickly, in just a few weeks. “It was the fastest Kraftwerk album ever recorded,” says Wolfgang. His fondest memory of this period was the making of the infamous Kraftwerk drum cage. “It was built in the middle of the Kling Klang recording room. We thought that instead of drumming on our electric drum pad boards we should go into the future and develop something which did not need to be touched at all like with my brass sticks hitting on metal plates connected to electronic sounds of our Farfisa Rhythm 10.

“Florian bought some chromium metal rods from a exhibition display company. These rods had to be screwed together to make a human-sized cube so I could stand inside it. Screwed around the edges were photo cells

## THE FIRST DRAFT OF THE DRUMCAGE





that released three different drum sounds when my hand triggered the beam between those light cells. The drum sounds still came from the wire-connected drum machine. I drew this first draft of the cage on a paper napkin during a visit of us at the Fischerhaus Restaurant on the river Rhine in Düsseldorf during cake and coffee on the outside terrace in late summer 1975."

Wolfgang singles out the track 'Radioactivity' as his favourite of the sessions. "Because of its theme and Ralf's melancholic and monotone vocals. It was the first track where our Vako Orchestron was involved. I loved this instrument. It had cellophane discs with original recorded human chorus on, as well as violins and other instruments. Each instrument on one clear disc. The human chorus, these 'ah' and 'oh' voices inside 'Radioactivity', together with Ralph's vocals give this song a melancholic vibe. That's why I love it. My other favourite song is 'Antenna' because it has these electrifying, crunchy, rattling Minimoog tunes, with a poppy tempo and positive words. I always loved playing 'Antenna' live on stage. It attacks you with a strong and uplifting sensation!"

While Kraftwerk and EMI prepared to release 'Radio-Activity', the spurned Phillips/Vertigo label put together what they hoped would be a cash-in on Kraftwerk's success - a double LP compilation of the first four albums they called 'Exceller 8'. It boasted a peculiar and foreboding cover that seemed to be a kind of negative version of the original 'Autobahn' album cover. The sunny landscape was replaced by a dark, nocturnal scene, the road ahead leading into ominous storm clouds and mountains glowing eerily red, a distant pair of lonely headlights indicating a car coming towards the viewer. It didn't do very well and soon ended up in record shop bargain bins and probably only served to confuse the marketplace for the release of the new Kling Klang Produkt proper.

Sure enough, when 'Radio-Activity' was released, it didn't fare as well as had been hoped. It failed to chart in the UK and made it only to number 146 in the US charts. Wolfgang doesn't remember any real disappointment in the Kraftwerk camp at the lack of success.

"We spoke about it, of course," he says. "I think maybe the theme was too complicated. Perhaps it sounded too depressing for radio to play it often enough to reach the Top 10. It was not easy and lovely like 'Autobahn'. The rhymes and words were putting forward complicated ideas, and it wasn't what radio thought of as pop music. Anyway, I wasn't involved in the authorship of it so it made no difference to me." It was a different story in France where the album's title

track was used as the theme to a popular show on the Europe 1 radio station. Presented by Jean-Loup Lafont, 'Mixture De Musique' and was a big hit in 1976, as was the album.

"In France they have a different approach to entertaining music," says Wolfgang. "I think it has to do with their traditional chanson music which the French are used to listening to, with its generally dramatic themes. 'Radio-Activity' was such a theme, with the melodies, its arrangement and Ralf's unique vocals. The French seemingly loved it and this delivered us a Number One there."

There was a neat thematic symmetry to that particular success and their acceptance into the chic Parisian music and art scenes would lend their next outing, 1977's 'Trans-Europe Express', a pan-European sophistication and appeal.

Kraftwerk wouldn't have known it because the information wasn't made public until 1989, but in December 1975, just a couple of months after the release of 'Radio-Activity', a nuclear power plant (or 'Kernkraftwerk') in the north of what was then East Germany, in Greifswald, came close to meltdown after a fire broke out. Had Kraftwerk known it they might have made the title song's theme more explicitly anti-nuclear rather sooner than they did.

Now the album has been recast as an explicit anti-nuclear statement, and the title track is a staple of the endless Kraftwerk world tour, where the audiences are left in no doubt that nuclear power is a bad thing as far as Ralf Hütter is concerned. The version on the 'Minimum-Maximum' live album starts with a short but grim lecture on the dangers of nuclear waste and the above-mentioned litany of nuclear accident locations (more recently Fukushima has been added), with new lyrics about nuclear contamination. The song morphs into a dancefloor workout, the original melancholy mitigated by slammin' beats.

As an artistic statement, 'Radio-Activity' was impressive. It was multi-layered and conceptual, its high art influences expressed through relatively accessible pop art. As a commercial entity it was a mixed bag. Reviews weren't uniformly positive to say the least. A UK music press who met Kraftwerk's initial breakthrough the year before with xenophobic headlines that referenced the war and Nazism in one way or another were primed for another 'Autobahn', but got something altogether more difficult to understand. The world (or at least the UK and the USA) it seemed still wasn't quite ready for Kraftwerk.





The black and white 'Goebbels schnauze' radio artwork has since been usurped by the day-glo red and yellow radioactivity hazard symbol, the sound on the disc itself buffed up considerably from the original's slightly under-produced Kling Klang origins (though the 2009 remaster is perhaps a tad over-compressed), the buzzing of badly earthed synthesisers has been (sort of) removed. The album's glorious Beach Boys-y high point, 'Airwaves' has also been retooled live with a Moroder-esque 'I Feel Love' bassline, the sweet, naive vocal shrouded in vocoder, the whole thing engineered for the dancefloor. It's not necessarily better these days, neither is it worse, but the fact is that 'Radio-Activity' has survived for 40 years as a crucial and fascinating part of Kraftwerk's Gesamtkunstwerk.

Kraftwerk's new album will be out... oh, you know

## WOLFGANG FLÜR RECALLS A PERSONAL REACTION TO THE 'RADIO-ACTIVITY'



"Some years ago I used to walk through our Hofgarten [city park] and one time I met an older friend of mine pushing his bicycle. On the back there was a young boy sitting in a basket, he was maybe three or four years old. I greeted my old friend and he introduced me to his little boy. 'This is Elmond,' he said, 'and this is Wolfgang from Kraftwerk'. My friend explained to me that little Elmond had discovered 'Radio-Activity' and was listening to the music all day long. I asked Elmond why he liked the song. 'Because you sing so sad inside,' he said. My friend

told me that his boy sometimes began cry during listening, which worried me. I explained to little Elmond that I was not the singer, but Ralf was. I asked him why he liked this sadness. After a few moments of thinking he replied: 'Because it is beautiful,' he said. I was flabbergasted! My friend explained: 'Children make no difference between strong feelings like joy or sadness. Crying is also a strong feeling and they do unabashed what we adults have unlearned or have forbidden us in public. Stupid, aren't we?'."



GABI DELGADO







# THE ELECTRO PUNK KUNG FU MASTER

With the release of his new solo album, '2', **DAF** man **GABI DELGADO** talks about his days as a Düsseldorf punk, his dislike of analogue synthesis, and how his recent move to Spain has re-energised his creative drive

Words: **MAT SMITH**



It's a warm autumn evening in Andalusia. Chickens are clucking, dogs are growling at shadows, and the sun is slowly setting over Gabi Delgado's back yard. He takes a swig from a bottle of Coke, lights a cigarette, exhales deeply, and promptly begins complaining about modern music.

"Give me 100 electronic tracks and I'll bet that the bass drums come in at either bar 17 or bar 33. It's all so obvious. An important essence of music is to make people lose control. It ties in with ancient societies and rituals, where you have people getting put into a trance and losing it through music. I think it's a function of music to make people experience other things, outside of normality and reality, just through feeling and dancing."

Delgado has just released '2', a new solo album chock-a-block with the characteristically brutal rhythms that have dominated his work since forming Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft with Robert Görl in 1978. The album consists of 32 tracks – 40 if you're a member of Delgado's music club – and arrives hot on the heels of 2014's '1' and the download albums 'X' and 'Club Worx'. Which brings the total number of tracks released by Delgado in the last two years to more than 80, a prodigious body of work that puts many other creative souls to shame.

"There are a few reasons for that," explains Delgado. "The first is simple – I want to give people value for money. I get fed up when CDs have just 10 tracks, especially when I know that eight of those are there to fill the fucking album. The second reason is that it's a statement. There's a general tendency – in society, in economics, in politics, in art, even in people's private lives – to not give everything. Austerity is a principle I don't like at all. People are not

able or prepared to give everything today, but I like to give everything.

"There's also an artistic reason, which is that a lot of the time I like to discharge everything I have in my head in order to be able to start new things. That's done now. Now I have room for new ideas, new tracks, new things." DAF were a product of the late 1970s Düsseldorf punk scene. Whereas UK punk was rooted in social angst and political disenchantment, Düsseldorf's punk movement, like that of New York, arose from a much more artistic aesthetic.

"Düsseldorf was a rich city, a very rich city, one of the richest cities in Germany," says Gabi Delgado. "All the old industries – steel and mining – were still running and the offices and the profits for those companies were in Düsseldorf, so lots of families had a high standard of living. The kids could afford guitars and synthesizers and home studios, which in those days were very expensive. On the other hand, there was also a strong arts scene. Joseph Beuys was teaching at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, for instance, which is one of the leading arts schools in Germany.

"At that time, everybody in that whole area who wanted to go out had to go to Düsseldorf. There were better discotheques, better clubs and better bars, so it was a real melting pot. And the kids in Düsseldorf were always looking out for what was new. They were the first to discover punk in Germany, apart from the Berliners. There was a club in Düsseldorf called Ratinger Hof, and in 1976 it became our meeting point for the punk movement.

"It was a nothing place, with no particular style, but it was





## LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

rough enough. The owner of the club was Carmen, who was the wife of the famous German painter Imi Knoebel, and she decided to give the punks this space. They put up some neon lights, so it wasn't too dark and it also wasn't too hippy. It was a totally open scene, it wasn't about who you were or where you were from, so very soon the students from the arts academy came to the Ratinger Hof too. For us, it was like the Cabaret Voltaire was for Dada. It became a beacon for what was going on in our punk scene."

Despite being smitten with punk, Delgado wasn't a fan of rock 'n' roll. Or guitars.

"Punk had this fresh, new, radical energy and I couldn't understand why it was based around such old instruments," he says. "You can't do much with a guitar, especially if you can't play it. For me, a band like The Ramones was just one big, endless song. It fell to us to put the synthesiser in the middle of that – and that was beginning of Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft. The music DAF played still had rock 'n' roll harmonies, which linked it to punk – punk was just badly played rock 'n' roll, after all – but we were using electronic machines not guitars."

During his pre-punk days, Delgado had been schooled in disco music, Giorgio Moroder especially, as well as P-Funksters Parliament and the more jazzy Weather Report.

"So I knew there were more interesting and wider possibilities for music than just the dum-dum-dum of punk," he offers.

From the first DAF recordings through to several of the tracks on '2', there's always been a strong sexual element to Gabi Delgado's music. It's blatant in DAF songs like 'Sex Unter Wasser' and 'Muskel', and more discreetly alluded to in the way that the machines prowl and purr with a dark, suggestive energy on the band's early albums.

It's there on '2' too, most notably with the over-stimulated synths and urgent rhythms of 'Hausarrest', which details the erotic possibilities of two people who are locked in a room together for 30 days. For Delgado, his fascination with sex in music comes from a primal place.

"I like my music to have a strong physical component," he says.

"I really need music that I can move to and I think dancing is the nearest thing to sex. Every track that I write, I try to see if I can dance to it in the studio. So when I'm creating music, I move a lot. I don't like to sit on a chair. I jump around all over the studio."

Delgado's musical epiphany came when he was seduced by the vocals and the machines of Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love'.

"I was a kid, 15 years old, and I remember hearing 'I Feel Love' at a disco," he says. "You had that Moroder sequencer sound with this woman breathing like she was having sex and I just thought, 'Wow, sex and electronic music, that's it! That's how music should be'. There are repetitive movements in sex, just like in electronic music. It's a rhythm, a constant way of moving. It's the body as machine. I felt that connection right from when I first heard that Donna Summer record."



Around the same time, he began to become more aware of Germany's own electronic music tradition, discovering bands like Neu! and Tangerine Dream. But he wasn't so keen on Kraftwerk.

"Kraftwerk were not accepted in the Düsseldorf punk scene at all," he laughs. "The punks saw these guys with their ties and they knew they were from the other side of the Rhine. The left side of the river is very chic and posh, and Kraftwerk were always going around there wearing their ties, drinking milk drinks in this bar called Milk Bar 2000. The punks thought Kraftwerk were posh arsholes. It wasn't until much later, in the early 80s, that they started being celebrated. But in the punk days, no way."

Although Delgado can now appreciate what he describes as Kraftwerk's enormous historical significance, at the time he thought they were too safe. He also thinks they missed an opportunity by focusing too heavily on album-based concepts and classic pop song structures, rather than the long and flowing tracks they recorded in the early part of their career.

**"I LOVE MACHINES, BUT I LOVE MACHINES THAT HAVE MORE OF A SENSE OF DANGER. YOU KNOW, ONE WING IS BURNING, BUT YOU'RE STILL PILOTING THE THING"**

"Their sounds became too clean," he explains. "I love machines, but I love machines that have more of a sense of danger. You know, one wing is burning, but you're still piloting the thing. There wasn't enough danger in Kraftwerk. Their music was like being sat in an office. DAF were totally different. We didn't want to have a verse, an A part and a B part. We wanted one constantly moving machine that just goes on and on, only changing slightly, and that's how club music is today."

To reinforce the point, his '2' album opens with the blunt 'NDKM', which stands for 'Neue Deutsche Klub Musik'.

"I'm really referring to what is going on nowadays in German clubs outside of Berlin," says Delgado. "What's interesting is we're hearing combinations of tracks that five years ago would have been unimaginable. Neue Deutsche Klub Musik is all these styles coming together, as they do in 'NDKM', where you have a half-beat part, more of a hardstep edge to the sound, and a part that's more techno."

But while 'NDKM' is a celebration of the new, 'Gott Ist Tot' ('God Is Dead') amounts to an obituary for what Delgado perceives as outdated religious belief systems.

"I wanted to put out the statement that it's not really necessary for modern people to believe in God, or even heaven," he says, as a dog begins howling ominously behind him. "To me, there are no longer any sins, so there is no need to feel guilty."

Don't let this make you think '2' is all heavy stuff, though. At the other extreme of the album is 'Elektro Punk Kung Fu Meister', a light-hearted track loaded with hubris that Delgado wrote because of his childhood love of Bruce Lee.

From God and Bruce Lee, our conversation moves on to analogue synthesisers. More and more bands are getting into the retro equipment market, trying to emulate the sounds of the 1970s and 1980s. But according to Delgado, analogue synthesis is something else that should be "tot".

"I think there's a lot of hype around it," he sighs, both sounding and looking deflated. "I think that the modern Nord synthesiser or an FM synthesiser sounds much better than an analogue synth. You can do much more interesting things with FM synthesis."

"I get lots of people contacting me to tell me they have just bought a Korg MS-20 but they can't get it to make the sort of sounds we made in DAF. When we went to Conny





## TECKTONIK - TANZ DER YOUTH

"There are a few tracks on '2' with a typical tecktonik sound, which is something I like very much," says Gabi Delgado. "The style is not new, it's a few years old and it's very popular in France. It's ghetto music, really. Tecktonik has nothing to do with the techno scene, although it has elements of techno, house and electro. It's named after tectonic plates, because the music is always moving, like an earthquake. The sounds are quite brutal and they don't use analogue synths at all. It has this very sharp, edgy synth sound that's repeating itself constantly and changing through algorithmic FM modulations.

"The great thing is that tecktonik is a real movement and they even have a special dance, like in hip hop. What I really like is that there is this specific way of presenting tecktonik music. They have DJs and operators and they have sound systems, like in reggae. They use old cupboards and trunks, put some beat boxes on them, and then they put these into a circle. The dancers go into the middle of the circle and the operator is responsible for letting the sound go round all the boxes while an engineer says which box is playing what. I really like that presentation concept. It's like a light show, but it's actually a sound show. For me, it's much more modern than old school techno, which is 25 years old now."



**"IT'S TRUE TO SAY THAT I'M NOT A NOSTALGIC PERSON. I DON'T UNDERSTAND PEOPLE WHO OWN A HARD DISK RECORDER AND A 4K TELEVISION, BUT PREFER VHS VIDEOS"**

Plank's studio, Conny said the sound was so plastic, so cheap. He said it had no power. Conny's idea was to put the Korg through big Marshall guitar amps and run bass sequences through Trace Elliot boxes. That was the secret of the DAF sound. We'd then put them in the room and record using microphones, like a rock band would do. It gave a warm distortion, but also the sound of the room.

"It's true to say that I'm not a nostalgic person. I don't understand people who own a hard disk recorder and a 4K television, but prefer VHS videos! Of course, everything old has its charm, but when people buy analogue synths I think they're spending money in the wrong place. They're antiques. It's like wanting to have a Mercedes Benz from the 1960s. I don't get it. You can't travel back in time."

For someone so obsessed with progress and so dismissive of any sort of legacy, Delgado's recent move back to his native Spain could be seen as an attempt at turning back the clock. He was born in Andalusia, but moved to Germany when he was young to join his father, who had fled from General Franco's oppressive political regime a few years before. His return to his roots might suggest he's edging towards retirement, but Delgado laughs this idea off.

"I just wanted a simpler life," he says, taking another glug of his Coke. "I lived for a long time in Berlin and I was really fed up with the weather. In Spain, we have lots of sunshine all through the year, but also the mentality here is so different. Germany is a very regulated country. Everything needs a permit and you must double check all that you do with a lot of bureaucracy."

As well as prompting a period of incredible creativity, Delgado's move back to Spain has allowed some clarity to emerge about the future of DAF and his on-off partnership with Robert Görl. The pair have reunited several times over the last decade or so, but announced they had split for good earlier this year. Now it seems they've reversed that decision.

"We have decided to carry on, but just as a live project," confirms Delgado. "Robert was here in my home studio in Spain recently and we tried a few things out, but the problem is we are both very radical. If we don't agree completely, then we don't want to compromise. We couldn't find an approach that suited us both, but we will be continuing to play live, so who knows where that might lead."

God and analogue synths might well be dead in Delgado's view, but for now at least DAF lives on.

"We're definitely not stopping," he insists, before heading back into the sonic research lab this electropunk kung fu master calls home.

'2' is out now on Oblivion/SPV

## **WATCH THE VIDEOS**

**GABI DELGADO - 'HAUSARREST'**  
[HTTPS://M.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=KCDFUYF-SQM](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=KCDFUYF-SQM)

**VIDEO 2**  
**DAF - 'DER MUSSOLINI' (LIVE)**  
[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=KZZVD\\_ZHBO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZZVD_ZHBO)







# WHY DOES IT HURT WHEN MY HEART MISSES THE BEAT?

**PROPAGANDA** founder **RALF DÖRPER** tells the inside story of one of the finest electropop outfits of the 1980s – from 'Dr Mabuse', 'Duel' and their almost faultless 'A Secret Wish' album, to the band's lengthy legal tussle with Trevor Horn's infamous ZTT imprint

Words: **STEPHEN DALTON**









One of the great electropop creations of the 1980s, Propaganda combined gleaming synthesisers with industrial noises, doomy Teutonic poetry with British post-punk wit, lush cinematic romance with totalitarian techno beats. Glacially sexy and glamorously arty, the Düsseldorf quartet were heavily styled and packaged like a film-noir version of ABBA. But their short-lived success ended with bitter infighting and a soul-crushing legal battle against the legendary London label that launched them.

With Propaganda's much-loved debut album, 'A Secret Wish', marking its 30th anniversary this year, founder member Ralf Dörper still has mixed emotions about his brief, turbulent tenure as a Top 10 pop star.

"Nowadays we can laugh about it," he says. "But that kind of thing can destroy people."

Ralf Dörper's journey to Propaganda took an unlikely route. He started making music on Düsseldorf's proudly uncommercial underground scene at the dawn of the 1980s, briefly joining proto-punks Syph before working on his own synthesiser material. His debut solo single was a "double feature", paying tribute to film directors John Carpenter and David Lynch.

"In a way, it explains what was going on with Propaganda later on," Dörper says. "I sent the record to England, to the NME, because one of the guys there was writing about music from the continent – Chris Bohn, who is now editor of The Wire magazine. And he made it Single of the Week. At that time, it was absolutely amazing for something from Germany to be Single of the Week in NME."

Dörper's love affair with the British music press continued when he joined industrial EBM pioneers Die Krupps in 1980. Several more NME Single of the Week accolades followed. One was for the 14-minute electro-industrial piece 'Stahlwerksinfonie' ('Steelworks Symphony'), which was recorded at Can's studio in Cologne. The record also won high praise from Radio 1 legend John Peel. Dörper quit Die Krupps in 1982, but by then his connection to the UK had been established.

"I had a feeling that people in England seemed to understand what I was doing," he says. "Not just Chris Bohn but John Peel as well."

Looking for a new project, Dörper decided the Düsseldorf scene was "commercial and stale" and began working with Cologne DJ and programmer Andreas Thein. They set up an electronic laboratory in the open-plan Mülheimer Freiheit studio complex surrounded by visual artists, some of whom would later become superstars of the German art scene. Electronic music, cinematic soundscapes and visual art – the key elements of Propaganda were falling into place.

"In the beginning, it was supposed to be more or less a project," Dörper recalls. "We didn't necessarily want to start a band. We wanted to do a couple of 12-inch records maybe. We had a visual concept as well. We had ideas for songs that were sometimes just titles and ideas for record sleeves before the music existed. We were thinking of doing something with vocals and we initially wanted to mix hard sequencers with female voices."

Like musical casting directors, Dörper and Thein began looking for a female vocalist to play the heroine in their electronic movies. Dörper approached Susanne Freytag, a jewellery designer he knew from Düsseldorf.

"I didn't really know if she could sing," he says. "I knew she was part of a girl band, The Topolinis, but that was more like a fun party thing. Andreas and I also had very much a filmic idea of what we wanted to do... and I thought Susanne looked Scandinavian, Nordic. That was the main thing in the beginning."

The trio's first recording together was a twisted semi-cover of Throbbing Gristle's 'Discipline', retitled 'Disziplin'. Electronic equipment was still scare and expensive in 1982, so the band booked a session at a studio in Essen with its own PPG Wave, one of Germany's first analogue synthesisers.

"We started Propaganda with equipment that was actually pretty cheap," Dörper notes. "A couple of years later, we worked with a Roland 808. The original 'Dr Mabuse' was programmed on this acid machine! Ha! At that time, people considered it to be cheap and shitty."

On a short trip to London, Ralf Dörper pitched Propaganda to several British labels, including Cherry Red and the left-field outfit Operation Twilight, who had released his debut German solo single in the UK. He also had his first face-to-face meeting with his media champion Chris Bohn, who passed on the band's demo tape to fellow NME writer Paul Morley. Soon after flying back to Düsseldorf, Dörper heard from Bohn that Morley was keen to sign Propaganda to ZTT, a new label he was about to launch with producer Trevor Horn and Horn's wife, Jill Sinclair.

"I liked the kind of music Paul Morley discovered and how he wrote about it," Dörper says. "And OK, I was pretty impressed by Trevor Horn, because at that time he was getting this change of image from The Buggles and Dollar. He had done Malcolm McLaren's 'Duck Rock' album, which I thought was extraordinary, and also ABC."

The promise of working with one of Britain's more forward-thinking, electronic-friendly pop producers shifted Dörper's musical ambitions.

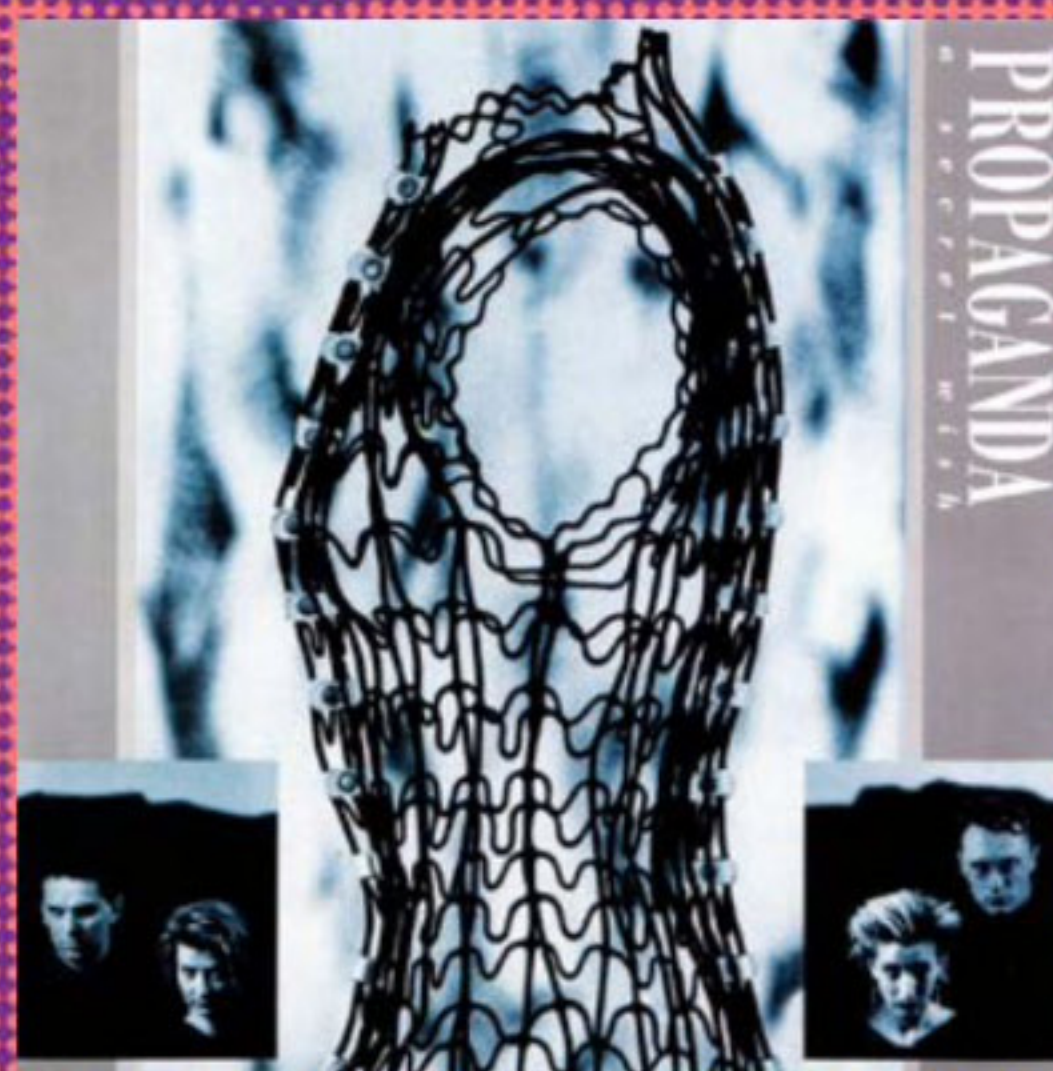
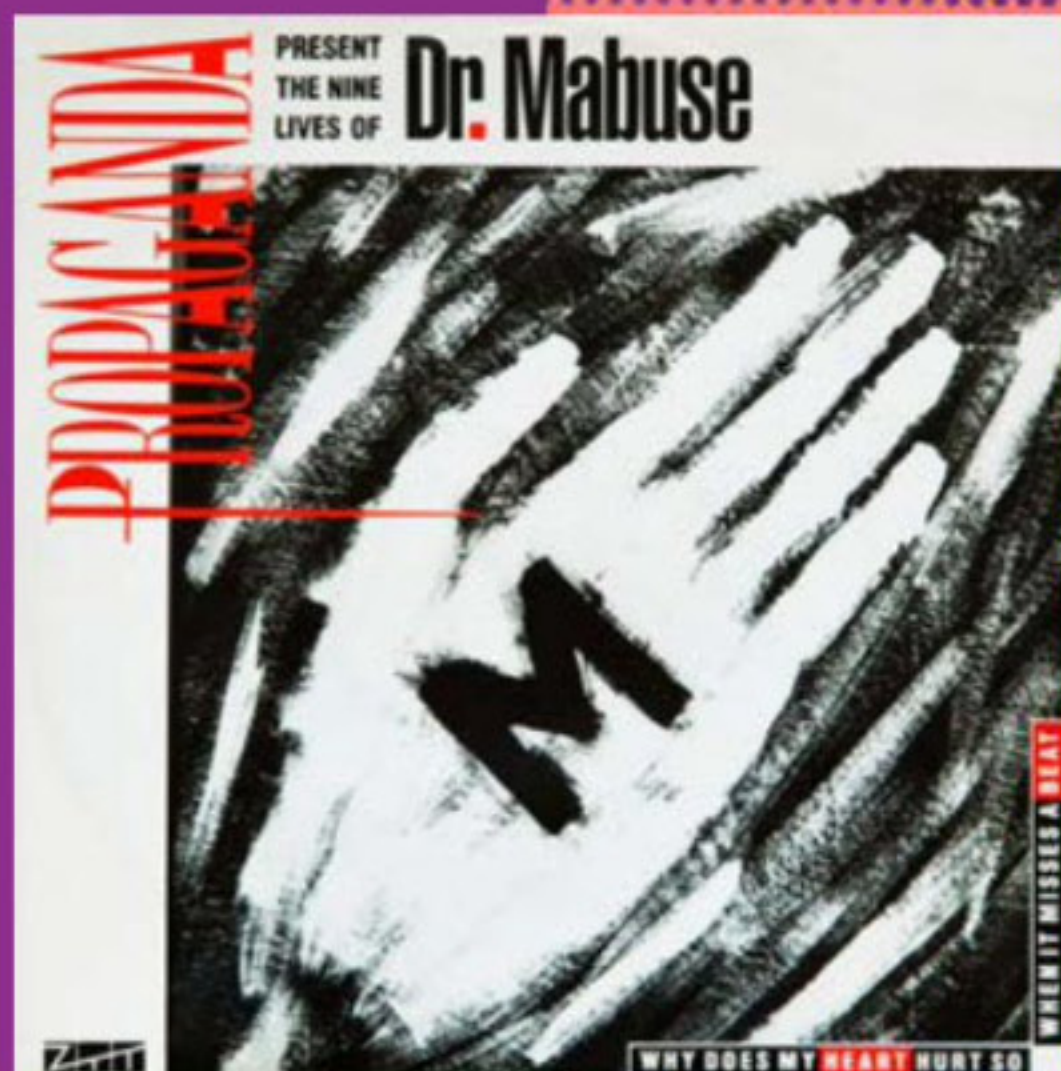




## DR MABUSE

## A SECRET WISH

## DUEL





**“IT WAS  
CERTAINLY  
MORE ABBA  
THAN  
BUCKS FIZZ”**





"Before that, Andreas and myself were thinking about Propaganda as this alternative, underground, industrial project. We were influenced by bands like Cabaret Voltaire, for example. But I also knew about Vice Versa and how they morphed into ABC, which I found interesting. And also with the name Propaganda, I always thought propaganda and pop as more or less the same thing. This all became clearer when the name Trevor Horn was mentioned."

With a ZTT deal looking likely, Propaganda began to finalise their visual image as a kind of ABBA-noir quartet of two male and two female members. Generously admitting her own vocal limitations,

Susanne Freytag enlisted fellow Topolinos singer Claudia Brücken, who was then 18 and still at school.

"That was perfect for going pop because we needed somebody who could provide vocal hooks," Dörper says. "If Trevor had heard us as a three-piece, I don't think he would have signed us. It would have been too strange for him. It also became pretty much obvious then that we could work on this ABBA look. It was certainly more ABBA than Bucks Fizz."

Around this time, Dörper also recruited Michael Mertens, a classically trained percussionist and electronic composer who had studied alongside Kraftwerk's Karl Bartos in Düsseldorf. Still playing with the city's Symphonic Orchestra, Mertens joined Propaganda as an "invisible" fifth member. In London, meanwhile, ZTT were similarly still in embryonic form. Morley was busy formulating his arty marketing strategies while Horn had yet to finish modernising his state-of-the-art Sarm West studios in Notting Hill.

"We were signed at the very beginning, before Frankie Goes To Hollywood," Dörper says. "We could see how ZTT was starting, how they got designers in, the graphics and stuff, and we thought everything was perfect. Everybody was euphoric, especially Paul Morley, who was excited about his plans and what he wanted to do."

But despite all the positivity, there was something bothering Dörper.

"I thought the contract we got from ZTT was a joke," he notes. "With Die Krupps, we had a big contract with an independent label, and after that we were chased by the majors, so I certainly knew the kind of figures in the ZTT contract were jokes. The only person it wasn't an issue for was Claudia, because she was still at school. It was the kind of money you would spend on a holiday."

The group signed up anyway, swayed by the chance to work with Horn. Their first collaboration was 'Dr Mabuse', a stylish homage to Fritz Lang's iconic trilogy of German Expressionist

horror films wedded to propulsive, metal-bashing synthpop. The sessions with Horn were painstaking, especially as the high-end Fairlight, Synclavier and Oberheim machines in Sarm West were dauntingly difficult for the young Germans, often requiring trained players from outside the band. But ultimately they produced a classic debut single. Released in February 1984, 'Dr Mabuse' became a Top 30 hit in the UK and a Top 10 record in Germany.

"It was pretty big," Dörper smiles. "The only problem was the media in Germany were a bit envious. They didn't like that there was something coming from Germany that was discovered not by them, but by some guys in England. So we had a kind of image in Germany that we were something constructed by Trevor Horn."

At this point, both band and label should have capitalised on the momentum of 'Dr Mabuse', but Propaganda found themselves increasingly sidelined. Claudia Brücken and Paul Morley were by now romantically involved and would later marry. She relocated to London, opening up potential divisions within the group. Their ZTT contract also gave Propaganda very limited funds to equip their Düsseldorf studio. Fortunately, Dörper was still working as an analyst at a bank and Mertens still playing with the orchestra. Signing a publishing deal with ZTT's sister company Perfect Songs finally allowed them to buy their own PPG keyboard.

The long layover brought out other tensions within Propaganda. An increasing promotional focus on Brücken instead of the ABBA-style collective image began to rankle with Dörper. And then Andreas Thein quit the band.

"In fact, he was forced out," admits Dörper.

Most published accounts blamed Brücken for ousting Thein, but Dörper cites other reasons too, including "gaps in the understanding between Andreas and Michael... he could be a difficult character to work with". Dörper later worked with Thein again after Propaganda and is wary of speaking ill of him now, especially since his untimely death from cancer in 2013.

Back in the UK, meantime, Horn found himself distracted by the explosive commercial success of ZTT's star signings Frankie Goes To Hollywood. Propaganda were put on hold.

"The gap was widening because all the time that Trevor Horn had was now spent on Frankie," Dörper recalls. "We normally would have followed up 'Dr Mabuse' after a couple of months, but we got this endless delay. At first it was because we didn't get the money for equipment. When we did get it, we made the blueprints for 'Duel', for 'Dream Within A Dream', for 'p:Machinery'. So all that was done in Düsseldorf, in Germany, but then we had to wait and wait and wait."



During this period, Morley flew to Düsseldorf to supervise photo sessions for singles that had not even been recorded yet. Discussions also began around the shape and sound of Propaganda's debut album, 'A Secret Wish'. Dörper initially favoured making the A-side an extended, symphonic version of 'Dr Mabuse', with five shorter tracks on the flip. But as Horn became increasingly preoccupied with Frankie and his own avant-pop collective The Art Of Noise, potential replacement producers were considered, including former Japan frontman David Sylvian and even chart-pop svengalis Stock, Aitken & Waterman. In the end, Horn's regular studio engineer Steve Lipson took over production duties.

"At the time we said, 'Shit, that was not the deal, who is Steve Lipson?'," Dörper scowls. "But with hindsight, I would say we were really satisfied with what he did. I think without him, the whole project would have collapsed. He brought a certain calmness and structure back into proceedings. If you listen to our records now, you can hear that 'Mabuse' was definitely Trevor Horn, very much a Fairlight production, and on the following singles you can hear our sound very much going Synclavier."

Propaganda's second single, 'Duel', was finally released in April 1985, more than a year after 'Dr Mabuse'. It was their biggest UK hit, landing at Number 21 in the charts. An instantly infectious, cheerfully upbeat Europop ditty about two lovers duelling to the death, the song contains some deceptively experimental sampled noises buried beneath its shiny surface.

"The musical concept for 'Duel' was to have a contrasting piece where the melodic part is more or less fighting the cacophony," says Dörper. "That was the first thing I thought about working with Trevor Horn, to use the underground elements in a pop context."

By now, Propaganda's debut album was ready to go. 'A Secret Wish' is awash with sumptuous electro-noir numbers, from the hard-edged Eurodisco melodrama 'The Murder Of Love' to the rich, narcotic glide of 'Dream Within A Dream' and the lush cinematic instrumental 'The Last Word'. The record features guest appearances by Glenn Gregory of Heaven 17, Steve Howe of Yes, Simple Minds bass guitarist Derek Forbes, Police drummer Stewart Copeland, and even a "small musical painting" by David Sylvian on the percussive industrial blast of 'p:Machinery', which would become the group's third single.

The most incongruous track on 'A Secret Wish' is a synthpop version of 'Sorry For Laughing' by cult Scottish post-punks Josef K. ZTT had a policy of imposing covers on their acts and at one point Morley even pitched a Carpenters song. Dörper is no fan of covers on debut albums, feeling they dilute the purity of a young band's vision. He floated The Velvet Underground's 'Femme Fatale' as a compromise, arguing Nico's glacial Teutonic torch singer vibe was a better fit for Propaganda's Euro-noir aesthetic. But the label prevailed.

"When people say with 'A Secret Wish' we made a perfect album, I always say, 'No, it's not perfect, we have this Scottish song on it'," Dörper notes. "At the time I said, 'Kraftwerk would never do a cover version'."

Released at the end of June 1985, 'A Secret Wish' earned critical acclaim but only made a limited commercial splash. It charted at Number 16 in the UK and enjoyed similarly modest success across Europe.

"Modest is the right word," Dörper laughs. "ZTT were disappointed because we had quite successful singles. 'Duel' was popular in England and it was also big in France and southern Europe. But I think the biggest success was the next single, 'p:Machinery'. It did nothing in Germany, nothing in England, but it was mega in France, Spain, Italy..."

Dörper was also amused to note how Paul Morley's high-art, densely detailed packaging often proved an obstacle outside Britain. ZTT's German affiliate label even refused to stock the 12-inch of 'p:Machinery' until a JG Ballard quote about the Baader-Meinhof leftist guerrilla group was removed from the sleeve.

"The further away we went from London and the Morley campaigns, the more successful it was," Dörper chuckles. "It failed totally in the US, though. We were filming a video for 'p:Machinery' in New York and the record company out there couldn't understand anything Morley wanted to explain to them about how to promote it. And in the US, 'A Secret Wish' got a sticker on it that said, 'Featuring Yes guitarist Steve Howe'."

More tensions surfaced when ZTT sent Propaganda on tour in late 1985. The line-up was augmented by Derek Forbes, fellow ex-Simple Minds member Brian McGee on drums, and session guitarist Kevin Armstrong. Technical limitations meant most of the electronic elements would be on a pre-recorded playback, so Dörper defiantly refused to join the tour.

"I was really angry with what they did, with replacing the machines with musicians," Dörper says. "At that time, I have to say that, like The Human League, I was strongly against guitars."

Propaganda's relationship with ZTT hit crisis point in late 1985. Brücken was now married to Morley and her loyalties were torn. Her involvement with the remix album 'Wishful Thinking', made without consulting the other members and released to poor sales in November 1985, became another bone of contention. But what finally pushed the band to mutiny was meeting lawyer Brian Carr, who had represented John Lydon in his successful court case against Malcolm McLaren. Carr went through their ZTT deal and concluded it would never earn the group any money.





## DIE KRUPPS RALF DÖRPER – BEFORE & AFTER PROPAGANDA

*Industrial bands. You could name a few, right? Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire are always the first two off the tongue. DAF are pretty close behind and maybe also Einstürzende Neubauten. And if we're making a list of granddaddies of the genre, Die Krupps, featuring one Ralf Dörper in their original line-up, are right up there.*

*It was Die Krupps' 1981 opus 'Wahre Arbeit Wahrer Lohn' – where minimal electronics rubbed shoulders with maximum metal bashing – that spawned a generation of industrial noiseniks such as Test Dept, Front 242 and Nitzer Ebb... who in turn influenced the likes of Frontline Assembly, Ministry and Nine Inch Nails. Which is a pretty tidy legacy.*

*Not content with being party to pretty much inventing EBM, Dörper actually left the band very early doors to play his part in inventing electropop disguised as Propaganda. Without him, Die Krupps continued to forge their taut racket before tempting Dörper back into the fold in 1989 to head up a remake of 'Wahre Arbeit...' with young pups Nitzer Ebb. Guitars seeped into their sound during the early 1990s and the whole thing got extra heavy with 'Metal Machine Music', their 1991 stormer of an album, while the following year's 'Tribute To Metallica' EP tells you nothing you didn't already know about this trailblazing marriage of runaway sequencers and flailing metal guitars.*

*A raft of musicians have passed through Die Krupps over the decades. These days, the core unit stretches right back to the original 1980 line-up and includes both Ralf Dörper and fellow founder Jürgen Engler. The band's latest album, their 25th no less, is 'V – Metal Machine Music', which has just come out on Sledgehammer/Oblivion Records.*

*And talk about a scene that's shot through with one city. The more astute among you will know that DAF and Die Krupps are from Düsseldorf. Oh, and the term EBM itself? "Electronic body music", coined by Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter to explain the sound of their 'Man-Machine' album.*





Propaganda initially took legal action to try and force a contract renegotiation, a fairly routine step for artists after a successful debut album. Horn and Sinclair responded in uncompromising terms, with a court injunction similar to that they would later serve on Frankie singer Holly Johnson.

Brücken quit Propaganda soon afterwards, remaining with ZTT as a solo artist. Dörper, Freytag and Mertens then faced a gruelling and costly legal battle that dragged on for 14 months. The case was eventually scheduled for the High Court in the summer of 1987. It was a high-stakes game for both Propaganda and ZTT, with the loser facing huge legal costs as well as potential damages, but Horn and Sinclair made an out-of-court offer to release the band from their contract two days before the court date.

"It was not renegotiated, unfortunately," Dörper says. "We were released from the deal, but the recording itself continued to be under the conditions that we had signed. That meant we still needed to recoup half a million pounds or something, which we actually did in the 1990s."

After the settlement, Propaganda signed to Virgin with an expanded line-up, including a new singer, young American Betsi Miller. They released a less successful, more conventional-sounding sequel album in 1990, '1234', but by that time all the original members had left. Dörper returned to his job in banking and later rejoined Die Krupps, an association that continues to this day. In 1988, Dörper also reunited with Andreas Thein to make "Germany's first acid house record", Rififi's 'Dr Acid And Mr House'.

"That was the total opposite of ZTT – we recorded it in a day and a half," Dörper laughs. "We had the Roland bassline sampled into the Fairlight, so it was a high-tech acid record."

In the 30 years since 'A Secret Wish', Dörper has mellowed towards his former musical sparring partners. He even forgave Trevor Horn enough to rejoin his fellow Propaganda survivors to play at a gala tribute show for the ZTT founder at Wembley Arena in 2005.

"You could say I used to be impressed by Trevor... and I am not any more," he grins. "But I am not arrogant, because I know he can do things that I can't."

The Wembley show led to discussions about a long-term Propaganda reunion. In the end, Ralf Dörper chose not to rejoin Freytag and Mertens when they reactivated the group, but he is back on friendly terms with his former bandmates, including Brücken, joining her onstage in London in 2013.

With a 30th anniversary version of 'A Secret Wish' in the pipeline, Dörper even hints teasingly that there may be some

kind of Propaganda live activity on the horizon. And what about the album that still stands as their near-perfect masterpiece? Dörper pauses to consider his verdict.

"I would have liked my original plan of having the very long 'Mabuse' on one side, but that album does not exist," he sighs. "But I like the instruments chosen by Steve Lipson and he managed to avoid things that sounded too 80s, because a full album with too much Fairlight is annoying to hear nowadays. And I have to say that I quite like 'Duel', because it reminds me of how we sampled the noisy stuff, which at that time for people at ZTT was quite new, to have this sort of industrial sound. Yes, I think it's actually a good album. I do not do this often, but I think I could still listen to it."

**A 30th anniversary version of Propaganda's 'A Secret Wish' will be issued next year**

## WATCH THE VIDEOS

[WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/EMBED/PX4XHQD9H14](http://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/EMBED/PX4XHQD9H14)

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A close-up, low-angle portrait of Wolfgang Flür, looking slightly upwards and to the right. He is wearing black-rimmed glasses and has a serious expression. The background is plain white.

WOLFGANG FLÜR

# BEYOND THE ROBOT

Former Kraftwerk man **WOLFGANG FLÜR** recalls a little of his life as a robot and looks forward to an altogether more human future with his 'Eloquence - Complete Works' album and his dramatic 'Musik Soldat' live show

Words: **PUSH**





# Don't mention Kraftwerk. I mentioned them once but I think I got away with it all right.

"My music has developed in a very different way to my former group," says Wolfgang Flür. "What they present is something I would describe as minimalistic and cold, with themes about robots and computers and technical things and so on. But where they are minimalistic, I would say that I am maximalistic. I would say that Wolfgang doesn't sound like Kraftwerk."

'Eloquence', Wolfgang Flür's first album under his own name and only his second since he left Kraftwerk in 1987, proves the point. It's subtitled 'Complete Works' and it brings together material Wolfgang has recorded at various times, in various places, with various collaborators, going back over the last 15 years. It opens with the airy and playful 'I Was A Robot', which was also the title of his 2000 autobiography. The track begins with the lines, "Coming from the autobahn / I was a radioactive man / I slipped into a showroom dummy / Robot playing was quite funny", demonstrating both his sense of humour and a human side that his "former group" often seem to lack.

"They have a special kind of a human side, I really can tell you that because I know them," says Wolfgang. "But it's not on the front, it's more in the backyard, as I might say. They are all nice guys actually, especially Karl, but he's the only one who is friendly with me. With the others, it's not so good. Well, there's only one left now, as we know, and he's still fighting against me."

Which is perhaps part of the reason why Wolfgang's record company offer a bit of advice to journalists wanting to interview him. "He won't talk about Kraftwerk," they say. He will talk about Kraftwerk, as it goes. In fact, he talks about Kraftwerk a lot, just as you'd expect. Right now, though, he's

doing so with a degree of caution. He's had one or two what you might call "difficulties" with Ralf Hütter in recent times.

"He doesn't want people to call me 'ex-Kraftwerk' or to put 'Wolfgang Flür, ex-Kraftwerk' on records or posters," explains Wolfgang. "He's fought with lawyers against me, putting me into legal actions. It has sometimes been very disturbing for me."

Of course, it's generally been gig promoters, journalists and the like that have used the "ex-Kraftwerk" tag rather than Wolfgang himself. When he plays live now, he has to send promoters strict instructions on the size of the lettering they are allowed to use if they want to include Kraftwerk's name on posters or in adverts. It's all to do with ratios and percentages, but the bottom line is that it has to be kept quite small. Which seems daft given we're talking about someone who was part of the band's most famous line-up, the one that recorded all their classic albums, beginning with 'Autobahn' in 1974.

"Well, it's up to him," continues Wolfgang. "Maybe he's a bit jealous that I do so many things now. When I left Kraftwerk, he thought I was lost from music. He thought, 'He's not dangerous'. I mean, I'm not dangerous anyhow, how could he think so? But when I released my 'Time Pie' album as Yamo with the guys from Mouse On Mars, a record that had some very interesting ideas, I would say he was not expecting that from the former drummer boy."

How do you feel about your relationship with Ralf Hütter these days?

"It is sad. I would love it to be the other way, for us to be friends, you know."

Do you think that's still possible?

"I am always open. Why does he need a lawyer to make communications between us? He could call me. He has my number, he has my email. We've done that for 17 years, you know. My goodness. But this is not a thing that fills my mind for the whole day, I have to tell you. No, not at all."



WOLFGANG FLÜR







I must admit that I find it hard to imagine anyone falling out with Wolfgang Flür. He's a real charmer and he's terrific company, as I first discovered earlier this year when he took part in a fascinating debate with Andy McCluskey from OMD and Stephen Mallinder from Cabaret Voltaire hosted by Electronic Sound in Norwich. I spent quite a lot of time with Wolfgang that weekend and ended up driving him and his wife, author and film-maker Zuhair Korkmaz, from Norwich to Heathrow, to catch their flight back home to Germany.

Hard to believe maybe, but Wolfgang is edging towards his 70th birthday. He was born in Frankfurt in 1947, a couple of years after the end of the Second World War. His father was an optician and Herr Flür's work took the family to Koblenz a short time later, then to Düsseldorf in the early 1950s. Wolfgang has lived in Düsseldorf ever since, but he and his twin brother Winfried didn't think much of the city to begin with.

"Koblenz is in the wine hills, at the crossroads of the Rhine and the Mosel, and we were surrounded by nature there," recalls Wolfgang. "My brother and I lived outside all the time, in the greenery, on the banks of the river. It was a perfect place to be a child, a kind of romantic place, and this had a big impact on me, on my personality. But when we came to Düsseldorf, we lived on a street with lots of traffic. It was loud and we couldn't play outside as we were used to. We had no nature near to us and we had no playground either. We didn't like it at all.

"My thoughts about the city changed as I grew older. I heard The Beatles and everything was different after this. I was learning English at school by this point, I was 15 or 16 years old, and my introduction to English culture was through an English teacher who had the longest legs and wore the shortest miniskirts you can imagine. She was fantastically sexy and everything suddenly seemed so modern, you know, with the fashion and the pop music and so on. We would listen to Radio Luxembourg every Saturday to hear the Top 10 pop records from England and we started to hear other groups like The Kinks and The Rolling Stones. We had nothing in Germany like these. All we had was schlager music and we hated schlager because it was our parents' music."

A couple of years down the line, Wolfgang formed a Beatles covers band called The Beathovens, who became very popular in the Düsseldorf region. On one occasion, they even supported The Who.

"Can you believe that? It was in a big concert hall, but I don't think I was aware of how famous they were before we played the gig. Watching them destroying their instruments was quite shocking to a lot of people."

By the time the 1970s rolled in, The Beathovens were long gone. But where they had led, many others followed – from Kraftwerk and Neu! to DAF, Die Krupps, Die Toten Hosen, Liaisons Dangereuses, Der Plan and beyond – each taking their own idiosyncratic path. I ask Wolfgang if he has any theories about why Düsseldorf produced so many great bands during the 1970s and 1980s.

"This has always been a place of the arts and a place of money. Some of the people were like Ralf and Florian, they came from families where it was not difficult to get 8,000 marks to buy a synthesiser in 1973. It's also a place where there are good schools and good universities, so lots of students, and we have a big fashion fair here too. I think this is all part of what was a kind of melting pot for kids with different artistic talents. I remember there were special cafes where the high fashion models and photographers have their meeting points. When I was with Kraftwerk, we used to hang around those places too, but I have to say that the models didn't even look at us when we came in with our black clothes and our racing bicycles to order our pieces of cake."

How aware were you of the other Düsseldorf bands at that time?

"Not so much. I personally knew only a few of them. I knew Robert Görl from DAF a little bit, for instance. We were quite distant from what was happening because we were away on tour a lot and, if I'm honest, I think we were also too arrogant to listen to other music. Punk was massive here and it was centred on a club called the Ratinger Hof. I went there a few times and I was hit by one of the punks once because they were jealous of us, they didn't like that we were famous and we had money and Florian was driving around the city in his huge Mercedes 600. But it wasn't just us. Everyone was jealous of everyone else. Everyone wanted to be unique, so there really wasn't any co-operation between any of the groups."



There are two things that I particularly remember about my road trip from Norwich to Heathrow with Wolfgang and Zuhair earlier in the year. The first was my urge to sing "Wir fahren fahren fahren auf der Autobahn" at the top of my voice as we whizzed down the M11. Thankfully, I managed to resist that.

The second thing I remember was Wolfgang's concern for the safety of his small travel case, a somewhat battered but still elegant gold coloured aluminium number. He told me that it was made by Zero Halliburton, who also make the briefcase in which the President of the United States carries the launch codes for America's nuclear weapons when he's on his travels. You can see Wolfgang's case for yourself on the cover of 'Eloquence'.

"The idea to put it on the album cover came from my good friend Markus Luigs, who is a photographer and a graphic designer, and it represents a connection to my past, but not in an obvious way," notes Wolfgang. "I bought the case on Fifth Avenue on my first visit to New York with Kraftwerk in 1975. Florian already had one like this, so I have to say that I imitated him. It is a special design and we liked it very much. I travelled with it always after this and it has a lot of symbolism for me when I think of all the places that my case and I have seen together and all the people we have met."

Was the case expensive?

"Yes. It was \$700."

I tell him he could have probably bought a car for that amount of money in 1975.

"A small one perhaps, a used car perhaps," he chuckles before straightening his face in mock seriousness. "But I had a car at home already. I didn't need a car. I needed a suitcase."

The notion of a well-travelled man is reflected in 'Eloquence'. The album is a collection of smart electronic pop songs – sleek and sharp, peppered with melodic hooks, bumped along by toe-tapping beats – with a discernible global vibe to many of the tracks. There are lyrics in English, German and Japanese (just like Kraftwerk, then), with contributions from the likes of Maki Nomiya, formerly of Tokyo popsters Pizzicato Five, and Mexican electronic composer Ramón Amezcua, a member of the innovative Nortec Collective. Other collaborators include Nitzer Ebb's Bon Harris, Meat Beat Manifesto man Jack Dangers, and Marc Almond's long-time associate Anni Hogan. Many of these artists Wolfgang has met in the last few years, during which time he has been touring his much-praised 'Musik Soldat' performances, more about which in a moment.

"When I travelled with Kraftwerk, I lived in a golden cage, if you know what I mean," he says. "The openness that I have now is wonderful. To go to Mexico City, for instance, to play with Ramón Amezcua at a festival with 60,000 people, that is such fun for me. The Nortec Collective are making a connection between electronics and traditional Mexican music, which is an interesting mix, and I like Ramon very much. He is a nice, nice man. He is a small man, very fine, very educated, and he has the whitest teeth in Mexico. Before he was a musician, he was a dentist. He made a lot of money giving new teeth to pop stars from America."

The collaboration with Ramón Amezcua is the brass-tinged 'Moda Makina', the spoken lyrics of which take inspiration from the fashion industry. In a not dissimilar vein is 'Cover Girl', a glorious synthpop track which Wolfgang describes as a continuation of Kraftwerk's 'The Model'.

"I thought the story of 'The Model' should go on," he explains. "We have it in the movies, we had 'Jaws II' and 'Jaws III', so why not in music? Unfortunately, it's not going so well for her now, though. It's not going well for the girl in 'Moda Makina' either. The lyrics are about being on the road and going to a motel which has a little bar and a dance platform, and suddenly I meet an old friend of mine from Düsseldorf, a very famous model, but her career is over, she's on the way down, so now she's dancing for money in this motel. It's a bad situation, I can tell you."

Wolfgang flaunts his storytelling skills on several of the other tracks on 'Eloquence'. 'Best Friend's Birthday' is a humorous tale of a man whose day is falling apart, complete with blasts of mute trumpet and repeated calls of "I'm freaking out!", while 'Axis Of Envy' is altogether darker and heavier. The latter is the track he recorded with Bon from Nitzer Ebb.

"Making up stories in this way is something which really fits with me because I wanted to be an actor when I was a young boy," says Wolfgang. "Unfortunately, my parents didn't allow me to go to acting school or have lessons for this. They said, 'No Wolfgang, you must have something serious for your life'. So I became a furniture designer and then I became an architect. But of course, this was not bad for me actually. It enabled me to build many things, including the various things that I built when I was with Kraftwerk. So, no, this was not bad for me at all."







If 'Eloquence' is a testament to Wolfgang Flür as a storyteller, then so too are his 'Musik Soldat' performances, although in a far less obvious way. These are not live shows and they are not DJ sets. Instead, they are what Wolfgang calls "presentations", during which he plays upbeat musical selections – synthpop, electro, techno – some of which are his own recordings and remixes, while others are tracks by his many friends and associates in the electronic music world.

The sounds are accompanied by a continuous film show, incorporating everything from clips of old movies to behind-the-scenes footage of Kraftwerk during their heyday to segments shot by Zuhair in some of the many places around the world she and Wolfgang have visited.

"I've been doing these shows for about six years now and I try to do something different each time," says Wolfgang. "With the films, I'm always trying to collect new scenes. We take a camera everywhere we go, so we always have lots of new scenes we can put in. But the films must fit with the music I am presenting. They must work together because I want it to be a double experience for people. Sometimes people dance and sometimes they just watch the films with their mouths open."

"Some of the people who have seen what I do, especially the music companies in Germany, they say, 'What is this you are doing?'. They say, 'We don't know how to promote you, Wolfgang'. Well, OK, if they are not able to understand, what can I do? I was always different. This is why Kraftwerk took me as the drummer, because I was different, because I had the courage to play electronic drum pads, you know, metal plates instead of a regular drum set. This is also why I don't call myself a DJ. I'm just presenting music and visuals – and making it my way by acting and moving. I sweat and sweat and afterwards I am really wet. Every evening when I play, it is like sport for me."

In the last part of the show, Wolfgang dons his Pickelhaube, his infamous German military pointed helmet, and performs a kind of clockwork marching dance. This is the 'Music Soldier' in full flow. The audiences generally greet the appearance of the hat and the weird dancing with a mixture of amusement and excitement. But as Wolfgang is keen to stress, he's making a deadly serious point.

"I put on the hat and do my silly dance, and we have footage of me marching outside Buckingham Palace and at the Statue of Liberty with the hat on, but I also play scenes from anti-war movies in the last part of the show. So it's not for a joke, it's a statement that I'm making. It's a demonstration of my hatred for everything to do with war and soldiers, with the dark business as I call it. There's one particular film I show near the end which was one of the first ever anti-war movies. It's

called 'Hell's Angels', which was the name given to the English fighter pilots in the First World War, and it has these dramatic scenes showing the true story of a Zeppelin sent to London to throw bombs on Trafalgar Square.

"When I was 17 years old, I was called to join the military, but I would not go. The Vietnam War was happening at the time and I was a shy young man – I was soft, I had no muscles, I was thin, I was really girlish. I told my mother, 'Mother, I'll never go to the military'. I said, 'I can choose to work in a civil service instead', so I asked to work in a hospital. I was determined not to go to the military. I said to my mother, 'If they don't accept it, then I'll go to jail. The police can come and take me. This is a political thing for me and I am proud of it'. Fortunately, I didn't have to go to jail. I worked in the hospital instead. It was a big challenge for me, but it was a good job actually."

Looking ahead rather than back, the next challenge for Wolfgang Flür is to come up with a new show featuring the material on 'Eloquence', most of which has not yet been included in his 'Musik Soldat' sets. It's going to be interesting to see how that pans out.

"I'm very happy with the album, but it has been a rush to bring everything together," he says. "We just started on it earlier this year. It was February, I think. And I didn't sign my record contract until July. I was worried because everything was recorded at different times and in different places, but it all seems to work together well. It sounds like a complete album. The main problem was finding some of the tracks. I had to look everywhere – in cupboards, in boxes in different parts of my house, on my computer, on my old computer which is in the cellar."

So does it feel good to finally get this stuff out there?

"Yes. I think I have to ask myself why I kept some of it hidden away for so long. It's not right that I left it sitting in cupboards and in drawers. It shouldn't really have been anywhere that I kept my socks and my pants."

**'Eloquence – Complete Works' is out now on Cherry Red**

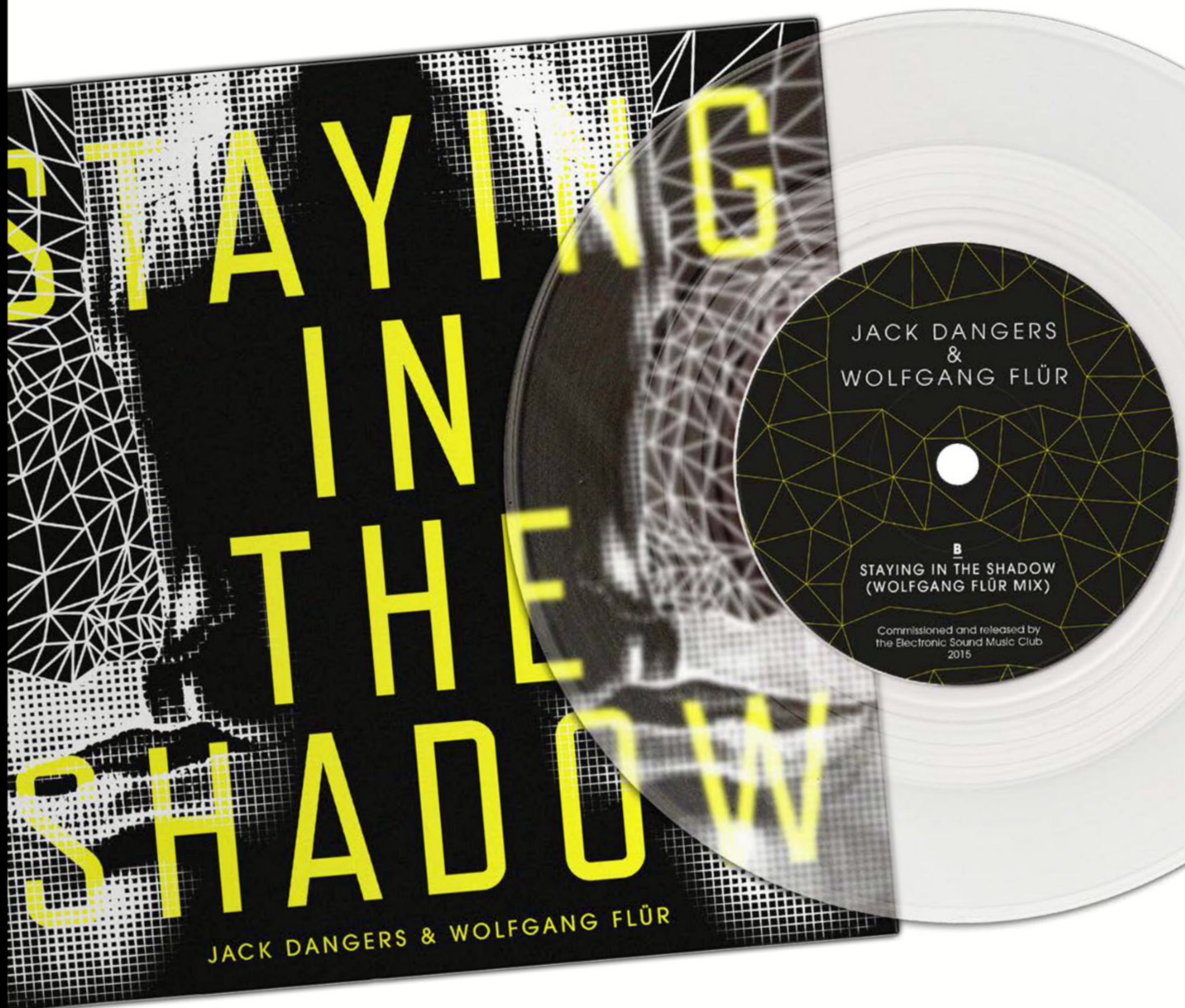




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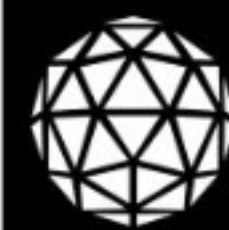
TECH

ARTURIA BEATSTEP PRO  
TINY SYNTH  
SYNTHESISER DAVE  
READERS' SYNTHS  
APP ROUND UP









# ARTURIA BEATSTEP PRO

The Grenoble geniuses return, this time with a knobby, paddy, **MIDI** beastie

Words: **LUKE SANGER**

Being a fan of sequencers and music tech hardware in general, I was champing at the bit to receive the new Beatstep Pro and put it through its paces. Thankfully, I could get started right away: the box contains everything you need to get going, with a plethora of cables for the various setup configurations you may have. The slim and rather beautiful packaging wouldn't look out of place in an Apple Store.

The Beatstep Pro itself feels rugged and weighty and should withstand the usual rigours of gigging with no problems. One thing that does concern me slightly, however, is the super slim micro USB connector, which could potentially snap off if something knocked into it. All the other connectors are 3.5mm jacks and adapters are provided where necessary, like the MIDI breakout cable.

Like many modern music devices, the Beatstep Pro doesn't ship with a paper manual, instead directing you to an online PDF. I decided to see how far I could manage without it, but I got stumped when trying to work out how to assign MIDI channels. Once I'd looked this up, though, everything else was easy and self-explanatory.

The beauty of this device lies in its simplicity: there are no menus to dive through, and everything is clearly laid out on the front panel. There are two monophonic melodic sequencers available and one dedicated drum track. Notes or beats are added by the step sequencer and knobs combo, old school style, or in real time via the pads, more akin to MPC-style sequencing.

My favourite features are the dedicated swing, randomness and probability knobs, which instantly spice up your patterns in ways only hardware sequencers seem to achieve. These functions are of course available in software like Reaktor and Max/MSP, but having dedicated controls for this purpose on the front panel really invites you to experiment and quickly gleans usable musical results. A shift button and pad combo allows you to access some other cool features like scales, quantisation resolution and sequencer direction.

As all sequencers should be, the Beatstep Pro is simple to use, very flexible and has many powerful tricks up its sleeve. It may not be as fully featured as a Cirkon, for example, but at €249 it is about a tenth of the price. This unit plus a couple of small boxes like the Nord Drum, Volca Sampler and, say, a Minibrute would make a great little live setup and would certainly be much more individual than an off-the-shelf groovebox.





# THE ELECTRONIC SOUND TINY SYNTH FINDS A HOME

Earlier this year, Electronic Sound commissioned the building of a little synthesiser by our very own resident synthesiser fixer-upper Synthesiser Dave. The synth, a 'light controlled stepping oscillator', then went on an odyssey around the UK to visit the great and good of the electronic music scene. It was signed by Andy McCluskey and Paul Humphries of Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, Stephen Mallinder (ex-Cabaret Voltaire, now of Wrangler), John Foxx, Graham Massey of 808 State, Clint Boon of Inspiral Carpets (that's what you get if you hang about in Manchester too long), Bengie, Paul Hartnoll and, finally, Wolfgang Flür. We made it one of the rewards when we ran a successful Kickstarter campaign when we went monthly.

The person who snagged the synth was Mark Fordyce, and his prize included an invite to our launch party, an intimate chit chat about electronic music with Stephen Mallinder, Andy McCluskey and Wolfgang Flür, followed by us all trooping into the venue next door where Wolfgang performed his 'Musik Soldat' show, and then after that back to the hotel for drinks into the early hours. It was a great night. What we didn't know was that Mark himself has a history as an early electronic pop pioneer. His band, The Mood, were signed to RCA and were on the verge of great things off the back of their 1983 single, 'Paris Is One Day Away'.

But fate intervened just when fate really wasn't wanted. Watch the video to see Mark tell the story of The Mood's saddest moment, and watch Wolfgang sign the Tiny Synth too: And here you can see the Tiny Synth's travels in all their glory:

**WATCH THE VIDEOS**

**[WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/PLAYLIST?LIST=PLA0MPVVA2LZWXY-JE6TABAMBBQUXLSEKH](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA0MPVVA2LZWXY-JE6TABAMBBQUXLSEKH)**





# SYNTH ESISER DAVE

Synthesiser Dave's shed is sort of like one of those homes for distressed hedgehogs. People find a poorly hedgehog under a bush, or on the hard shoulder of a motorway, take it home and put in a cardboard box with a blanket and some cat food, and then they call Mrs Tiggywinkles, hoping they'll come and take the flea-ridden spiny worm-eater off their hands. That, in some ways, is what happened with this Siel DK 80. Its

owner phoned Synthesiser Dave and asked him to come and collect it for mending and, on discovering it might cost about £25 to bring it back to life, offered to sell it to Dave for a tenner. The Italian synth manufacturer Siel (Societa Industrie Elettroniche) made this peculiar synth in 1985, not long before they gave up the ghost, and it was a sort of a response to the Korg Poly 800, which Dave didn't like at all. But Dave rather likes this.

**WATCH THE VIDEO**

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/EMBED/31EUO\\_CLWZ8](https://www.youtube.com/embed/31EUO_CLWZ8)



# READERS' SYNTHS

If you too are filled with joy by your favourite machine, you can share it with the world: write to us at [info@electronicsound.co.uk](mailto:info@electronicsound.co.uk) with 'Readers' Synths' as the subject line

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## ELECTRONIC DREAM PLANT WASP

Owner: **Pete Roberts**

Where: **London, UK**

Year purchased: **2000**

Amount paid: **£470**

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"In the 1980s I lived in Norwich and was in a very early synthpop outfit called Testcard F. We started out with a 1960s Farfisa organ, an electronic kick drum and snare made from Maplin kits and an EDP Wasp. This was like a Sinclair ZX81 of the synth world: brilliant, cutting edge technology somewhat hampered by its build quality.

"Apart from the striking black and yellow flat 'keyboard', for me the interesting thing was that it didn't have the usual ADSR. The sustain control also enabled the repeat mode – a kind of one note arpeggiator which we used a lot for the main rhythm element. The white noise and filter made a useful snare too. The keyboard sensitivity seemed to stray a little – sometimes you could play it just by waving a hand nearby.

"The Wasp tragically malfunctioned after a couple of years and was ditched. Somehow the replacement machines we got with their excellent and robust build quality, patch memories, stable tuning and proper keyboard action didn't seem half as much fun.

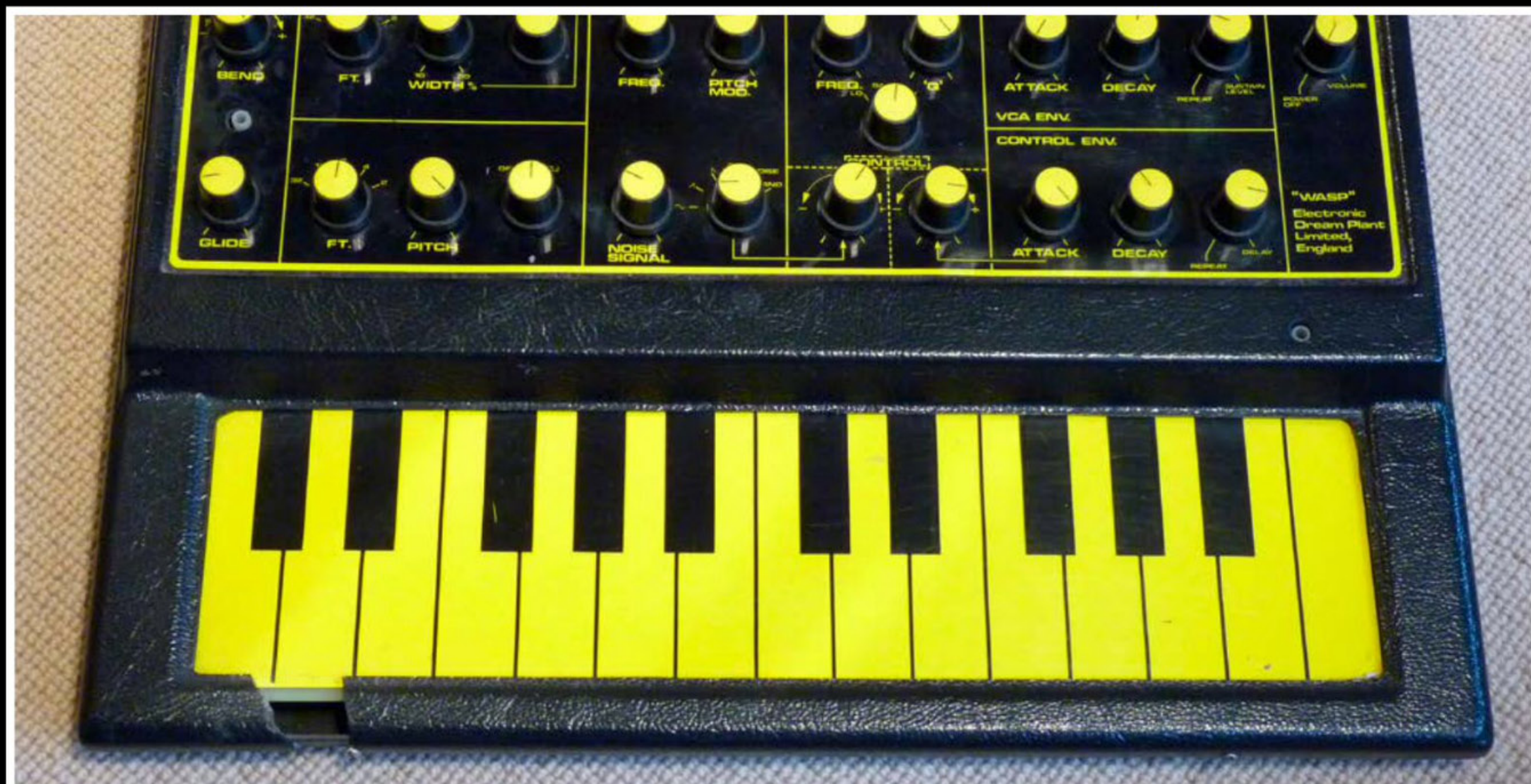
"So, 15 years later when I saw a Wasp on sale in the window of Rock Stop on Charing Cross Road at what seemed an eye-watering price, I bought it. Later on I got a Kenton MIDI to CV and Wasp convertor, so I could trigger it via its curious 'link sockets'.

"It came with a "Performer's manual" which had a somewhat disturbing cover and some handy pages showing the controls that you could photocopy and write your settings on. In Testcard F we'd attempted a similar approach with cardboard overlays with holes in, which slipped over the knobs to help recall patches – though it never seemed to work.

"I'm not convinced you can ever get the same sound from the Wasp twice, and in some ways that's why I love the thing. It's a tad unpredictable and capable of sounds that are enormous, raspy or downright strange, so I tend to record or sample them when they happen, rather than using it as it was intended. Also, its leatherette plastic case seems to be getting more fragile with age – hence the bit that's missing in the photo.

"It's still a hit with visitors. People spend a surprising amount of time just sitting noodling around on it. Small, battery operated, built in speaker and brilliant – what's not to like?"













# APPY TALK

Part two of our round up of the top **iPAD SYNTHESISER APPS** around – vintage giants that you can keep in your pocket

Words: **MARK ROLAND**

Last month we looked at some of the best synthesiser apps on the market – this month, we've got four more. If you wanted to get hold of these vintage beauties for real, it'd set you back around £10,000. The total price of all the iPad apps listed here – just over £60 – looks pretty appealing now, doesn't it? Add to that the great modern features the developers have been able to give these classic synths, as well as how easy it is to just pull out your tablet and play wherever you are (even in the bath!), and it's a total no-brainer, really...



## KORG iM1 KORG INC

### WHAT WAS IT ORIGINALLY?

Did you listen to any pop records from 1988 to, oh, pretty much the rest of the 1990s? Yamaha may have owned most of the 1980s thanks to their DX7, but they were usurped good and proper by Korg when they unleashed their monster M1. It wasn't just a synth, oh no, it was a workstation, for hard working musicians to do work on. It was built to be as happy on the road as in the studio, and in fact it was pretty much a studio in itself. With a big five-octave keyboard, on-board sequencing, multitimbrality, loads of effects, and cards which loaded 100 sounds that would bed in immediately to almost any mix you cared to stuff them into, it soon became a core instrument for thousands of studios and musicians. The synthesis side of the M1 wasn't so emphasised, its sounds were built from samples which were then effected and filtered. There was no resonance control, but no one cared because this was a machine built to switch on, stick a card of preset sounds into it, and start playing. It was the biggest selling synth of its time, shifting 250,000 units at £1,500 a pop. Everyone had one, from Rick Wakeman to Plastikman.

### WHAT IS IT NOW?

The iM1 came out in May 2015 and is literally an M1 in your iPad. It sounds the same. Seriously. It has seven "cards" that load by touching one of them, instantly. And there are two in-app purchases available for £3.99 each, which add another 16 and 11 cards respectively.

Auditioning sounds from the 'Best Collection' card is like an aural history of the early 1990s. There's 'Organ 2', the sound of a thousand house hits, and the reason



deep house producers still seek out vintage M1s to this day. There's 'Solo Sax', too, and before you know it you're involuntarily knocking out Nightcrawlers' 1992 smash, 'Push The Feeling On'. The app adds a resonant filter, and programming it is way easier than the original hardware version. Creating and editing Multisound patches is very straightforward via the clean interface. In fact, editing everything is very easy with the brilliant design of this app. There's also a manual on board, just in case, as well as a replica of the original manual too.

### BEST FEATURE?

Loading the cards with one touch, and being reunited with a sound world that isn't necessarily the most challenging or contemporary in the current climate, but is just so good and usable. And pan pipes.

### DOWNSIDE?

They've left off the sequencing capability of the original. But you can see why. After all, why fiddle about sequencing when there are many fully functioning packages for the iPad which can control the iM1 – not the least of which is Korg Inc's own Gadget environment. It's also not particularly a programmer's synth. It's an M1. Not everyone is going to like the sounds it makes and they're not going to be bothered to try to edit them either. Not cheap.

### HOW MUCH?

£22.99





Arturia

**iProphet**



## IPROPHET ARTURIA

### WHAT WAS IT ORIGINALLY?

The Prophet VS was made by Sequential Circuits, the company founded by synth genius Dave Smith, who will be revered evermore for his Prophet 5 synth, and the recent much lauded Prophet 6. It was one of the last synths the company made before it was sold to Yamaha in 1987, and it was digital. Boasting "Vector Synthesis", the main selling point was the four oscillators per voice, made up of 127 waveforms that you could then mix between using the joystick. The result was a pretty dynamic-sounding, crunchy, digital beast, with some wild noises lurking just below the surface. The VS has the kind of exciting sound design potential of analogue, and did clean, digital 1980s sounds too. They didn't use common parts, many were custom built, so if original models malfunction, pretty much the only way to fix them is to cannibalise another one, which is a damn shame. The VS wasn't a huge success, and with only 2,500 ever made and half of those probably binned or stripped for parts by now, this machine is a truly endangered species.

### WHAT IS IT NOW?

If any vintage synth needed rescuing, it was the VS: a great synth that sadly became a victim of economics. Arturia recognised this, and have brought their usual smarts to the app, which retains the original's unique character, including of course the all-important joystick, and the 127 waveforms which can be assigned to any of the four oscillators easily. Filter shaping has been replaced with touch screens, so you can drag those envelope shapes around until it looks right, or until something cool starts coming out the speakers, the latter being the preferred method of synthesis since the dawn of time. Looping the ADSR

envelope makes this a great app for creating moving pads. With dedicated pages for the Vector synthesis bit, a funky modulation matrix and effects, not to mention the gazillion pre-loaded sounds, the iProphet is a joy to use, a great resurrection of a classic.

### BEST FEATURE?

Synth apps have the advantage of bringing intuitive interface design to classic synths that were not in any way intuitive, and this app really makes VS synthesis easy.

### DOWNSIDE?

It's quite hard to nitpick something that is this good. It sounds digital, but it can also make analogue noises. It's not the standard subtractive synthesis approach, and that might not be to your taste if you're a late 70s/early 80s purist.

### HOW MUCH?

£7.99



## KORG IPOLYSIX KORG INC

### WHAT WAS IT ORIGINALLY?

Korg's Polysix was launched in 1981 and was one of the first almost affordable polyphonic synths at £899. It was head-to-head at the time with Roland's Juno 6, and while the Juno had Roland's considerable polyphonic start on Korg (they'd introduced the almost unbearably lovely Jupiter 4 in 1978), Korg had the edge in that the Polysix had memory storage where the Juno 6 had none, and could be synced up via CV/gate, whereas the Juno wouldn't communicate with anything. As a result, the Polysix cleaned up, until in 1982 Roland put everything right with the Juno 60, and were able to blow the competition out of the water with its new MIDI polysynth.

### WHAT IS IT NOW?

The Polysix, while popular, was a relatively limited synth. The app has kept the best features of the hardware version – like unison mode, for example, which puts all six oscillators onto one key and then allows you to detune them for some very huge mono sounds – and adds some new features, like another Polysix for starters (you can sequence two independent Polysix synths), a drum machine, a sequencer and a mixer. Like the synth itself, these additions are basic affairs; the mixer has eight tracks, one each for the two synths and six channels devoted to the drum kit. Each strip has a solo and mute



button, pan pot, effect mix pot and a gain pot and there's a master FX section, too. The sequencer is 64-step and you can chain patterns together into songs.

### BEST FEATURE?

The automation feature (press and hold any knob on the synth and the automation window opens up) is a powerful tool, and in association with the sequencer allows for some complex soundscaping. You can knock up songs on it quickly and then share them via the Polyshare button, which is "powered by Soundcloud" and allows for a social media experience with your fellow Polysix noodlers with followers, charts and all that jazz.

### DOWNSIDE?

It's simple and elegant, like the original, but it might lack some hard edge for some users. I found it limiting to start with, but after a few sessions I grew to enjoy it more and more. Another not-cheap Korg price point.

### HOW MUCH?

£22.99





# IMINI SYNTHESISER ARTURIA

## WHAT WAS IT ORIGINALLY?

A Minimoog. The Minimoog. The wooden-cased beauty created by Dr Robert Moog, popularised by Wendy Carlos, Keith Emerson and Rick Wakeman – specifically the Model D. It's got belting great bass sounds, and screaming lead sounds for squiggly wiggly soloing while wearing a cape and trying to steal the limelight from the guitarist, or for making crowds of adoring and newly minted synthpop fans lose their shit at Wembley Arena if you're Gary Numan in 1979. Whichever, the Minimoog is probably the iconic synthesiser. And if you want to play 'Autobahn' properly, you'll need one of these. That's why Kraftwerk had a load of them in Kling Klang.

## WHAT IS IT NOW?

It's a Minimoog in your iPad, which you can switch into polyphonic mode, with an arpeggiator and a Kaoss pad-alike XY controller interface option thrown in. And FX (delay and chorus). Arturia have been making vintage synth emulations as standalone and plugins for desktops for some time now, and the iPad version of the Minimoog is just great. It's easy to use, and has retained much of the character of the original, while the additions are sympathetic to what made the Minimoog so desirable. It's an app you'll want to fire up all the time.



## BEST FEATURE?

A Minimoog you make polyphonic? A Minimoog with an arpeggiator? That'll do...

## DOWNSIDE?

Erm, struggling a bit to find one, give me a moment...

## HOW MUCH?

£7.99



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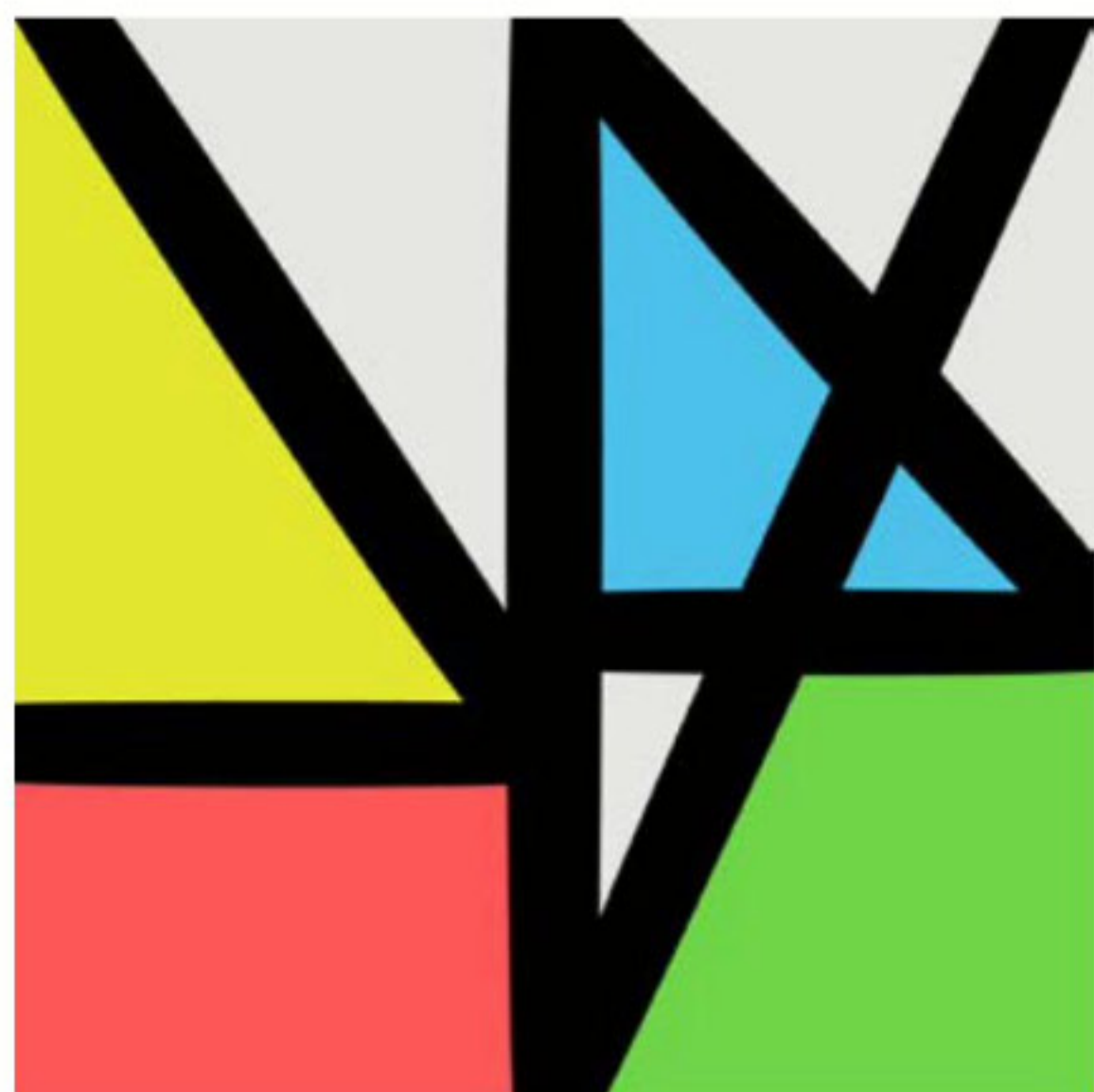
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### Music Complete

MUTE

**Manchester's finest serve up one of the year's biggest albums. We take a long, hard listen...**

First up, some housekeeping. No, Peter Hook isn't on it (\*waits for tumbleweed to blow across the prairie before continuing\*). So what else do we know? The sleeve is by Peter Saville, course it is, and guests include Iggy Pop, La Roux, what's-his-chops off The Killers, and The Chems' Tom Rowland, Stuart Price and Richard X appear on assorted production and mixing duties. The Traveling Wilburys with synths then.

The last two albums, 2001's 'Get Ready' and 2005's 'Waiting For The Sirens' Call' (three if you count 2013's '... Sirens' Call' outtakes 'Lost Sirens') were more leave it than take it. The harder-nosed have it that their last decent (merely decent) outing was 1993's 'Republic', so what awaits with this, their 10th studio album?

The band – stalwarts Bernard Sumner, Stephen Morris, Gillian Gilbert, along with new-ish boys and Sumner's Bad Lieutenant cohorts Tom Chapman and Phil Cunningham – say the only guideline before they set to work on 'Music Complete' was to make a dance record.

"We wanted to go back to the roots of New Order and make an electronic record," says Chapman. Morris puts it best, blaming Factory Floor: "Seeing young people jiggling about to things with wires hanging out the back jogs your memory a bit about the way you used to do things. You think, 'Ah, that used to be me, maybe we could do that again'."

So could they? Have they? You know what, they sort of have. 'Music Complete' is very much an album of two halves plus a song that seems to have escaped from the last album by The Killers.

Opener 'Restless' is a treat, prime, back to their roots New Order and as distinctive an album opener as 'Regret' opening 'Republic'. It's not 'Love Vigilantes' on 'Low Life' but not much is. Big, swooping, stringy chords, obligatory twangy guitar solo and bright as buttons drumming. Next up, 'Singularity', which has something of the Joy Divisions about it. That brooding bass rumble, a chicka-chicka-chicka drum machine, driving Teutonic groove. And then about halfway in it does this funny thing.

Up to that point, on first listen, you're thinking, 'This is good'. It's certainly more New Order than New Order have been in a decade – and just then a sequencer kicks in and the song, in a blink, flits from Joy Division to New Order and you go from 'This sounds okay' to "HERE WE GO!". And you'd not be wrong.

Then it happens. 'Plastic'. If they'd started the album with 'Plastic' you'd have half the electronic music world throwing in the towel, packing up and going home. Think 'Thriller' rubbing off on 'I Feel Love' in an electro back alley. It's a total delight, all six minutes and 55 seconds of it. This is proper, PROPER New Order. All of a sudden 'Music Complete' is sounding like the big brother of 'Technique'. Enough said? Marvel at how crisp and sharp and clean everything is. That hi-hat, so champagne-bright it sounds like a bag of

bombs going off in a greenhouse factory. The remixes, due in November as part of a vinyl boxset, are going to be worth waiting for.

The worry is, of course, they've blown their load after three tracks. Nope. Track four, 'Tutti Frutti', starts off like Frankie Goes To Hollywood meets 'Funky Town' before it irons out into a classic New Order four-to-the-floor romp, complete with a 'Fine Time' "feel that love technique"-esque voiceover. Oh, and there's some corking lyrics throughout the record, won't spoil the fun, but when Bernard nails it... Take the singalong chorus here: "You got me where it hurts / But I don't really care / Cos I know I'm okay / Whenever you are there / You take me to a place / I always want to go / You always make me high / Whenever I feel low". And the soaring, glorious female vocal? That's La Roux's Elly Jackson and that's her on the funk-fuelled Chic-style following track 'People On The High Line' and earlier on 'Plastic'.

It's quite hard to get past the first five tracks, which as an opening quintet are pretty devastating. Once you do, the second half heads off in all directions. 'Academic' is cast from the same New Order songbook as opener 'Restless', both of which would have sat nicely on 'Republic', and 'Nothing But A Fool' is real belter and not just because it clocks in at a whopping seven minutes and 43 seconds. At that length you'd expect a banger, right? Wrong. It's the most guitar-led track on the album, a hint of Bowie's 'Absolute Beginners' about it, hardly a synth in sight and a chorus that builds and builds and builds and builds. 'Unlearn The Hatred' gets back to the dancefloor and some straightforward Chems-produced piano house...

Before I get carted off for some impartiality electroshock therapy, some balance. There are a trio of oddities. 'Stray Dog' is an instrumental, with Iggy Pop's growly spoken word on top. It reminds me a little of Ry Cooder's 'Paris Texas' OST and while not a duffer,





it sits a bit odd here. 'The Game' is a strange little thing. A bit of a nothing track, going nowhere. And I don't quite know what to make of the Stuart Price-produced 'Superheated', the album's closer. It comes with The Killers' Brandon Flowers on chorus duties and is more a Killers song than a New Order one. Which is odd in itself and perhaps why it's buried at the end. Sounds all wrong. As prodigious as Price is, he's surplus to requirements here. Ship in an electronic music producer to produce New Order? Don't be daft. That said, the Tom Rowlands and the Richard X credited cuts

don't sore thumb half as much as this. Take from that what you will.

What strikes you about the album as a whole – and you don't notice it at first – is there's very little of that trademark Peter Hook bass twang, just a few bars here and there. And here's the thing: for all the huffing and puffing, New Order without Hooky is still New Order. And all the better for it. The last two or three albums bore the scars of the ill-feeling, but this return, with the dust seemingly settled, finds New Order back to their best, doing what New Order do best.

What's more, even Hooky will listen to 'Music Complete' and have a wry smile. You'd imagine he'd kick himself quite hard when no one was looking. Traveling Wilburys? What bloody idiot said that?

**NEIL MASON**



Pic: Nick Wilson





## CHVRCHES

### Every Open Eye

VIRGIN EMI/GOODBYE

**Glaswegian trio's second album finds them sounding bigger and better than ever**

A lot has happened for Chvrches since they first burst onto the electronic scene in 2013 with their debut, 'The Bones Of What You Believe'. Lauren Mayberry, Iain Cook and Martin Doherty were treated to a Brit award nomination and have been touring like crazy, quickly becoming festival favourites – quite a feat for a synthpop trio.

Now they're back with their second long-player, 'Every Open Eye', and the growth since album one is more than evident. Mayberry sounds much more in control of her material and sings with a confidence and defiance that was only hinted at on the first outing – and who can blame her? The briefest of googles will throw up more than a taster of the kind of misogynist attacks she's faced for daring to be a woman in electronic music, and Mayberry and her bandmates have been standing up against this sort of abuse since the release of their first single.

This isn't just an irrelevant biographical note: Mayberry wrote many of the lyrics to the songs on 'Every Open Eye' while

touring over the past couple of years, and directly interacting in a live environment with fans who support her in those circumstances must have contributed to the strength of personality that is conveyed on this album. Her voice is strong. The synths are bold. The drum machines lash like whips. And it proves to all the doubters that the trio can make great, interesting, popular electronic music with a woman at the helm.

It's not an album of break-up songs, but 'Every Open Eye' does deal throughout with the lingering emotions at the end of a relationship. There's the tongue-in-cheek bitterness visible in the opening track, 'Never Ending Circles' ("Here's to taking what you came for") and when Mayberry sings "I know I need to feel release" on the first single, 'Leave A Trace', it's about being set free from an involvement that is no longer giving any of the participants joy; the rest of the song celebrates letting go of a relationship that has become too controlling. In 'Bury It' she's already leaving toxic emotions behind.

The instrumentation doesn't go anywhere unexpected, but you still can't help dancing to tracks like 'Make Them Gold' – sometimes those predictable resolving refrains are just the ticket. Cook and Doherty keep the songs chugging along, the richness and depth of their contributions contrasting with Mayberry's airy voice. 'Clearest Blue' is the best example: the vowels of the chorus – "Please say you'll meet me, meet me halfway" – stretch across an almost industrial beat, and before long the song has descended into a punching, powerful mass, floating vocals barely audible over the sharp, crisp synth sounds. The band's skill at shifting between tempos and dynamics, no doubt carefully honed over years of playing live for festival crowds, is clearly on show here.

With the potential to be this generation's Depeche Mode, Chvrches are fast becoming the face of popular electronic music. Could they be the saviours of the mainstream? They've given us more than enough reason to believe so.

ROSIE MORGAN



Pic: Danny Clinch





## CARTER TUTTI VOID

**f (x)**

INDUSTRIAL

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**First studio album from the trio unleashes a deeply evocative masterpiece**

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Since splintering from seminal industrial antagonists Throbbing Gristle in 1981, Chris Carter and Cosey Fanni Tutti have remained beautifully isolated on the idiosyncratic path they've traversed through the outer reaches and subterranean depths of electronic music. While dancefloors have continued to cavort to the latest lazy producers reaping success from the shiny regurgitations enabled by evolving technology, the pair have not so much weathered but simply ignored the fleeting trends, creating music which has hot-wired basic equipment then mated it with outside elements such as Tutti's voice, guitar and cornet to birth haunting new sonic mutants.

While Throbbing Gristle sandblasted punk with the most extreme form of sheer noise terror, Carter seemed hell-bent on extracting much deeper ghosts out of his machines, to be teamed with Tutti's like-minded experiments with audio expression. Their 1981 debut

album as Chris & Cosey, 'Heartbeat', was followed by 'Trance', which named one musical trend the pair would inspire – along with techno, industrial and electronica, as homaged on the 'Twist' remix tribute by acolytes such as Carl Craig and Mike Paradinas. Their innovative spirit mushroomed when they set up their Creative Technology Institute (CTI) label, releasing further groundbreaking missives such as 1985's 'Technø Primitiv' and inaugurating their multi-purpose 'The Library Of Sound' and 'Electronic Ambient Remixes' CD series, while continuing to work with a range of collaborators.

In 2004, the duo made 'Cabal' to mark changing their name to Carter Tutti, followed by 2007's 'Feral Vapours Of The Silver Ether' and a riveting re-imagining of Nico's 'Desertshore' album in 2011. That year the couple were joined by Factory Floor's Nik Colk Void, playing Mute's landmark Short Circuit Festival at the Roundhouse (as captured on the mind-frying 'Transverse' live album). 'f (x)' is Carter Tutti Void's first studio emission and moves the electronic goalposts again as the six lengthy excursions plunge into a shadowy, multi-textured netherworld where riffs and melodies congeal, and an infernal pulse throbs down below like a bottomless pit echo of the minimal techno heartbeat.

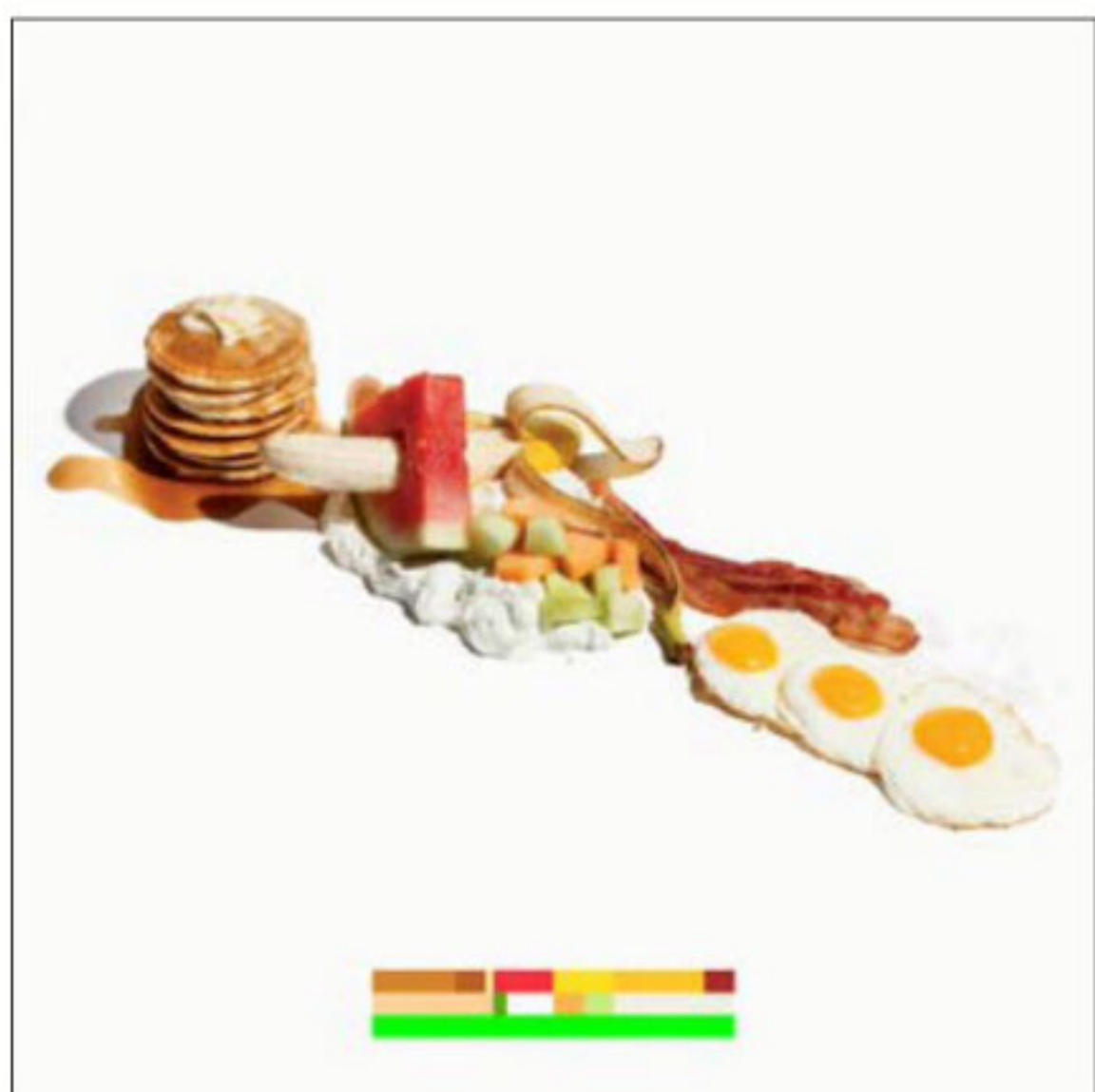
Impossibly deep, dark and distorted, the radioactive shudders, eerie screees, croaking bullfrog's rectum swamp gas and cracked howls slashing 'f = (2.2)' and 'f = (2.4)' construct an evocative new strain of scorched earth sex magic and aural cacophony ritual. 'f = (2.3)' and 'f = (2.6)' are lashed and elevated by dismembered vocals and deep-fried guitar, but by the closing track everything's become a skeletal, wind-ravaged ruin of parched circuit skyscrapers.

No one else sounds like this and they couldn't if they tried. It also seemed that way when Chris & Cosey started out more than three decades ago, and took years for the world to (almost) catch up. Maybe the fevered knowledge, telepathic grand passions and unearthly sonic arsenals being unleashed on 'f (x)' are the sound of a distant electronic future but, logistically, that would be doubtful given the unique working methods at large here. What is clear is that this sublimely evocative work comes as a welcome furnace blast in the rather predictable present as three true originals run riot and put everything in a supernaturally alternative perspective.

**KRIS NEEDS**







## BATTLES

La Di Da Di

WARP

### Experimental rockers ditch the vocals in search of a new voice

Battles have always been, first and foremost, an instrumental band. Their strength comes from a combination of virtuoso musicianship and a willingness to embrace experimental structures. Their early EPs were rhythmic masterclasses that split the lines between prog rock, post-rock and minimal techno. So tight was the playing that the music sometimes felt more like the product of robots than a group of guys jamming in real time.

Despite these beginnings, the conversation surrounding their subsequent material has often been dominated by how the band has chosen to deploy vocals. Their 2007 debut 'Mirrored' was marked by the freewheeling, digitally manipulated voice of Tyondai Braxton, who in the middle of preparations for second album 'Gloss Drop' left to focus on his solo work. The band coped spectacularly with this significant departure by drafting in an array of guest vocalists, most notably Gary Numan and Matias Aguayo.

Their latest record, 'La Di Da Di', is

characterised by an absence of vocals. As Battles' first entirely instrumental full-length, it could have been a chance to re-engage with the core elements of their practice. Unfortunately, it comes across as a missed opportunity, and something of a damp squib. Which feels like a strange thing to be writing about a Battles record, but it's hard to shake the feeling that 'La Di Da Di' is a step down. Simply put, 'La Di Da Di' is neither as fun as 'Gloss Drop' nor as purely thrilling as 'Mirrored'.

The lack of any vocal tracks needn't have been a problem at all, but perhaps a welcome injection of character would have given the listener something else to latch onto. Lead track, 'The Yabba', is a good example of what lies in store. It's bold in terms of structure, with spindly riffs and interlocking grooves, but offers little else. It feels like a series of false starts, a conveyor belt of promising ideas that could do with some more development. 'Mirrored' succeeded because it paired its compositional ambition with propulsive energy, rather than treating it as an end in itself.

I don't want to be misleading, there is good stuff here, from the glitchy reggae lilt of 'Megatouch' to the playful carnival vibe of 'Dot Com'. The band themselves are excellent throughout, especially John Stanier on drums. Perhaps the best track is 'Non-Violence' – it has an invigorating insistency about it, a real heft to the drums and a splendid rush of sparkly synths that dissolve as rapidly as they appear. The entrance of each new element is unpredictable and, crucially, exciting.

If this review dwells unfairly on the negatives, it's only because we expect more from Battles. I understand why the band didn't want to offer up a repeat of 'Gloss Drop', but they needed to give us something more substantial than this. 'La Di Da Di' succeeds when it harnesses the energy of its predecessors, but a lot of the time it feels strangely inert. Battles have always been a band easier to admire than to love. It's just that this time round, there's not even that much to admire.

COSMO GODFREE



Pic: Grant Cornett





## JOHN FOX

### London Overgrown

METAMATIC

**A minimalist marvel shines in the light at the end of the concrete underpass**

Abandoned cities being gradually reclaimed by nature is a theme that's captured the imagination of John Foxx for decades. It's popped up before, on albums like 'Cathedral Oceans' and 'My Lost City'. You might even say it's something of a personal obsession.

In the liner notes to 'London Overgrown', Foxx talks fondly of night-time rambles in Highgate Cemetery, of the tree roots sprouting from the walls of his recording studio in early 80s Shoreditch, then an industrial wasteland giving few clues to its hipster future, and of the derelict factory offices in his native Lancashire, where brambles grew among the moulding account books. He also cites an impressive array of references, both populist and scholarly, from 'Planet Of The Apes' and 'Quatermass', to the work of Piranesi (famed for his etchings of Roman ruins) and the extravagant architectural fantasies of Capriccio.

'London Overgrown' relies on the same capacity for creative vision, but the beautifully rendered artwork (Foxx's

own) certainly helps build an appropriate mind palace for the listener. The multi-layered picture is made all the more intriguing by the ambient minimalism of this instrumental album. If you take away the artwork and the intriguing theme, you could easily hear the ambient washes and 'Blade Runner'-esque strains as being far removed from urbanity, crumbling or otherwise. Close your eyes and you might find yourself transported to a meditation resort on a remote Balinese beach, rather than sitting in the shadow of the moss-enveloped spire of St Paul's Cathedral.

The distinctly filmic quality recalls Eno's 'Music For Airports', with no percussion and little variance between the tracks, some of which are given bewitching titles like 'Often Now, I Wake' and 'A Small Revolving World'. Ethereal notes are sustained for aeons, burning with intensity for a few seconds and then slowly ebbing away before the cycle begins anew. Aside from the more brooding 'City Of Mirage' and the 'Close Encounters'-ish 'Persistence Of Vision', 'London Overgrown' sounds like one slow, awe-struck awakening, like the wonder of coming to in a foreign city after a lengthy cryogenic stasis, watching a sunrise spread steadily over endless unknown horizons.

Foxx had an extended spell in the musical wilderness himself, of course. After his time with Ultravox and his initial solo success and his years running the Garden Studio, where everyone from Depeche Mode to The Cure recorded, he retreated from the fray in the mid-80s. He reinvented himself as a graphic designer, photographer and multimedia conceptual artist and it's tempting to interpret this album as some sort of personal treatise on the serenity that comes from stepping back from the maelstrom at your artistic apex, a la Ziggy Stardust.

In the manifesto-like press release, John Foxx talks passionately about a possible future London as a "Post carbon city" complete with "the Hanging Gardens of Shoreditch and the Glades of Soho", where Hampstead Heath blurs into Richmond Park. Listening to this, preferably while drifting off to sleep in darkness with the window open, the tendrils of his plangent synth strings slowly spiralling their way into your subconsciousness, such dreams feel almost close enough to touch. Here's hoping there's an accompanying tactile virtual reality installation in the works.

**JOOLS STONE**







## JOHN GRANT

**Grey Tickles, Black Pressure**

BELLA UNION

**More dark matter from the Iceland-based bard of frozen barbs and no-holds-barred songwriting**

Pity the confessional artist. They can't win. No matter how much we root for them, we still want them to bleed and keep on suffering in service to their muse.

So it is with John Grant. Having licked his wounds from the emotional battering chronicled on 'Pale Green Ghosts', he bounces back in more defiant spirit with a release that's cheeky, offhand and even a little lusty in places. It may not always pack the same emotional punch as its forerunner, but one of the most idiosyncratic voices of our time remains intact.

"Grey tickles" is the Icelandic term for a mid-life crisis, and once again the topography of Grant's adopted homeland seems etched into the grooves. But whereas 'Pale Green Ghosts' was all glacial wastes and fleeting moments of aurora borealis shimmer, 'Grey Tickles, Black Pressure' revels in volcanic fury, sticky funk oozing from the molten rock. There's even a track called 'Magma Arrives'.

The title song, recalling Elton John's 70s heyday, shows Grant hasn't lost his knack for an arresting lyric. While lamenting life with HIV and depression, he reflects: "But there are children who have cancer / And so all bets are off / Because I can't compete with that".

The album comes bookended by two spoken word monologues about love, one delivered in flat Yorkshire vowels swiftly eclipsed by a cacophony of sinister voices, but disco listicle stomper 'Disappointing' is the closest we get to an actual love song. It features the languorous croon of Tracey Thorn toasting the joys of "ballet dancers, with or without tights".

A hefty portion of the record is spent firing vitriolic barbs at former lovers, along the lines of 2013 single 'Black Belt', and arguably there are a few too many in this vein, making Grant seem like the synth-friendly Morrissey it's OK to like. The playground taunts of 'You & Him' – which sounds more like the result you'd expect from Franz Ferdinand and Sparks than their recent FFS collaboration did – wear a little thin ("You and Hitler ought to get together / You ought to learn to knit and wear matching sweaters") but the electro whiplash of 'Voodoo Doll' raises chuckles with the line, "I made a voodoo doll of you / I even put it in a corduroy jumpsuit".

There's less vulnerability on show this time around, and textures take on a darker, metallic sheen. Space invader armies rampage through 'You & Him', squelchy basslines wriggle beneath 'Snug Slacks' and furious stabs of guitar noise punctuate the chorus of 'Guess How I Know', but there's some unusual instrumentation too, like the bass oboe solo that plays out on 'Down Here'.

Grant really hits his stride in the latter half of the album with a series of blistering lunar torch songs where he unleashes that soaring, velvety baritone to devastating effect. His brush with the BBC Philharmonic last year lends some Barry-esque bombast to 'Geraldine' and the mercurial 'No More Tangles', while the proggy 'Global Warming', an amusing diatribe against sun worshippers, weeps with quivering synth lines like some latter-day 'The Windmills Of Your Mind'.

After these you can easily forgive John Grant his indulgences. Few songwriters can work in references to parapraxis, GG Allin and Prokofiev so effortlessly. It's good to have him back, grey tickles and all.

**JOOLS STONE**







## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### In A Moment... Ghost Box

GHOST BOX

#### Tenth anniversary double album from nostalgic sci-fi label

Trying to definitively pin down the output of Ghost Box, the esoteric, retro-futuristic electronic music imprint started by Jim Jupp and Julian House back in 2004, is not easy. Jupp has described each Ghost Box release as a “missive from a parallel world”, and recently defined its ethos as “a small group of like-minded artists, creating music that sounds like it came from an imaginary past”. But rather than pure re-enactment, he says, it’s “more to do with playing around with a whole set of influences from an era – say 1965 to 1985 – then recombining them to create something contemporary, yet naggingly familiar”.

And yet, how do you even begin to understand the music of a label whose essence is based on a half-remembered, half-imagined world that doesn’t exist, except in the minds of its founders? This 10th anniversary compilation, featuring 31 remastered tracks considered by Jupp and House to be the highlights of the label’s output so far (the pair record

as Belbury Poly and The Focus Group respectively, by the way), offers some in-roads.

These woozy, atmospheric curios, almost supernatural in feel, are like the soundtrack to a fragmented, surreal dream from your childhood – especially if you were a child of the 60s or 70s. Taking inspiration from the regional telly idents you used to get back in the day, the terrifying public information films that popped up without warning during daytime advert breaks, B-movie horror flicks, and the strange interlude music counting down to those supposedly educational programmes you watched while bunking off school, Ghost Box artists make music that is quintessentially English, full of sci-fi affectation, faded nostalgia, and a chilling sense of déjà vu.

Veering from the gentle, Neu!-like motorik pop of The Advisory Circle and the melancholic ennui of John Foxx & The Belbury Circle to the witching hour textures of Pye Corner Audio, and even the infectious fuzzy beatnik groove of The Soundcarriers’ ‘Boiling Point’, it makes for a vivid trip. Burbbling analogue synths are gilded by elements of musique concrète, folkie prog, dark psych, kosmische and old library music, with touchstones ranging from Jean Michel Jarre to Wendy Carlos, John Barry to Basil Kirchin, and other notable points in between.

As always, it’s about the whole aesthetic package – both the album’s lavish physical CD and vinyl formats have been overseen by designer Julian House, proving yet another example of the label’s eye-catching, retro-influenced graphic design. So while Ghost Box sets about reinventing the past – in some respects at least – it might seem to be pandering to those of a certain age, more likely to appreciate its obscure cultural references, made-up or otherwise. But there’s more than enough interesting hauntological weirdness and “out there” ideas in these potent, strangely alluring

temporal delusions to extend beyond the label’s cultish appeal, and attract curious newcomers to its wonderfully quixotic, visionary canon.

VELIMIR ILIC





## BARBARA MORGENSTERN

**Doppelstern**

MONIKA ENTERPRISE

**The multi-talented Berliner shares her skills around with an album of collaborations**

Barbara Morgenstern, the Berlin-based artist, composer, lyricist, music and choir director, likes to have a concept already in her head before recording, an idea that she can relate to both emotionally and intellectually to trigger the song writing and production.

The musical journey on 'Doppelstern' is a reference to the scientific phenomenon of double stars, which is the translation of the title. Every track here is in collaboration with another musician, hence the double theme. Each track is the result of Morgenstern and one other collaborator, her double (star) for the track, each originating in different studios, across continents, a handful of which appeared on the pre-album EP 'Beide' and are now followed by this full set of collaborations.

Morgenstern wanted every song to be a product of those pairs, the combined skills and styles, ideas and energies unique to the dynamic. Unlike her first

recording, 'Sweet Silence', in which the vocals were in English, the songs on 'Doppelstern' are mostly in German. In 'Übermorgen', a duet with Justus Köhncke, I know they must be musing over the wonder and awe of the universe – that is, how stars are a luminous ball of gas held together by their own gravity that one day will eventually explode and die, but it's hard to figure that such momentous events are occurring in the world around us from both the melodic vocals and high treble electronic pop soundtrack. It has all the qualities of an excellent radio pop song though, which the title explains is its aim.

There is a hint of mindfulness, elegance and intrigue which blends beautifully with the soundtrack when you can understand the words: 'Lost In A Fiction' is in English and 'Too Much' combine both languages successfully. That said the mood still comes across throughout the album, particularly in 'Meins sollte Meins sein', with Hauschka. In 'Gleich

ist Gleicher als Gleich', featuring Lucretia Dalt, intrigue and playfulness arrive, with random, unusual sounds and curious pace, and it seems to bring out the sweet-subtle-sharp element of Morgenstern. 'Facades', with Julia Kent, is completely different, no less captivating, with its layers of melodies popping up in unusual places and a trip hop beat in full flow.

This album is a beautiful thing to own. Working with a different musician, producer or vocalist for every track means ego finds it difficult to squeeze in, and the intent and energy goes into the one track in a different way to the norm. And there is something unique and spontaneous about every song, as she intended, with her as the thread. Now she needs to find her true artistic double (star), the one that is brave enough to pull on that thread.

NGAIRE RUTH







## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### Trevor Jackson Presents: Science Fiction Dancehall Classics

ON-U SOUND

**Monumental selection of Adrian Sherwood's finest, stretching to his furthest-out disco mutations and beyond**

Let's start by calling Adrian Sherwood the most prolific, fearless and influential electronic pioneer to sabotage this country's eardrums and cerebral reference points in the last century. For over 35 years, Sherwood's productions have replanted the dub ethos at the heart of the machine, while managing to assimilate and twist New York's post-disco electronic dance templates and turn loose later major talents in settings they never experienced again.

Trevor Jackson is an unashamed On-U acolyte whose immersion in Sherwood's productions fuelled his own idiosyncratic approach, using aliases such as Playgroup and Underdog (the name under which I first encountered him when he remixed The Sabres Of Paradise's 'Theme' in 1994). Recently hailed for his 'Metal Dance' compilations for Strut, Jackson has been let loose in the colossal On-U vaults and come up with a collection which is as startling, individual and speaker-shattering as could be hoped for.

Sherwood started On-U Sound to release the one-off New Age Steppers collective, which included members of The Slits, The Pop Group and Aswad, but the roster swiftly grew into a multi-headed hydra of mavericks, anarchists and conscious souls. Just the idea of conceiving a fresh way of presenting a new take on On-U Sound's catalogue is daunting, but over two CDs (or triple LP plus downloads) Jackson comes up trumps by homing in on Sherwood's experimental avant-disco and electro sides, along with the expected deep dub mixing desk demolitions with names such as Creation Rebel, Dub Syndicate, Suns Of Arqa and African Head Charge.

It's these warped boogie excursions which really elevate the set, along with rarities and obscure hidden gems. For instance, Sherwood's dismembered space-take on UK jazz-funkers Atmosfear's 'When Tonight Is Over' from 1984 boasts the kind of glistening pulses, disembodied vocals and clunking synth basslines which were then drenching the groundbreaking mastermixes being carried out by names such as Shep Pettibone on New York radio stations KISS FM and WBLS. These radio tapes were pure gold at the time and a huge influence on British electronic developments later that decade (which Sherwood followed up on the mangled disco outings of his 1984 album as Voice Of Authority, represented here by 'Stopping And Starting').

Sherwood already had ties to New York's dance underground after hooking up with the Sugarhill house band (bassist Doug Wimbish, guitarist Skip McDonald and drummer Keith LeBlanc) to form Tackhead and Fats Comet. He was now conducting a London parallel to New York's genre-straddling melting pot by merging his dub sensibilities with these hip hop studio titans, resulting in a new strain of alien dub-funk. These were often built on the behemoth drum machines heard on tracks here such as Tackhead's 'Now What?' and Fats Comet's 'Dub Storm' (the B-side of 1985's 'Stormy Weather' single).

Other obscurities include ferocious post-punkers The Chicken Granny, club dynamo Alan Pelay's confrontational disco tear-up 'Parasitic Machine', an early outing by Shara Nelson (with 1983 single 'Aiming At Your Heart') and Neneh Cherry's electro-rap hoedown 'Dead Come Alive'. Both of the latter were realised with The Circuit, aka Steve Beresford, who appears solo with the booming 'Loudspeaker'.

Obviously this selection is the tip of a mighty iceberg, but Trevor Jackson has done a fine job of distilling one of the biggest meltdowns to hit music into a concise explanation of its significance. And it rocks like a motherfucker.

**KRIS NEEDS**







## APHROHEAD

### Resurrection

CROSTOWN REBELS

**While the Cat's away, Chicago's underground genius revisits his dark alter-ego**

The early 90s was a fertile time for house and techno, but often it seemed that too few producers were willing to take the music beyond dancefloor-pointed manifestos, or attempt to inject any character or sense of danger. Except perhaps in Chicago, a city that was always a hotbed for innovative musical bomb squads, whether it was Master C&J's sublime subterranean missives or DJ Pierre's trail-blazing acid work.

Felix Stallings first emerged as the latter's protégé in 1987 with the classic 'Fantasy Girl', before Pierre brought him to the Guerilla label for his debut EP, 'Thee Dawn', in 1993. Felix Da Housecat had been let out of the bag, swiftly establishing a sexy, mysterious character boosted by his spoken vocals. It wasn't long before he unleashed his Aphrohead alter-ego to strike further into the realms of psychedelic experimentalism with landmarks such as 1993's 'In The Dark We Live (Thee Lite)', followed by 1994's 'Thee Industry Made Me Do It!' set.

I've long believed Felix to be one of the

unsung geniuses of American electronic music, capable of infusing anything he touches with his unique dark twist. If a crowd is cavorting in the sun, he'll drag them into a night-black alley and give them a good kicking, before sending them through the roof. When his success brought him a Kylie remix, he mangled the song beyond recognition into a coruscating warehouse pile-up. Of course, Felix went on to massive success, including the monumental Miss Kittin team-up on 'Silver Screen, Shower Scene', and he continues to obliterate dancefloors around the globe, but the studio is the laboratory where his ever-questing spirit is allowed to prowl the darker side.

The good news is that Felix has brought back his Aphrohead persona, which means a licence to push the envelope, working with live analogue beats and coaxing demonic new textures out of his machines. Easy listening it's not, although 'Resurrection' starts innocently enough with the title track's vocodered melodies and the electro flavours of 'KlymæXXX'. But Chicago underground music was never about being comfortable and, after a gorgeous Mr Fingers bassline on 'Come To ME',

Felix eases up the jacking valve on 'Let's PRANCE', harking back to seminal Windy City labels such as Dance Mania. The darkness looms on 'Elevator (I'll Take The Stairs)', a night-stalking sound painting of a Chicago project block with Felix's vocal declarations slicing through the claustrophobic glitch.

The sinister vibe continues with the kick and relentless fizzing loop of the stark 'Grown Man Cry', over which Felix intones, before the extreme locomotive machine-groove of '1KING 1QUEEN' and filthy acid sound of 'Medusa'. After 'Front To Back' has further piled on the paranoid jackhammer thump and voices-in-the-head disturbance, 'Sashe Sashe Sashe' plants a camp vocal loop over the album's spiciest re-enactment of Master C&J's icy breath, weaving an intricate death disco web in which it's almost possible to hear Felix's fevered brain hatching its next strategically placed buzz or earthworm's belch.

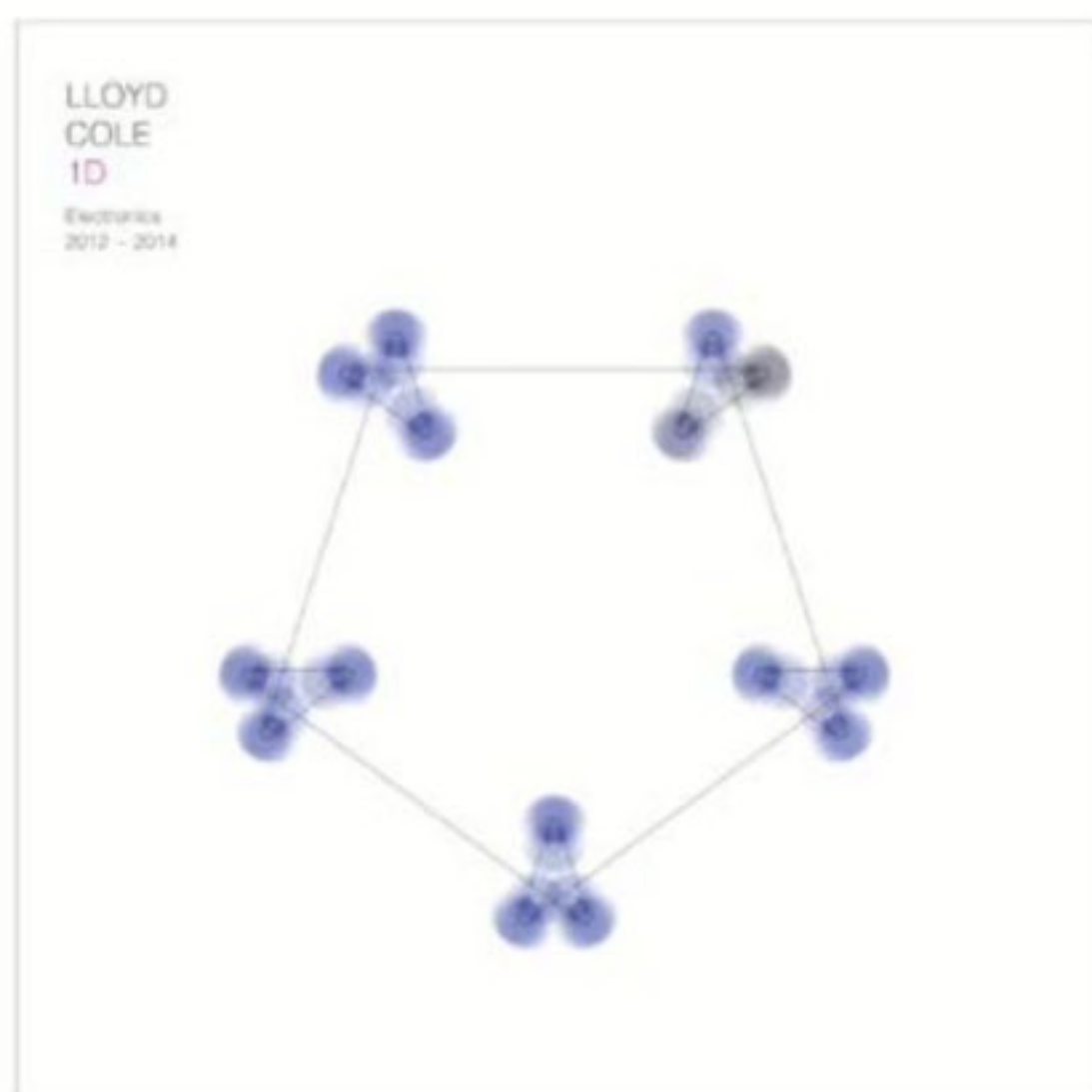
Deep, original and mischievous, this is the way this music has to go to survive the EDM onslaught. Trust Felix to come up with the cream.

**KRIS NEEDS**



Pic: Vanessa Moore





## LLOYD COLE

1D

BUREAU B

**Unfinished modular sketches from the notebook of one of electronica's more unlikely adherents**

There's an amusing New Yorker cartoon doing the rounds on social media; two middle-aged guys are looking at an expensive hi-fi and the caption reads, "The two things that really drew me to vinyl were the expense and the inconvenience". The gag may as well be about modular synthesis. Building a modular system takes time, is costly, and the finished product (if it ever is finished – modular is like crack to synth heads) is notoriously difficult to control.

In the liner notes for '1D', a record created solely with modular, Lloyd Cole explains that much of his creative life lately has been spent in front of a computer screen, and he wanted to break free from it. That, and his desire for a new process for his collaboration with Roedelius, meant he got into modular. This led to their 2013 release, 'Selective Studies Volume 1', which in turn brings us to this album.

'1D' is a collection of demos, experiments, modular system learning curves being ascended, and close-but-no-cigar

rejections Cole made in preparation for the collaboration. As part of Bureau B's canny belief that process is as valid as finished product, it encouraged Cole to dig out these demos for release. The label has some previous with this kind of nosy archival smash and grab, recently truffling through Conrad Schnitzler's vault for goodies and innocently asking Karl Bartos if he had any tapes up in the loft from his Kraftwerk days (he did, and the result was 2013's splendid 'Off The Record').

Modular systems allow dissonance – you can soon start spitting out non-standard scales of voltage controlled note generation – but Cole's melodic instinct has kept him from pursuing that path, instead inspiring a series of tuneful and gentle pieces. In some places, '1D' is like an analogue update of Mark Mothersbaugh's 'Muzik For Insomniaks' series, a couple of 1980s albums of improvised/generative music

created within the digital workflow of the Fairlight. And like 'Muzik For Insomniaks', '1D' is appealing and listenable, with enough space in it to be considered ambient, but with more rhythm and melody – more organisation – than you'd usually expect from baby-step experimental noodlings with modular.

This is certainly not a record for the casual listener, and you have to wonder what Cole's core audience will make of the relatively challenging fare, much like when Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones decided to make a pretty confrontational electronic noise project in 2014 (Minibus Pimps' 'Close To Ground'). Zep completists must have been sorely tested by that particular outing. However, from our perspective, it looks like Lloyd Cole has discovered an authentic voice with electronic music, and his search for a new process has paid off.

MARK ROLAND



Pic: Kim Frank





## THE FANTASTIC PLASTICS

Devolver

ALTERCATION

**The New York duo give a 21st century twist to new wave with this honed debut**

"When the functional technology becomes obsolete, it can then become art," runs the sample on 'We Are Obsolete' that opens the debut album from New York duo The Fantastic Plastics. It would be wrong to suggest that 'Devolver' is built up solely from redundant reference points, but in adopting an attitude and an image derived from American new wave artists like Devo and The B-52s, we can certainly make a convincing case for this band sounding retro – or is idolatry and imitation itself a form of modern art?

None of this amateur philosophising actually counts for anything, of course. We're just talking about a cute sample that happens to deal with the theme of obsolescence. What really matters is that The Fantastic Plastics (Tyson and Miranda) have produced an album that is a huge amount of fun, containing insistent, instantly anthemic tracks that will have you grinning like a loon and pogoing like an anxious Muppet. The pair

trade lyrics in that curt, shouty manner that kids are hot for these days, while guitars fizz with a syncopated riffery co-opted from The Knack's 'My Sharona'. Synths dominate the foreground with bold ambition and boisterous drums propel the songs forward with unhealthy levels of speed and vibrancy.

If CBGB hadn't closed its doors and turned into a fashion boutique, The Fantastic Plastics could have become the house band. They uniquely capture the point when new wavers finally sloughed off all but the last vestiges of bratty Ramonesiness that was an essential part of the venue's legacy. Together, Tyson and Miranda's vocals have an authentic punk wryness, while their lyrics run the gamut of concerns that nag away at us today: the hollowness of glamour and fame ('It's All Plastic'), looking perfect (the ironic romanticism of 'Under The Knife'), surveillance and the loss of personal identity ('Thought Patrol' and 'Assimilate'), the mundanity of working like you're on some vast corporate production line (the joyous standout 'Overtime!'). Even when they slow things down on the crunch and bleep of 'Mr Computer', they're still openly in thrall

to technology albeit just ever so slightly wary.

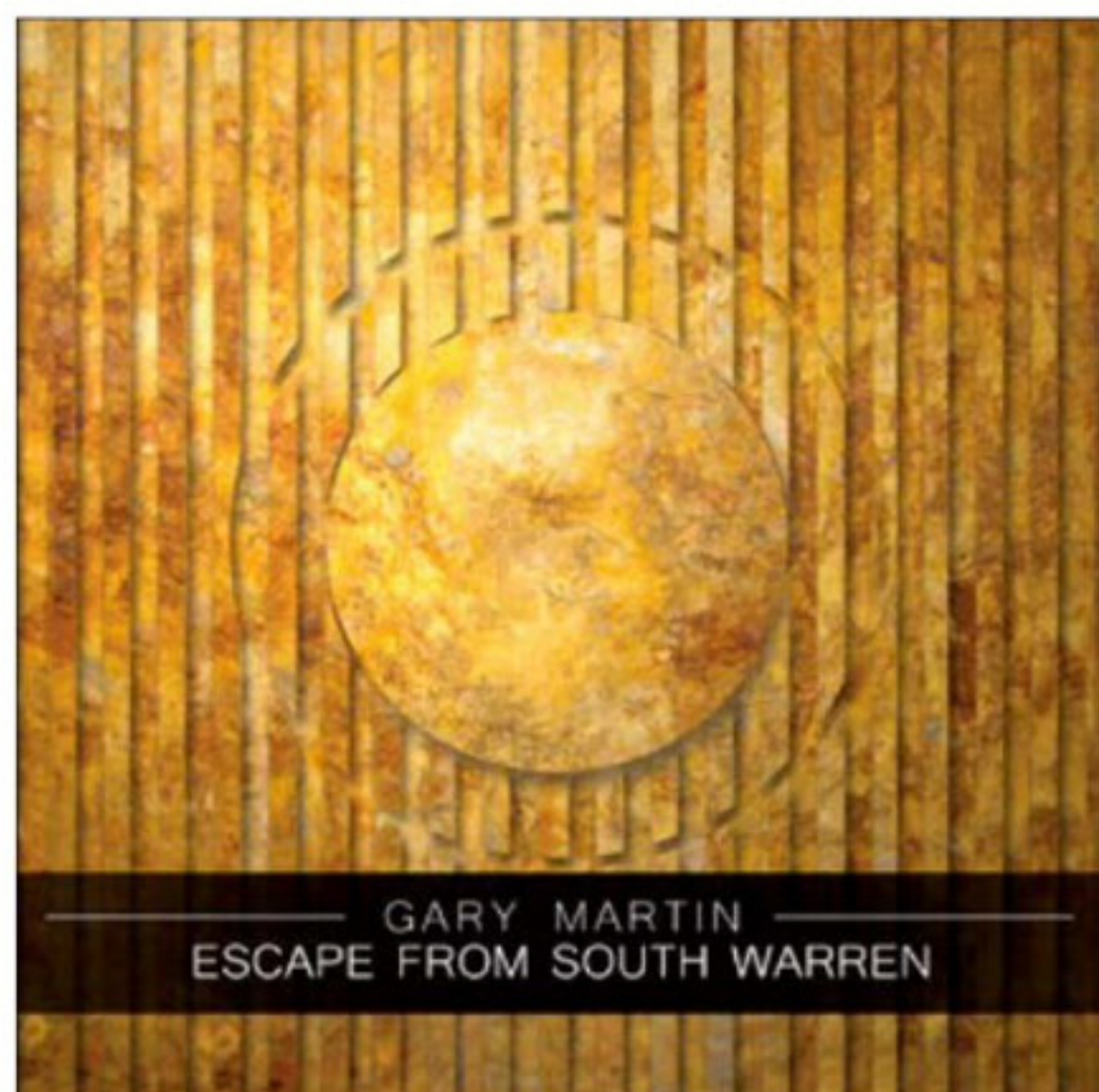
The Fantastic Plastics have made a name for themselves on the Manhattan and Brooklyn live circuits, and it's not hard to see how energetic tracks like the irrepressible 'Troublemaker' would transfer to the stage. On record, that energy is held in a constant tension between robotic synths and wiry guitars. The sound is honed and carefully sculpted, but injected with just enough chaos and manic, high-velocity shenanigans to make 'Devolver' a lasting proposition.

New York's music scene has always had a canny knack of spitting out bands that meddle with the status quo, feeding off something that has come before while reimagining it for a trend-conscious listening public. The Fantastic Plastics do that extremely well, getting you excited about bands that, for a time, seemed risibly forgettable while still sounding fresh and essential. The new new wave starts here.

MAT SMITH







## GARY MARTIN

### Escape From South Warren

MOTECH

**Less is more as Detroit techno's best-kept secret delivers his masterclass**

You'll search in vain for Gary Martin's name in the great annals of techno. He's from Detroit, he runs the Teknotika label, he's the man behind the aliases Gigi Galaxy and Mole People, and he's been around since the emergence of Motor City's second wave of producers in the early 1990s. Yet despite a superlative back catalogue ('The Seductive Sounds Of Teknotika' compilation is required listening), you won't find him mentioned alongside the likes of Richie Hawtin and Stacey Pullen. As the press release accompanying this rare full-length excursion points out, Gary Martin is one of Detroit techno's great unsung heroes.

Nor does that situation look set to change. For the last two decades, Martin's tracks have graced the Fabric mix series as well as Jeff Mills' record box, but his productions, while deep and effortlessly groovy, have a no-nonsense, unassuming quality that lend themselves to the mesmeric mid-portion of a set rather than the "who hell that?" of a closer. In short, he remains something of a connoisseur's choice. 'Escape From

South Warren', a record of sublime craft and subtly shifting mood, explains why.

Named after the area of Detroit in which Martin used to live – round the corner from Eminem's alma mater, 8 Mile – the album opens with the jaunty synth and humorous allusions of 'Moogy Mank'. However, it's track two, 'We Get Down', that's the real scene-setter here. Seemingly transmitted from a dark vault sometime in the early hours, it's a quiet but sinewy techno-house hybrid that, like everything else on 'Escape From South Warren', seduces rather than pummels.

'Well' continues in the same subterranean vein, but having established an atmosphere Martin shatters it – in a good way, you understand – with a more experimental, history-plundering mid-section. On 'My Medicine', he wigs out on acid, breaks out a Hoover sound, and suddenly we're raving like it's 1991. Meanwhile, from its Gigi Galaxy-referencing title onwards, 'Galaxy Style' harks back to the mid-90s sound of prime-era Teknotika, a playful and slyly funky tune complete with bongos and a

bubbling stream of 303 running through its centre.

The dreaded sax of 'I Don't Know Why' gives way to the metallic riffs of 'Eastward Course', while 'My Own Mind' mines a seam of steamy house beloved of Blake Baxter. For the final stretch, we go deep again. 'Stellar Caravan' tweaks the sepulchral leanings of the album's opening into hypnotic and trancey shapes, while the closer, '2,000 People Inside', is a strolling techno tune enlivened by outbreaks of home-time whistling.

If 'Escape From South Warren' has a unifying theme, it remains unclear. There are missteps along the way. But for the most part, this album fulfils its brief, providing a wormhole from here to the dancefloor, proving that Detroit techno is in rude health and making the case that Gary Martin, his command of a myriad of styles achieved with the very lightest of brush strokes, should take his rightful place in the history books.

ANDREW HOLMES







## BLANCMANGE

### Nil By Mouth

BLANC CHECK

**A second long-player this year from Lancashire's finest and this time it's purely instrumental**

After a two-part 35-year career spanning half a dozen albums, as well as numerous re-releases and compilations, you'd be forgiven for thinking Blancmange have little left to give. With 2011's 'Blanc Burn' return, the duo surprised everyone with a darker side to their sometimes camp and always eclectic electronic melodies. So began a genuinely exciting new era for them.

Since Stephen Luscombe retired following a prolonged illness, Neil Arthur continues to play with notions and notes, and here serves up a further surprise in the shape of 'Nil By Mouth', a wholly instrumental outing from someone whose vocals are more distinctive than most.

Its opener, 'Eleanor', is a witty combination of chord arpeggios that young learners of the pianoforte would refer to as "walking upstairs" in their daily practice routine, perhaps declaring the album as an intellectual reaction to Bach's 'The Well-Tempered Clavier'-inspired keyboard wizardry. A Blancmange lifetime theme has been to

make the complex and deep sound free and easy.

This innocent trail of chords echoes throughout the whole album – even in the darkly compelling tracks like 'Son' or 'Fall'. The latter is perhaps the most abstract contribution, with its open spaces and classical phrasing. 'Landsea' is perfect, a polite, intricate guitar and a simple synth melody, much the same as "walking upstairs" but now including "skipping downstairs", aware of the purity it has in mind and therefore hitting the mark as supremely arty and wonderful, rather than just brilliant. But there's more to come with 'Crystals Of Zircon' and its nod to tribal rhythms and the swell and pace of 90s trance dance. On any other artist's album, this would be the stormer, here it's almost the filler, seeming less deep, awkward and interesting than its friends.

The track titles suggest that Neil Arthur wants the listener to construct their own narrative, but as 'Nil By Mouth'

progresses you realise he is building a scene, words or no, and the messages are clear. Many of these titles sound like a story unfolding, even without the guidance of a dialogue: 'Gone', 'Close Encounters', 'Holiday Camp'... If anything, tracks without words turn daisies into exotic flowers, by which I mean there are multiple levels of aural delight: you are not restricted to attaching yourself to a storyline/song structure, and unlike a lot of modern electronic music, you are not given safety nets in the form of a consistent back beat or loop. Only the random echo of that chord arpeggio.

'Nil By Mouth' is such a good title for an instrumental record, it's surprising no other musical pioneer has thought of it before, but it takes a lot of skill and confidence to trust that your art will explain itself without words. Especially when you are known for that very form of expression.

NGAIRE RUTH







# MÜLLER ROEDELIOUS

**Imagori**

GRÖNLAND

**Yin-yang collaboration pairs organic piano explorations with precise digitalism**

With well over 1,600 works to his name, there's scarcely a word to describe the sheer copious velocity of Hans-Joachim Roedelius' musical output. "Prolific" hardly comes close, especially when later collaborations like this are considered. And there's certainly never been any laurel resting or self-congratulatory nostalgia mining for the octogenarian krautrock founder – only the obvious and undiminished thrill of chasing new forms.

Following Roedelius' recent pairings with the likes of Lloyd Cole and Air's Jean-Benoit Dunckel, this latest outing marries instinctive neoclassical piano extemporisations with the more structured percussive digital patterns of Gotan Project's Christoph H Müller, the seasoned and eclectically-influenced Swiss-born Parisian "world-beat" producer-composer. 'Imagori' focuses on audibly clear contrasts; here, buoyant and driftingly minimal, and there, tight, beat-driven and densely syncopated. In the main it's a success, and even where

the odd sequence might feel a little aimless or perhaps rather too Café Del Mar, there's always a harmonious warmth to sustain.

After first getting together for a series of improvised Paris performances in 2012, the pair began 'Imagori' by reinvigorating some short piano pieces and rhythmic experiments that Roedelius unearthed from his archive. The dates for the originals haven't been specified, but the soulful simplicity of his contributions to some of the better tracks here – 'Time Has Come' and the superb, cyclic 'Origami' in particular – carry echoes of the Cluster man's groundbreaking mid-70s collaborations with Brian Eno, who paid a visit to Cluster/Harmonia's rural commune in Forst, Lower Saxony, while on a break from working with Bowie on the Berlin Trilogy.

Spookily, Eno even pops up for a phoned-in spoken word cameo on 'About Tape', a track led by Müller's propulsive dancefloor-oriented technoid beats and interlaced with the merest of ivory tinkles. It's a great track and Eno's voice is cleverly treated and made to ride with the beat by Müller's deft production

touch. But as a collaborative piece, it only just succeeds: the contrast between the sound of the two contributors here sometimes feels akin to birdsong being drowned out by the sounds of the city.

More successful is the structurally complex 'Himmel Über Lima'. Initially drawing inspiration from an Afro-Peruvian waltz rhythm, it brilliantly wends its way through a rhythmic shift that culminates in a classically Roedelian ambient passage. But towards the end of the album, Müller's laptop compositions meet Roedelius' melodic improvisations less skilfully, with tracks like 'The Question' bringing that post-club chill-out 90s vibe perhaps too much to the fore.

On the whole, the articulation points of their two very different ambiances work well throughout much of this intriguing and confident record, revelling in both the legato and staccato, with Müller's programmed, often downbeat elements creating framed grooves through which Roedelius' piano keys somnambulistically glide and transform.

**CARL GRIFFIN**







## ESB

ESB

BUREAU B

### French analogue power trio spark up in epic cosmic jam session

Jamming has been the lifeblood of music's evolution since time immemorial, fuelling blues and jazz, birthing rock 'n' roll through R&B, and providing the creative impetus for everyone from The Grateful Dead to Can. The very nature of technology has also meant that many of electronic music's most inspiring, epoch-making landmarks have come from improvisation and experimenting with little idea of the consequences. See Eno and 'Acid Tracks'. Now, with jamming a massive genre in itself, spontaneous electronic sessions have been throwing up some major works. Last year's titanic workout between Can drummer Jaki Liebeck and Faust's Hans-Joachim Irmler, which resulted in the tumultuous 'Flut' album, immediately springs to mind.

This is the ethos that fuels the likeminded French trio of prolific composer Yann Tiersen, Lionel Laquerriere (Nestorbianca, Geysir) and Thomas Poli (Dominique A, Miossec, Olivier Mellano, Montgomery, Laetitia Sheriff). The idea to record an album came after Laquerriere joined Tiersen's

live band in 2010 and the pair started messing around on analogue versions of Tiersen's songs at soundchecks. Inspired by the unpredictable nature of their equipment, the pair turned it into a project in its own right when they were asked to play the Acusmatiq Festival, roping in fellow synth nut Poli to complete the line-up of the group they decided to call Elektronische Staubbund, before abbreviating it to ESB.

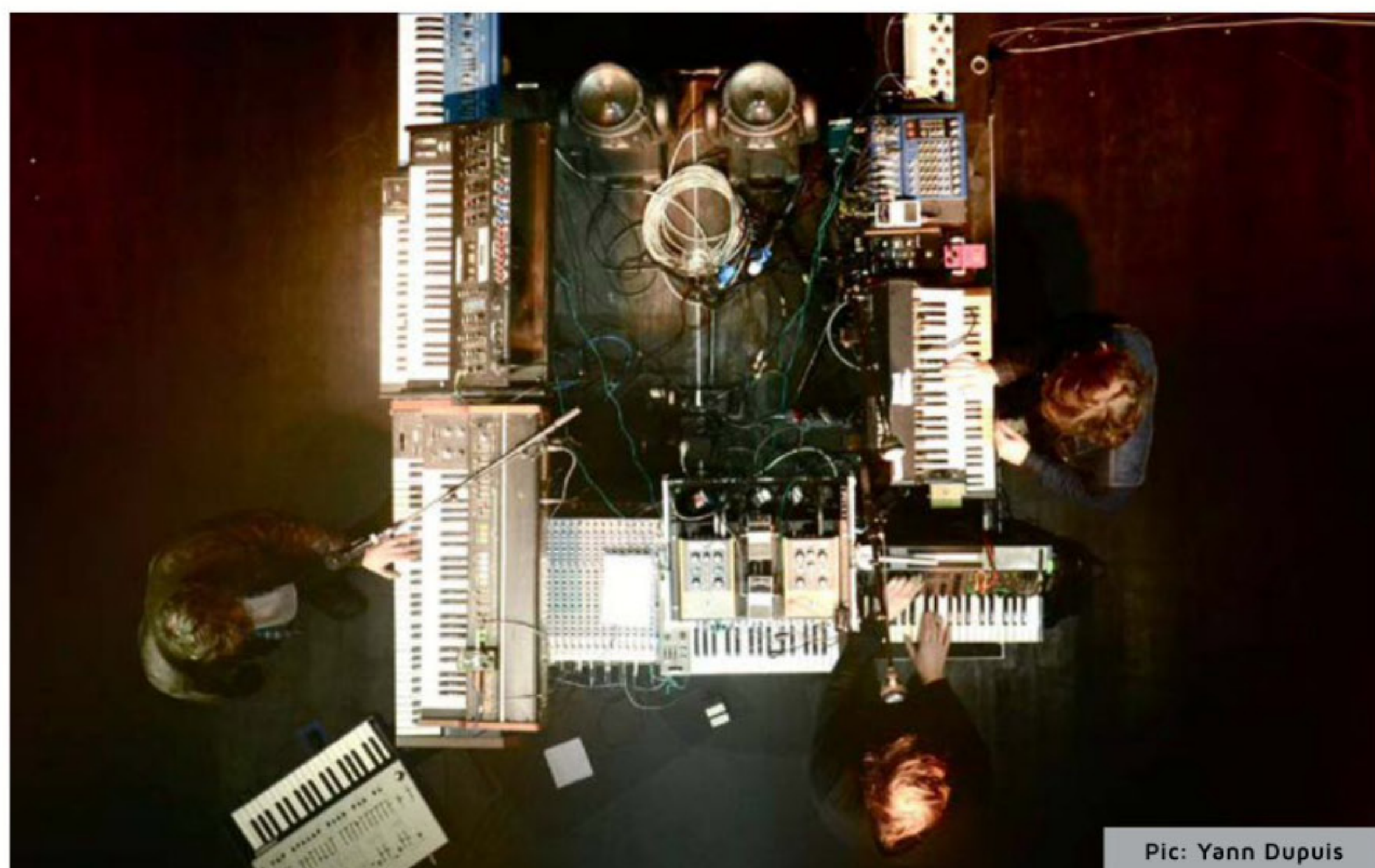
After further festivals and a seven-inch single for the Thoré Single Club, the trio have now found time to hook up at Tiersen's studio and record their first album. Each chose two items from their analogue arsenal, plugged in and spent the next 10 days jamming in the old fashioned way. At the end of the sessions they emerged with an album full of life, surprises, fantastic accidents, different moods and sonic plateaux rarely glimpsed in traditional recording strategies, which Poli then mixed in Rennes.

The three musicians are obviously having a blast after being let off the leash, nodding at recognisable influences and long-embedded faves over the course of seven tracks. 'Market' marches in like the opening stretch of fellow countrymen

Magma's 1973 masterpiece 'Mekanik Destructiw Kommandoh', with its dark, brassy sheets and ominous drones, before the apocalyptic wall-of-sound aura is stacked higher and bolstered by crashing beats on 'Spoon'. Krautrock titans such as Popol Vuh, Klaus Schultze and Neu! are evoked on tracks like 'The Flashlight'. The simmering keyboard atmospherics of 'X2' again hark back to early Magma, although oddly mated with the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, while 'Jellyfish' bursts in like a breezy bolt of motorik light as if the trio decided they were going to be Kraftwerk for the day.

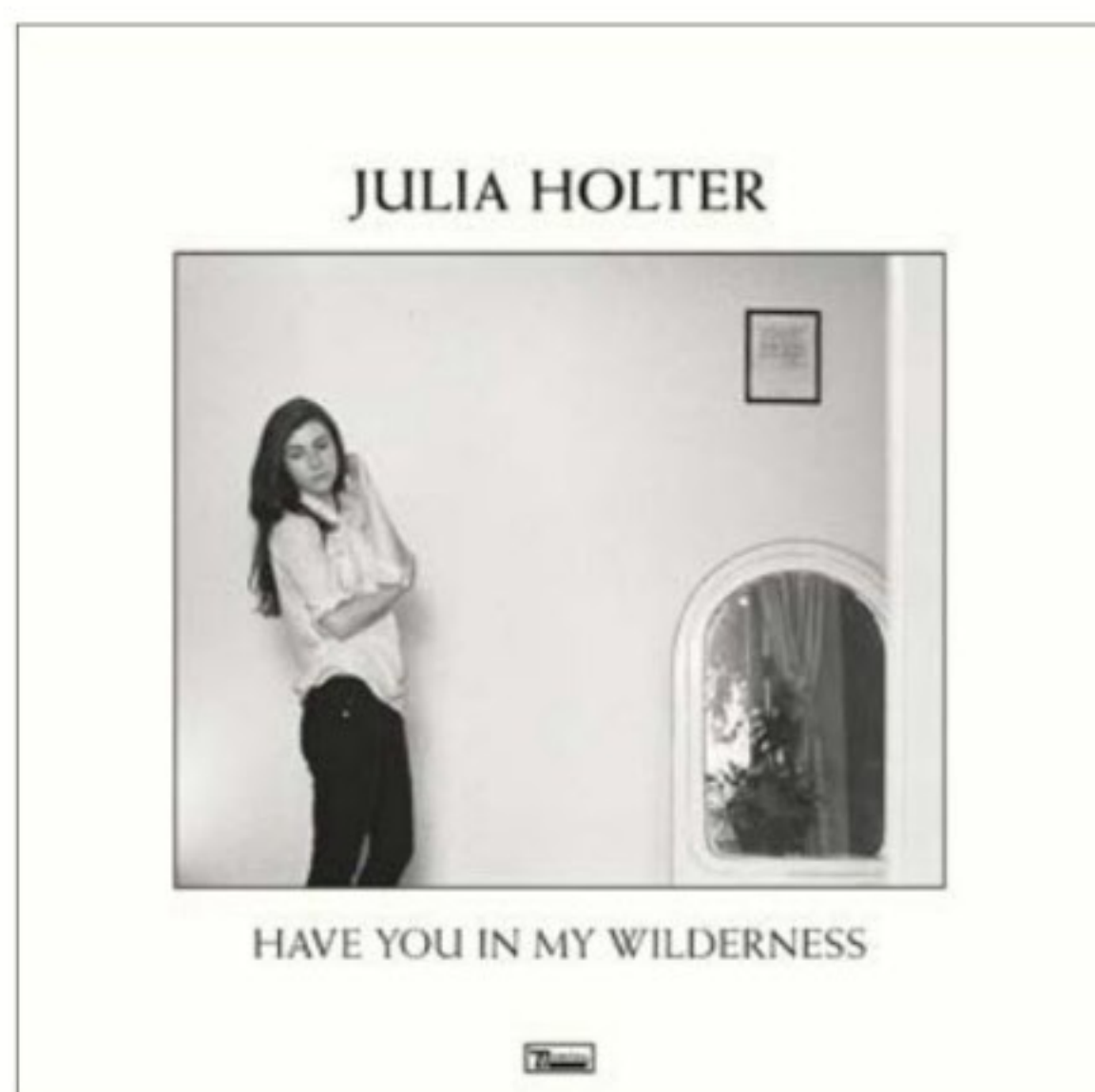
The last two tracks see the threesome cut loose any ties to earthly rhythms and structures, floating in their own space, devoid of gravity or restraint. 'Late' sounds like slow-motion meteors colliding in a black hole, and 'Kim' takes the album out on a weightless space rhapsody. All in all, there's a compelling energy and aura around 'ESB', which makes yet another strong case for this sort of unfettered behaviour and brand of electronic anarchy in these increasingly sanitised times.

KRIS NEEDS



Pic: Yann Dupuis





## JULIA HOLTER

### Have You In My Wilderness

DOMINO

**LA's extraordinary experimental pop magician delivers her most welcoming long-player yet**

If Disney ever asked David Lynch to remake one of their classics, LA's avant-pop vocalist and composer Julia Holter would surely provide the soundtrack. Something nuanced, ambiguous and edgily enigmatic, but that also conveyed innocence and wonder, emotional depth and dream-opaque mystery. For that is Holter's forte, and there's currently no one else out there who can touch her at the refreshingly accessible end of electronic experimentalism.

'Have You In My Wilderness' is Holter's fourth long-player. All of her previous output, which began with 2011's 'Tragedy', has received glowing critical acclaim, and her currency has been steadily growing since. That first release, a concept album inspired by one of Ancient Greek tragedian Euripides' plays (and why not?), announced an uncompromised arrival. A year later, she again referenced the classical with a second full-length, the 'Ekstasis' of the title referring to the philosophically-based concept of feeling outside of oneself.

While all of this may sound off-puttingly pretentious, trust us, it isn't. Sure, this is nothing that Kylie would tackle and there are certainly shades of Laurie Anderson (and perhaps at times Julianna Barwick) in some of Holter's vocal abstractions. Ultimately though, she's an authentic artist, brilliantly doing her own thing and mining the under-exploited territory where pioneering futurism embraces the familiar.

And perhaps while more commercially aware than much of Holter's previous work, all that visionary integrity remains very much intact in 'Have You In My Wilderness'. Exploring the dynamics of love, trust and power in relationships – hardly new issues in the world of the pop singer – Holter's ability to fly well above anything that sounds remotely prosaic renders these 10 tracks with such disarming honesty that it often feels like you're hearing someone opine on these themes for the first time, even as the upbeat opener, 'Feel You', skips into view with its gorgeously layered melodic sensibility. Listen closely and its subject matter isn't quite as tangible as you might think. "Are you mythological?" she asks of

her out-of-reach addressee with oblique uncertainty.

'Silhouette' is a delight. Holter's distinctly enunciated voice is right to the fore (where previously it might have been swamped in reverb or dropped back), surfing on waves of a vivid, fluttering backing both real and synthesised. There's a Brechtian drama in the plaintive 'How Long': "Stay with me 'til the morning," she sings with Nico-esque gravity, "with the three-man orchestra playing..." And there's a troubled darkness too in the superficially torch-like 'Betsy On The Roof', which peaks in a disintegrating tumult of violin and piano.

The episodic brilliance of 'Lucette Stranded On The Island' is a high-order career highlight. Its vocals are delivered as though from a semi-conscious reverie and set against a swirling backdrop of choral echoes and multi-textured instrumental riches delivered by a classy ensemble. It's a fine feat of both transcendent lyricism and beautifully realised compositional verve. The same could be said of the rest of this sublime work.

CARL GRIFFIN



Pic: Tonje Thiesen





## PEACHES

Rub

I U SHE MUSIC

**The filthy queen of electro performance art returns to the studio after six years**

Back and nastier than ever, Peaches is once again putting the “clash” in electroclash. ‘Rub’ was recorded last year in LA, and is her first album since 2009’s critically acclaimed ‘I Feel Cream’. With lyrics like “Get you off like Robert Shapiro / Talk to me like DeNiro / Let’s get suspect / Let’s get wet”, that previous record was a carnally-charged, button-pushing success. As an artist who thrives on subversion, Peaches barely paused to accept the praise. The natural follow-up? A one-woman production of ‘Jesus Christ Superstar’ and a semi-autobiographical electro rock opera, ‘Peaches Does Herself’.

This latest release absorbs her love for outlandish theatre: ‘Rub’ is a visual project with a video for each song, but she’s not simply “doing a Beyoncé”. According to Peaches, now is a good time to “make whatever you want” and “show it wherever you want”. Forward-thinking art is always fine by me, but this is a music review, and I have to enquire: does the music stand alone?

Exhibit one: ‘Close Up’, a collaboration with ex-Sonic Youth member Kim Gordon. While the lo-fi hip hop breaks no ground, the video certainly does. Directed by Vice Cooler, formerly of Hawnay Troof, it features vaping, lactating, defecating, vomiting, gender subverting and, naturally, burlesque wrestling. It’s an absorbing piece, to say the least.

Despite this opening, the rest of ‘Rub’ isn’t overpowered by its attention-grabbing visuals. Lead single ‘Light In Places’ somehow manages to trump its accompanying footage of aerial artist Empress Stah shooting actual lasers from her actual bum. Glam and glitchy, it celebrates political and personal emancipation: “Liberate en masse / Eliminate the class / All humans, free at last / So much beauty coming out of my ass”. With a Moroder-worthy beat and Gaga-downgrading mantras, this is a highlight.

Besides laid-back rapping and throbbing disco rhythms, ‘Rub’ is an album of further contrasts. Peaches fuses the

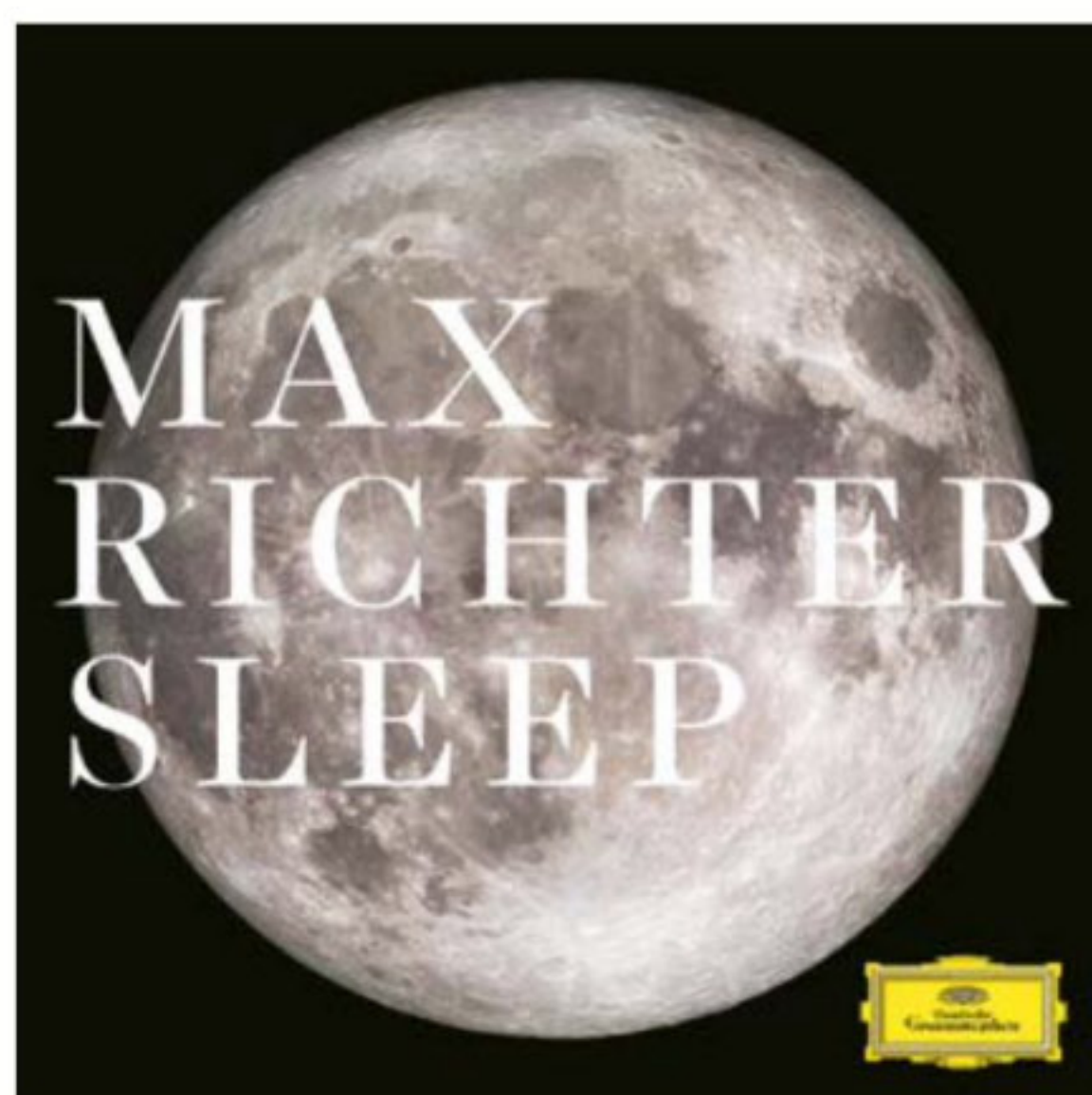
mainstream appeal of ‘I Feel Cream’ with the obscurity of her earliest work. Tracks such as ‘Dumb Fuck’ mimic Vevo-age Beth Ditto, whereas disturbing gristle like ‘Free Drink Ticket’ won’t be played at electro clubs anytime soon. The lyrical content also varies, for better and for worse. Take ‘Dick In The Air’ – what could be better than a sex-positive feminist statement, complete with a droll dig at Ayn Rand? A song whose shock factor doesn’t overshadow the music, perhaps.

Such blips aside, ‘Rub’ sees Peaches playing to her strengths. Successful collaborations with Cooler, Gordon, Simonne Jones and Feist validate her astute talent radar, whereas vivid jams like ‘Light In Places’ flaunt Peaches’ own brilliance. Perhaps I’ll feel differently after I’ve watched all of the corresponding videos. Until then however, I’ll ensure my headphones are fully plugged in and turn up this NSFW electroclash filth-fest.

WEDAELI CHIBELUSHI







## MAX RICHTER

### Sleep

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

**An eight-hour epic soundtrack to your slumbers from the prolific German composer**

There's a reason why things are a certain size. For example, you're unlikely to find an MP3 player bigger than your shoe. I've never seen a ghetto blaster bigger than an elephant. And so when we think of an album, we tend to think of a dozen tracks and something roughly the length of an episode of 'Kitchen Nightmares'. We can hold an album in the boundaries of our mind: it has a beginning, a middle and an end.

How then do you handle Max Richter's 'Sleep', an eight-hour neo-classical opus that knocks the best efforts of Wagner or The Orb into a cocked hat? A gargantuan, oversized cocked hat? First things first: 'Sleep' is not a conventional record. As the title suggests, it is designed to be listened to outside of waking hours; Richter partnered with a neuroscientist so he could explore how our dream patterns could be "a place for music to live". 'Sleep' interacts with the grey fog of our unconscious, like Global Communication's '76:14' or The KLF's 'Chill Out' – two albums which have helped me climb the wooden staircase to nightmareland.

The palette of 'Sleep' is narrow: a simple piano walks the scales, strings cycle around an almost imperceptible bass, beatless echoes suggest rhythms as we progress from one glacial theme to another. Any vocals are abstract, and the work swings between hazy and half-hearted, between pastoral and pastel, between thrumming and humdrum. Little offends the ears, although the organ tones on 'Path 3' hit frequencies I'm convinced would cut through slumber. There are some building-block signatures that appear from hour to hour – for example, a piano that dallies with reverb returns much later with an edge of darkness, a slow-motion reflection of itself, and there is comfort to be found in the leisurely yet hopeful refrain of 'Patterns'.

'Sleep' has two notable side-projects: a one-off performance in Berlin from midnight to 8am, with beds provided for the audience, and a one-hour version of the record for those who like their albums album-sized. Other than that, there's not much to grasp onto here – no beginning, no middle, no real end, just languid wisps of melody with a simple, likeable Richter lilt. An impressive achievement, yes. A work of genius, yes. But this is one mainly for completists and hoarders.

How do we handle 'Sleep'? We don't. We press play, we plonk our head on a normal-sized pillow, and we let our neurons do the rest.

FAT ROLAND







## JENS-UWE BEYER

**The Emissary**

KOMPAKT

**Send yourself on an adventure with the latest album from the German ambient popster**

Cologne resident Jens-Uwe Beyer is a regular contributor to Kompakt's annual 'Pop Ambient' series, a selection of left-field wonderfulness curated by Wolfgang Voigt. Beyer also records under the Popnoname monicker, exploring pop-house, tricky disco and spangled ambience in equal measure. 'The Emissary', though, is the first proper album he's delivered under his own name and it's a record that sees him branching further out into more esoteric musical realms.

The opening brace of tunes – 'St Pop' and 'Hands' – are somewhat misleading in terms of what to expect. The former is all jerky synths and baroque stabs, while the latter's plaintive piano runs wouldn't be out of place on a record by the late, great Susumu Yokota.

It's not until we reach the third track, 'It Started On A Wednesday', that the sonic blueprint of 'The Emissary' is really laid out. There's a bass pulse so deep you'd think Jacques Cousteau has served it up himself and some ghostly key whooshes

that can only have been dreamt up in a flotation tank. It neatly segues into 'Moonshine Tangerine', where the pitter-patter of percussion sounds like a rainstorm threatening to blow up into a full-on monsoon, before the backwards guitar echoes of 'Water Dancer' conjure up an image of War On Drugs jamming with Philip Glass. This is music that's about texture, feel and mood, where you feel Beyer is like some sort of puppet master, gently tugging the strings and letting the music go to work by itself.

The sense of mysticism continues into the second half, where 'About Turn' and the title track bathe in luxurious chord changes and there's a faint rumble that promises surprise. A more accurate comparison may be with Texas drone kings Stars Of The Lid. There's always a melody going on but lots of interesting sci-fi noise too – not so ambient that it could send you to sleep, not so angular

that it would put you off your dinner. You can hear the complexity, rather like a Christopher Nolan film. You wouldn't be out of line if you expected a fat Hans Zimmer organ stab to come crashing through and Leonardo DiCaprio's spinning top to keep on spinning.

The album title is telling. An emissary is someone sent on a diplomatic or special mission. It needs to be an individual with powers of persuasion, impeccable timing and the ability to change people's perceptions, yet all the while doing his or her best not to attract attention to themselves. This is Jens-Uwe Beyer in a nutshell, a consummate performer who's comfortable operating in the shadows, happy to deliver his own strange cargo. You're highly encouraged to sign for the package now.

KIERAN WYATT







# TOMO AKIKAWABAYA

## The Invitation Of The Dead

MINIMAL WAVE

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**Lost 80s Japanese synthpop  
treasure rediscovered and  
remastered**

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"From the moment I first heard 'Mars' by Tomo Akikawabaya, I felt he was a mysterious, far away and unreachable entity. I'm not sure why, perhaps it was something about the depth and darkness of his music... I ended up searching for him for many years without any luck, so it was a true surprise when he finally surfaced."

Those are the words of Veronica Vasicka, electro-archaeologist and charismatic head of Brooklyn's Minimal Wave label, whose long search for the pioneering, elusive master of dark Japanese synthpop has resulted in this compelling double LP, which brings together 1984's 'The Castle' and the following year's 'Anju'.

Close to giving up her hunt, Vasicka contacted synth-waver Nao Katafuchi, a Tokyo ex-pat living in New York who still had close links with his native city's music scene. And, it turns out, with Akikawabaya. Katafuchi put the two in touch, and they began a dialogue. Ironically, during the discussions that

resulted in this double album idea being agreed, it transpired that Akikawabaya has long been a fan of Minimal Wave, closely following its scrupulously well-judged output. "Just goes to show..." someone probably said.

Minimal Wave devotees will no doubt be anticipating this release with wasabi keenness, such is the profile it's been given by their arbiter queen. They'll discover a collection of darkly alluring little gems here, all deftly remastered with crystal clarity and sounding both of their time and out of it.

Opening with ceremonial, temple-like atmospherics before giving way to glorious 'Blade Runner'-esque swathes of keyboards, 'Rebirth' has plenty going on to lure in the curious ear. As the track progresses, there's a downtempo cinematic portent that also recalls Angelo Badalamenti's soundtrack work for David Lynch. Running at well over 10 minutes, it's a brave one to start things off with.

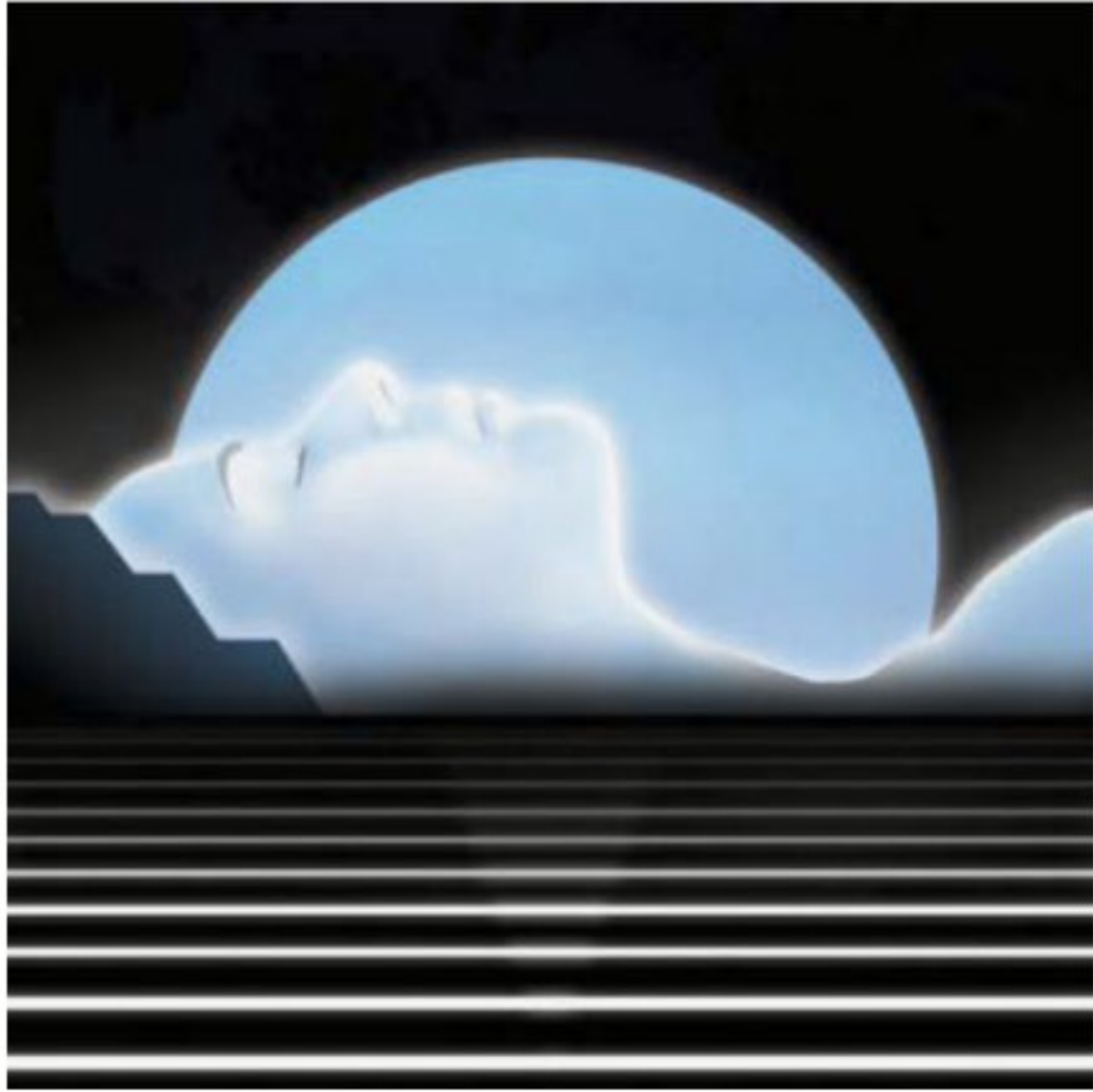
'Mars', the track which first hooked Vasicka, is more accessibly pop-toned, propelled by the high-pitched drum machine cracks of a Boss DR-55, apparently borrowed from Salon Music's Zin Yoshida, who was recording in the same studio. Just so you know. But what strikes most are Akikawabaya's vocals. Sung in heavily-accented English, they're fascinatingly reminiscent of David Sylvian, even down to the affected vibrato edges and mildly pained expressiveness. Standout 'Dizziness' sounds like one of those unlikely one-hit-wonders you can't quite place, so catchy is its major/minor key chorus hook, snappy uptempo syncopation and jaunty, nostalgia-tinged Roland synth stabs.

No mere synthpop auteur though, Akikawabaya shows a master's touch both as a keyboard player and producer throughout, sustaining genuine depth and variety over the whole piece. The reason, no doubt, for Vasicka's dogged pursuit of this obscure character. There's

a cerebral, introspective quality to songs like 'Diamond' and 'Sleeping Sickness' that cleverly places a spacious, dystopian ambience into pop contexts that could otherwise sound clumsy in the hands of lesser musicians. 'The Invitation Of The Dead' is truly quite the find.

CARL GRIFFIN





## ROSEAU

**Salt**

BIG DADA

**Stunning debut from folk songstress turned electronic pop prodigy**

Electronic pop music usually gets its claws into you from a young age: there's something about those sparse, knowing melodies and addictive choruses that hooks the average impressionable teen. Not so Kerry Leatham: traditional songwriting coursed through her veins from a young age, with early forays being wholly acoustic.

It wasn't until she signed to Tape Club Records that this songstress opened her mind to new ways of framing the emotions that swirled between her synapses. At some point following the release of a folk EP with labelmate Peter Lyons, Kerry Leatham stumbled upon a copy of Logic and a laptop. Before long, Ninja Tune subsidiary Big Dada came knocking, and several experiments later she had, a little behind her peers, unambiguously morphed into an electronic pop artist under the guise of Roseau.

The story is somewhat remarkable in itself, but not as remarkable as the content of Roseau's debut album, 'Salt'. Her songwriting background has served

her well, and is immediately apparent from the opening honeyed tones of the album's ballad-like title track, where her smooth, sultry vocal washes beautifully over sparse electronic production.

'Kids And Drunks' is the first song to demonstrate just how successfully Leatham has recalibrated. From verse to chorus, her distinctively British intonations cast a spell over the rich fusion of syncopated melodies and itchy beats. That vocal positively snarls on the single 'New Glass', with its sardonic spoken word verses cutting through layers of icy chimes and intricate, bobbing beats.

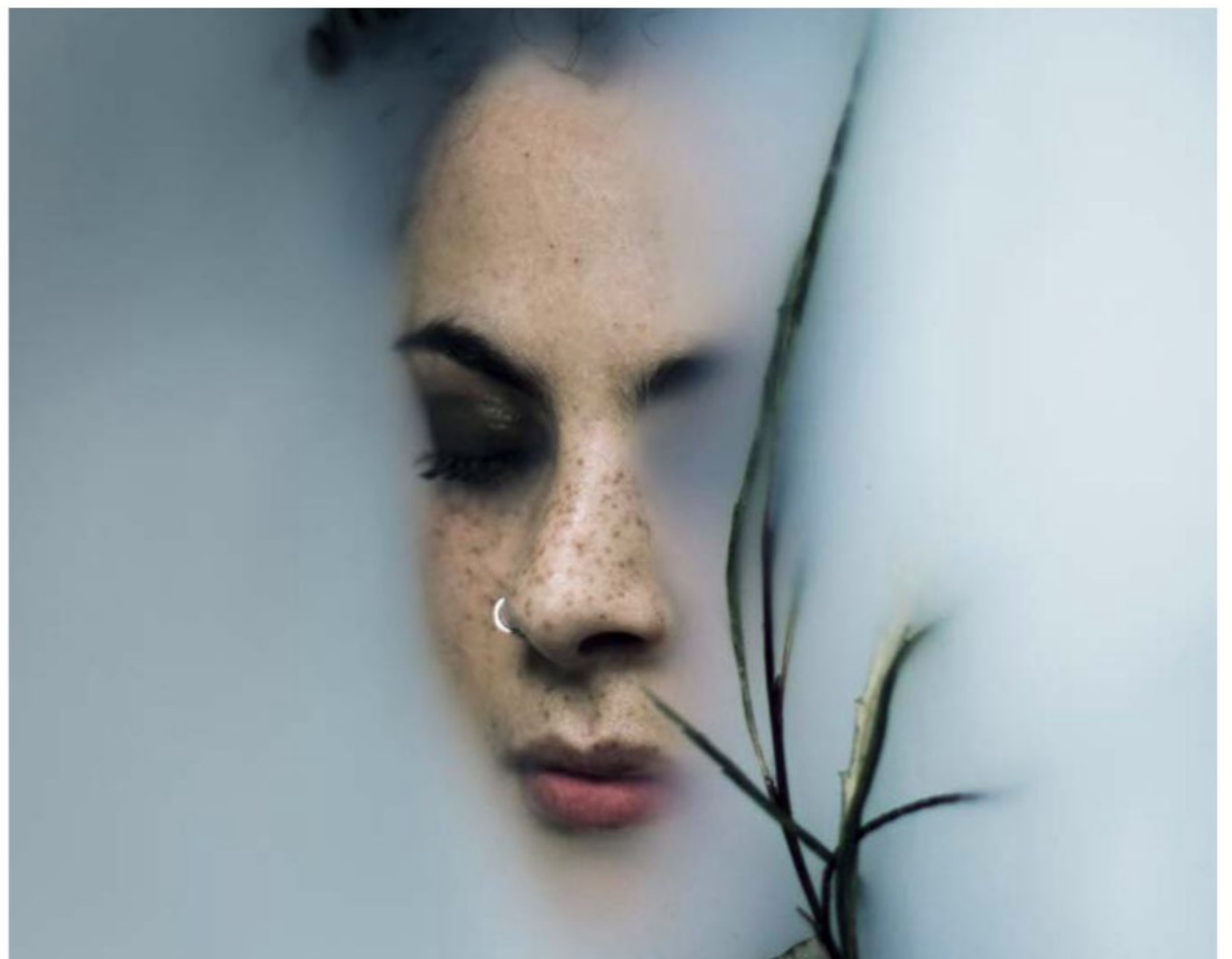
Although 'Salt' rarely raises the pulse at any given point, ballads appear to be a speciality here. 'See You Soon' allows her aching tones an ocean of room to manoeuvre around the barely noticeable percussive snaps, crackles and pops. The songs are short and sweet – few pass the three-minute mark, but that's plenty of time to lure the listener in with fables of

lidocaine-induced heartbreak.

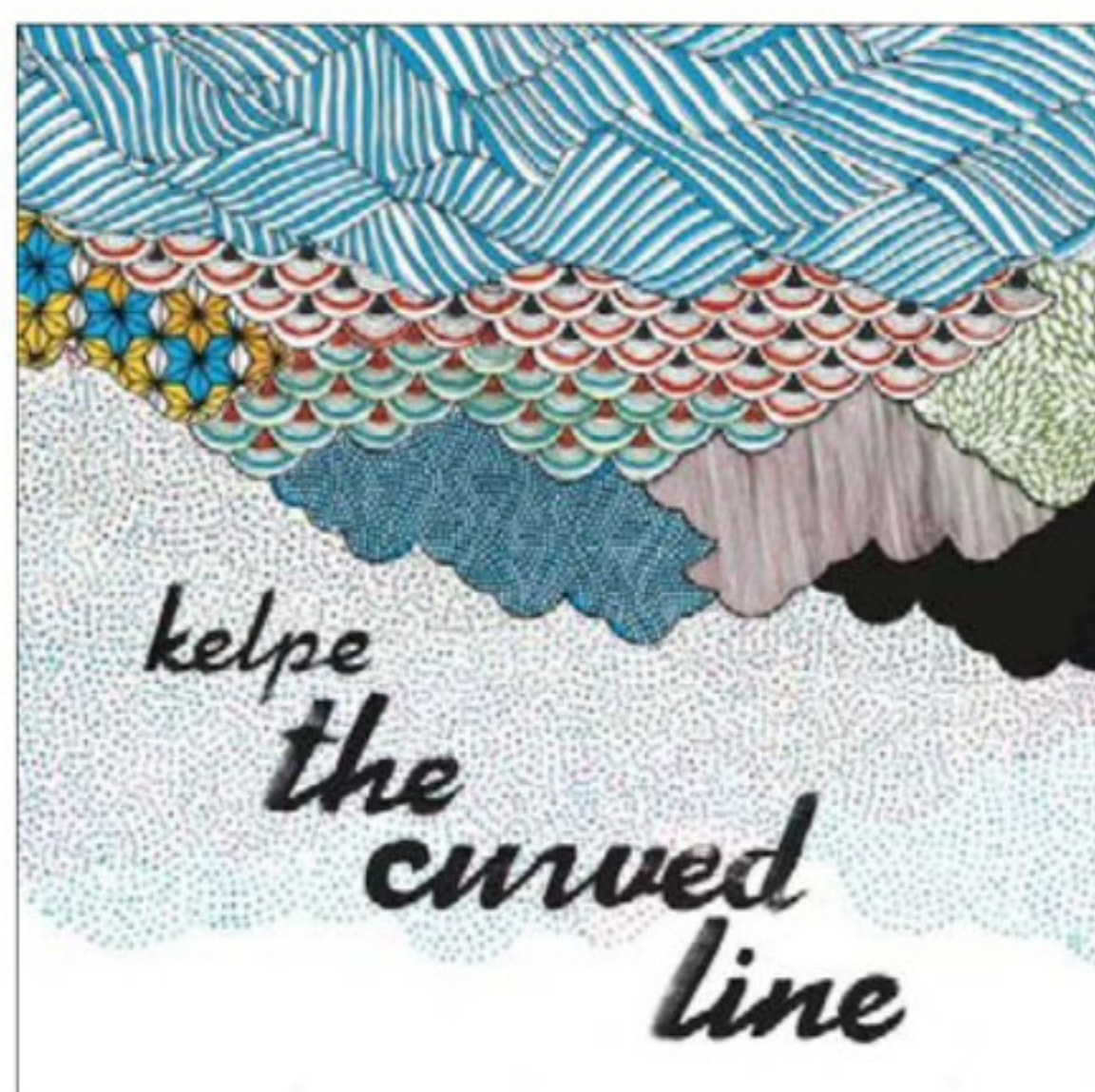
'Hot Box' is screaming out to be Roseau's second single, as dizzy vocals coil around squeaky pulses and extrovert handclaps. The constantly shifting harmonies add texture and pitch that require little accompaniment; it's therefore to her credit how the busy electronics vanish into the songs while still being a vital component of her work.

The album's sonics were drawn from field recordings inspired by the rustic clattering of various junk found in a giant abandoned warehouse near Leatham's home. A metaphor perhaps for the sense of melancholy seclusion that is strewn across her lyrics, beautifully balanced by the naked confidence of her voice – tracks such as 'Accelerate' are pure magic. To label 'Salt' addictive would be an understatement; Roseau is one lady to watch, and this is a clear contender for debut album of the year.

**DANNY TURNER**







## KELPE

### The Curved Line

DRUT

Album number five from Kel McKeown brings the sonic wallpaper to life

To say that 'The Curved Line', Kel McKeown's fifth album as Kelpe, was forgettable would be a gross understatement. It's a subtle, nuanced collection of songs, but one that also seems inoffensive, wallpaper-esque, perfectly ambient. If you let it, this record can exist quite happily off in the background, bothering no one, minding its own business. In essence, it is a soundtrack to a trendy bar where people just go to talk loudly, drink obscenely overpriced cocktails, and generally pay no heed to whatever music might be playing beneath a myriad of amorphous, quickly forgotten conversations.

But give it your undivided attention and 'The Curved Line' reveals itself to have hidden depths, tiny networks and pathways that lead off into unexpected places. Take 'Chirpsichord', whose structure owes a clear debt to a particularly mellow strain of house, but whose execution feels like it's constantly on the verge of breaking into something altogether less rigid. That the track ultimately collapses in on itself is

no surprise, and the fat, ominous bass tone that lurches into view around the midpoint feels about as conspicuous as snowfall in summer.

One of the many subtleties of 'The Curved Line' lies in the choice of drum and percussion sounds. Here is an artist who clearly invests time and effort in the rhythm, rather than adopting ready-made 4/4 loops. At times, the beats have the same vintage quality as anything Richard H Kirk did back in his Warp days, when the Cabs stalwart dusted down primitive rhythm generators and old drum machines to add a certain warmth to his tracks. In McKeown's case, the human quality to rhythms on other tracks, like the standout 'Sick Lickie Thing', comes in the form of Chris Walmsley, a drummer who appears on stage when Kelpe plays live.

A highlight here is the too-brief 'Morning Two', wherein McKeown eschews any sense of housey order in favour of a jazzy swing, complete with Fender Rhodes-style sprinkles. It's slick and disciplined, but still much looser than anything else here,

with the exception of the chunky, layered 'Canjealous' (whose initial rhythms from Walmsley seem to owe a debt to Can's Jaki Liebezzeit). These tracks slot in easily next to the more obviously hypnotic thud of 'Drums For Special Effects'.

Another persuasive quality on 'The Curved Line' comes in the form of melody. Classic Warp 'Artificial Intelligence'-era gestures crop up on tracks like the opener, 'Doubles Of Everything', sharing the same icy chill and captivating starkness as anything from that formative period.

The biggest success of 'The Curved Line' – if you can hear it above the din and clamour in your chosen hip drinking establishment – is the authenticity that McKeown brings to proceedings. Electronic musicians have been trying to inject a sense of dexterity and virtuosity to synth music almost as long as the form has existed, and Kelpe's attempts to do just that with this album shouldn't be overlooked.

MAT SMITH





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