

minimalism of *Like The Whispering Of Winds* (Cicada 1986) or the dancing keyboard patters of *Momenti Felici* (Virgin Venture 1987). Brian Eno sponsored some of the tonal pieces on the Japanese collection, *Pink, Blue And Amber* (Prudence 1996). For a fresh overview of everything Roedelius has to offer, try *Aquarello* (All Saints 1998).

## MANUEL GÖTTSCHING AND ASH RA TEMPEL

One of the most melliflously gifted guitarists to come out of the German rock scene of the early 1970s was Manuel Göttsching. His fusion of guitar improvisation with electronic treatments made his first group, Ash Ra Tempel, one of the most exciting German bands of their era. By the mid-1970s he was a solo inventor, allying his Fender and Gibson guitar streams with effects to the modern recording studio. He became adept at combining the instrument with soft synthesizer washes and hypnotic grooves. His output reached a crucial peak on the 1984 release 'E2-E4', so successful a marriage that it became a benchmark Ambient House and Trance recording for the 1990s.

Ash Ra Tempel were formed in 1970 by Göttsching and Klaus Schulze in Berlin. Their first album, *Ash Ra Tempel* (Ear) was recorded by Conny Plank at the Star Studio in Hamburg in 1971 and released that year. It was basically electronically treated rock, one track per side of LP. The second track, 'Dream Machine', was full of cavernous atmospheric sounds. The group's second 1971 album, *Oscillations* (Ear), added more instrumentation and players but lost Schulze to a solo career. It played around with rock but culminated in the region of cosmic music, 'Search'/'Love', featuring electronically treated vibraphone and an electronic Ambient haze.

A journey to Berne in Switzerland saw them jam with the American acid guru Timothy Leary on the highly self-indulgent *Seven Up* (Cosmic 1972). From the early days with Conny Plank most of the recordings were produced or supervised by Dieter Dierks, who had a studio in Cologne. By 1973 Ash Ra Tempel were down to a duo of Göttsching and Rosi Müller, who made the hippie-folk *Starring Rosi* (Cosmic), replete with Mellotron, harp, vibes, synths and conga drums. Sweetly affecting it was, serious innovation it was not.

For this Göttsching had to go solo, spending two months in the summer of 1974 in his own studio in Berlin with guitar, effects and a four-track Teac tape machine. Mixed by Dierks, the resultant *Inventions For Electric Guitar* (Cosmic) is now considered a benchmark recording. Over three compositions Göttsching harnessed bubbling rhythm tracks, plaintive electronic sonorities and wonderfully colourful tone poems from his guitar. Often it was impossible to discern what he was playing, so consummate was the skill involved. *Inventions* was to become a name-checked Ambient classic.

Now signed to Virgin as Ashra, Göttsching was to begin by effortlessly

combining his sweetly toned guitar style with mellow synthesizer and keyboard sounds. *New Age Of Earth* (1977) danced along on a rush of brightly textured sounds, lapping on the shores of Fleetwood Mac blues one moment, taking off into the cosmic ether the next. Here texture was everything, Göttsching going out of his way to create an interplanetary sound of the future. *Blackouts* (1978) was less convincing but his guitar glowed as usual. *Correlations* (1979) and *Bell Alliance* (1980) had their moments but Göttsching was increasingly at odds with the technology, some of the drum-machine tracks sounding positively awkward. Sensing his music needed more concentration, he took time off and during the last month of 1981 recorded the astonishing *E2-E4* (INTEAM 1984), a wonderfully dancey rhythm track with enough space for liquid sounds, funky bass keyboard grooves, hesitant nervy keyboard motifs and the silken guitar notes of old. At nearly an hour long it occupied a space all of its own, thus becoming one of the most-sampled records of the House explosion of the 1980s and 1990s – a veritable soundtrack for the E generation.

## KRAFTWERK

Considered the most influential group to come from Germany during the 1970s, Kraftwerk went out of their way to fashion a pure electronic aesthetic which encompassed all aspects of modernity. Each album became a complete concept in its own right, from motorways to trains, from radios to computers. Each new phase was marked by a startling new image, a process which saw the Düsseldorf group move in the direction of cybernetics, as actual robots took their places on-stage. They played the pop game to the hilt, building up a huge reputation for themselves as each recording widened their audience. They had a direct effect on the music of David Bowie and with Afrika Bambaataa's 1982 club smash 'Planet Rock' (which sampled the rhythmic sections of *Trans-Europe Express* and *Computer World*) they became hip with young black Americans. It was their adoption by Detroit Techno musicians that made Kraftwerk gurus of the new Ecstasy generation, their sleek, machine-like creations at one with the new culture of cyberspace.

Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider-Esleben, to all intents and purposes, embodied Kraftwerk. The word loosely denotes 'power station' and has a strong gender connotation of 'men at work'. Hütter was born in Krefeld in 1946, the son of a doctor. He studied piano while young and then took up the electric organ at Düsseldorf Conservatory. Schneider-Esleben, the son of a prominent architect, was born near the Swiss-German border in 1947. The family moved to Düsseldorf when he was a toddler and over time he developed an interest in concrete music, particularly the work of Pierre Henry. He also attended Düsseldorf Conservatory, studying the flute. Later he would drop the 'Esleben' from his surname, becoming simply Schneider. Both were '*hoch bourgeoisie*',

gentlemen of the refined and affluent German classes. They formed a close friendship at the Conservatory and began making music.

Schneider had a strong interest in electronic equipment – the potentialities of loudspeakers, echo machines and sound synthesis. Hütter was keenly interested in composition and rated The Beach Boys very highly. Both admired Stockhausen and the Futurists. In 1968 they formed Organisation, a loose industrial rock group. They played with Can and recorded *Tone Float* (RCA 1970) but considered the results undisciplined. Their focus became an evocation of the North Rhine industrial heartland of the New Germany. Hence Hütter and Schneider renamed themselves Kraftwerk and worked with Conny Plank, the engineer most likely to produce positive and contemporary results.

From 1970 to 1971 two albums were made for Philips, their new label. In the heart of Düsseldorf they had found 180 square feet of studio space, which they christened Kling Klang Studio. There they began amassing equipment – tape machines, self-invented drum machines, oscillators and such, Hammond organ and of course Schneider's beloved flutes. *Kraftwerk* (1970) was pure sound manipulation, a product of their LSD experience of the late 1960s, a nerve-racking ride through machine sounds which ended with a veritable recreation of aerial bombing. 'Coming Down From Heaven' was a reminder that these young Germans had inherited a painful cultural memory of the war. *Kraftwerk 2* (1971) was a huge jump in sound quality, its opening track, 'Klingklang', bringing in the soft percussive sequences overlaid by flute which would become a Kraftwerk trademark. During this period they had temporarily worked with Michael Rother and Klaus Dinger, who would form NEU!. Surprisingly, even Hütter had left for six months, confused over his musical direction. The commercial success of *Kraftwerk 2* gave the duo confidence to go on.

*Ralf And Florian* (Philips 1973) is my favourite Kraftwerk album and their finest Ambient statement. Having honed their skills in live performance and improved their self-made synthesizers and drum machines, the group recorded this album at Kling Klang and in Cologne and Munich with Conny Plank. No longer was it a case of exploring the avant-garde loves of their youth but playing real music. The album was full of Schneider's treated flute sounds, their presence adding a real dimension of German Romanticism, mindful of Mahler. More incredible were the glacial and insistent sequences, so advanced that they would still sound contemporary a quarter of a century later. 'Tone Mountain' was as if the electronics were jumping out of the grooves. In effect this was dance music and to highlight the fact they even recorded a track titled 'Dance Music'; again the interlocking electronic rhythm, graced ever so slightly with bright percussion and angelic voices, was wonderfully fresh and accomplished. There were plenty of interesting sounds on this album – Hütter's excellent touch on the piano, the synthesized sound of waves and the altered sound of Hawaiian guitar on 'Pineapple Symphony'.

By 1974 Hütter had invested in a MiniMoog synthesizer. Inspired by their constant Volkswagen trips on the new autobahns, Kraftwerk decided to base an

entire album around a car journey. Again they chose Conny Plank to oversee the recording, this time in his new studio near Cologne. Using electronicized voices and the hypnotic sequences so well conceived on *Ralf And Florian*, Kraftwerk produced a twenty-two-minute track titled 'Autobahn', which began with the sound of a car starting up. The resulting album, *Autobahn* (Philips 1974), charted all over the world. That year also saw the addition of two new members, Wolfgang Flur (a Frankfurt design student who drummed) and Karl Bartos (another conservatory student from Düsseldorf with orchestral ambitions). Kraftwerk thus became four and toured America as such in 1975.

Their next project, *Radio-Activity* (Capitol 1976), would turn their early Romanticism to a kind of wistfulness, a sense of something lost in the future. Its equivalent would be Brian Eno's feeling of the 'nostalgia for the future' he experienced when he began filming the water towers of Manhattan during the late 1970s. Kling Klang was now a laboratory, Kraftwerk's image that of white-coated scientists. Schneider had come up with better drum machines and was fond of short-wave radio sounds. It all came together on *Radio-Activity*, a powerful statement of high-definition electronics. 'Radioland' involved metronomic and slow percussion overlaid by an entire panoply of squirmy, squishy, electronic noises panned in wonderful stereo effects. This literal celebration of the early joys of radio included a synthesized voice singing the words 'electronic mu-sic'. The album, with an old picture of a radio as the entire cover, shifted considerable quantities in France, where the title track sold one million copies as a single.

Used to spending much time travelling by train all over Europe, Kraftwerk then fashioned an album on the concept of the European rail network. *Trans-Europe Express* (Capitol 1977) is a radiantly concise statement, the album cover again harking back to the past, the four members of Kraftwerk dressed in 1930s suits with very short hair. Another inside-cover shot pictured them sitting at an outdoor luncheon table which could have come from a traditional Bavarian postcard. The only sign that these four gentlemen were musicians came from Schneider's trademark minim badge on his left lapel. The album was a masterwork of wonderfully gilded sequences that recurred with Minimalist simplicity. Their tone on all keyboards and synthesizers had reached a new peak of fidelity and sheen. The show-piece title track mimicked the movement, sound and sights of a train journey with a humorous reference to 'Iggy Pop and David Bowie'. The finale, 'Franz Schubert', is one long, hypnotic multi-sequence with again a wistful synthesizer undertow. It leads to the climax of the vocoded 'Endless Endless', which brought one back to the album's opening sequence.

While *Trans-Europe Express* was mixed in Los Angeles, *The Man Machine* (Capitol 1978) was entirely recorded in Düsseldorf. The album is often considered the pinnacle of Kraftwerk and highly influential on British electro music and subsequent Techno offshoots. *The Man Machine* realized Kraftwerk's fullest ambition of the futuristic meeting of man and machine as in cybernetics.

Yet tracks like 'The Robots' sound completely mechanized. Another track, 'The Model', became a number-one hit in 1981 owing to its pop commercial appeal but the real guts of *The Man Machine* lay in 'Neon Lights', again a piece filled with a wistful longing for a future that seemed to be past. There was a textural beauty to the synthesized flute passages, a jewel-like luminescence to the keyboard sequences which repeated themselves in Minimalist style for over ten minutes. In terms of concept the cover was another classic: four red-shirted men in stiff formation standing on a staircase and facing east, their faces super-pale, their lips covered in rouge. The cover was credited to the Russian Constructivist artist El Lissitzky and it was obvious that Kraftwerk saw themselves as workers for a new electronic future. In the studio they had built workstations which could be taken out on tour. Dummies were even designed to look like the group which could humorously take the place of the musicians on stage. There was a wicked irony at play here which wasn't lost on their burgeoning audiences. In response Kraftwerk, now wealthy enough to spend time in summer houses and follow intellectual pursuits, did not even bother to tour the album.

In effect the great period of Kraftwerk was over. The rest was consolidation. *Computer World* (EMI 1981) was again a short album at just over thirty minutes. (By having fewer tracks on vinyl, Kraftwerk could get better sounds out of fatter grooves. Hence the high sound quality of their later records.) An excellent paean to the computer, the album spawned a technologically impressive world tour where the Kling Klang studio was taken on the road and audiences were treated to state-of-the-art video screens and customized hand-held synthesizers. Florian Schneider even played a completely synthesized flute. In the US they encountered the new dance culture which centred around DJs looping their very own records. By 1982 Afrika Bambaataa would make Kraftwerk a real influence on black music culture.

Yet offers from even Michael Jackson were allowed to dissolve as Kraftwerk spent years digitizing Kling Klang. Hütter became obsessed with cycling and the album *Technopop* was recorded on analogue equipment ready for release in 1983. But Hütter shelved this and continued to upgrade, purchasing a Synclavier computer sampling synthesizer from New England Digital at enormous personal expense. Kraftwerk had always wanted to be ahead in terms of technology. During the early 1970s they had used electronic drum pads, by the mid-1970s they were using sixteen-step sequencing and by the early 1980s were perfectly synchronizing multi-track tape equipment to synthesizers. For them digital technology had to be embraced. The first fruits was the multi-lingual, danceable *Electric Café*, (EMI 1986), Kraftwerk's first CD release.

Yet all wasn't well. Hütter, who drove himself to the limits, hardly ever sleeping, collapsed in England in 1986 with a suspected heart condition. Five years would then be spent remixing old Kraftwerk tunes digitally for the new Techno generation. Karl Bartos remembers two years literally spent programming a new Yamaha DX7 synthesizer! Since Kling Klang was hermetically

sealed (Hütter and Schneider refused to have telephones, faxes or secretaries) both Flur and Bartos felt completely isolated. In 1990 they left the group and Kraftwerk was again a duo. For *The Mix* (EMI 1991) familiar Kraftwerk tunes were housed up, given a Techno sheen to fairly impressive effect, but the results only showed that Kraftwerk's sound was now commonplace and not advanced.

Kraftwerk then toured with two studio engineers and got the likes of studio whiz William Orbit to remix some old music. In 1992 they supported U2 in Manchester in a protest against nuclear waste disposal. As the century came to a close Kraftwerk became more conspicuous musically but physically seemed to disappear into the fabric of their closely guarded studio. In 1997 they made a surprise appearance at Luton for that year's Tribal Gathering rave. The following year they played Sonar '98 in Barcelona -- an array of men in black behind their electronic consoles, chiming their greatest hits for an appreciative electronic generation. After they toured Japan and the US rumours were rife that this was their last-ever concert appearance. In terms of impact, Hütter and Schneider had followed Stockhausen's famous dictum that man should control machines. By allying a classical education and a progressive attitude to electronics with perfect (and often ironic) pop concepts, Kraftwerk used the medium of LP records to achieve a tremendous cultural impact. Though often seen as over-simplistic and too mechanized in their approach, they nevertheless humanized electronic music for a mass audience.

## LISTENING

For many years Kraftwerk's CD releases were in disarray. In 1994 I was forced to purchase my CD copy of *Trans-Europe Express* in New York because it was not available in the UK. *Ralf And Florian* (Crown 1995) is their supreme Ambient release, a wonderfully warm and spiritual music which pre-dates their so-called 'mechanized' phase. *Radio-Activity* (EMI 1987) and *Trans-Europe Express* (EMI 1987) have much to recommend them, but the value of *The Man Machine* (Fame 1988) is overstated (though 'Neon Lights' is exemplary Kraftwerk music). *The Mix* (EMI 1991) is pure fun, a Techno-ized snapshot of their entire career.

## KLAUS SCHULZE

One of the great electronic musicians, Germany's Klaus Schulze became a synth star during the 1970s, a decade in which he went out of his way to break down prejudice towards the medium. His view was simple: 'With Pierre Schaeffer, Stockhausen and Boulez you had people building notes from scratch. They really worked hard to create a framework for us. When I began using synthesizers I too learned how to build notes. All the stuff had to be done by hand.' Influenced by Pink Floyd, Schulze entered the 1970s by venturing