The Wirtschaftswunder

Salmobray

Reissue (originally released 1980)
CD / LP / digital
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First official LP reissue of this milestone in European post-punk history. Formed in Limburg in 1980, multinational band The Wirtschaftswunder consisted of Czech-born guitarist Tom Dokoupil, Canadian keyboardist Mark Pfurtscheller, German drummer Jürgen Beuth (also in Die Radierer) and Italian singer Angelo Galizia.

Salmobray was recorded by Dokoupil in his basement studio on a 4-track recorder and sounds absolutely state of the art. Punk in the very best sense, who needs the Hansa Studios in Berlin when you can do great things in the basement of Limburg? Even 40 years after the first release Salmobray is a monolith. The Wirtschaftswunder sounded and still sound like no other band: danceable yet disturbing pop that 40 years on is still modern.
The Wirtschaftswunder would be a household name today, even internationally, like Einstürzende Neubauten or Palais Schaumburg, if a touring accident hadn't temporarily interrupted their career at the worst possible time.
A great album at long last available again.

Ich bin ein Alphabet

It was June 1980, a punk festival at an independent youth centre, hidden away in a Munich backyard. Three days solid, nothing but hard-edged punk. Early on the Sunday afternoon, shortly after dumplings so to speak, a few characters in pale suits and hats appeared, looking like a cross between Madness and the East German politburo. Word got around that they came from out in the sticks, the countryside, and all they wanted to do was play. The Wirtschaftswunder had, in all seriousness, driven five hundred kilometres to Munich. And straight back again after the gig. Just to make a statement. And what a statement it was, one which began long before they arrived on stage. Once there, they sliced their way through the audience with their sheer presence, exuding self-confidence that was neither innate nor divine, but the pay-off for a clear-cut concept. A concept that went beyond visuals and into attitude: destabilization, otherness, shaking things up. Rooted in questions of art, as the avant-garde liked to phrase it back then: ‘How do we drag people out of their complacency?’ What may sound rather pretentious today was an important concern in the late seventies / early eighties, held back by intransigence. People knew so little, even Munich was something of a backwater in comparison to Hamburg, Cologne or Düsseldorf, where the art academies played such an influential role.

The Wirtschaftswunder were never interested in conventional concerts or specific sounds, they were constantly engaged with the presence of genuinely diverse characters. Take Angelo’s confused aura of a gastarbeiter (migrant worker) – which was absolutely authentic. He came from Sicily and somehow ended up in a metal goods factory in Limburg. When he sang: ‘Ich bin ein Analphabet’ (‘I am analphabetic’, I couldn’t help hearing: ‘I’m an alphabet’), he really meant it. There was somebody who struggled with this strange German techno world, who didn’t know: ‘what does it all mean?’. Tom arrived with his family from Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Mark landed in the German provinces all the way from Toronto. Together, they were a fulcrum for the ‘theatrical process’ as Tom called it, their artistic principle released in performance: Thunderer whistles, salutes, axe battles, taking angle grinders to metal, generally unsettling people. Tom’s brother, the ‘new wild’ painter Jiri Georg Dokoupil, came up with much of the conceptual ammunition. None of which was the slightest bit hackneyed – indeed, nothing like this had ever been seen before in a musical context. In Mark’s hands, the synthesizer was no regular instrument. It wasn’t just that I always thought: ‘now there’s someone who knows exactly what he’s doing’; every note was perfectly placed, unlike the swathes of bombastic keyboard which were en vogue in the mainstream. And we should not forget how Jürgen held everything together – with his drumkit, yes, but also in terms of human relationships. The interplay of characters becomes transparently clear on the first LP (1981). Not least in terms of the production, which is brilliant in its simplicity. Tom had a small 4-track studio in a cellar, but he performed wonders with it! Absolute state of the art; without compare, unless you were happy with throwing yourself into the jaws of the record industry. And this is why The Wirtschaftswunder are such a fantastically important band. Their retrospective status (in contrast to the lauded legends of Fehlfarben, DAF, Palais Schaumburg, Neubauten ...) does no justice to their standing at the time. Through no fault of their own. If it hadn’t been for that bloody car accident which sidelined Angelo for quite a while... and even half a year in the NDW (German New Wave) era was an eternity. Everything happened so fast, all that remained to be done was to break up.

Jürgen Teipel

Tracklisting

1. Analphabet
2. Tanz mit mir
3. Schein
4. Die Leute sind Interessant
5. Völlegefühl
6. Eis
7. Stop Talking
8. Le Rose
9. X-Y Nein Danke
10. Blue Cheri
11. Marktwirtschaft
12. Bauernlife
13. Padre Del Mondo
14. Heimweh

Promotion

Sean Newsham
+49 (0)176 307 30158
sean@tapeterecords.com
www.tapeterecords.com

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