



The Wirtschaftswunder

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The Wirtschaftswunder are European post-punk history. Formed in Limburg in 1980, the multinational band consisted of Czech-born guitarist Tom Dokoupil, Canadian keyboardist Mark Pfurtscheller, German drummer Jürgen Beuth (also in Die Radierer) and Italian singer Angelo Galizia.

After their DIY Milestone "Salmobray", the band was signed to Polydor. Contrary to the aims of the record company, who planned to make a huge NDW act out of the band, the new (and more expensive) ways of record production just showed how special this band really was. A financial flop and artistically one of the strangest and most wonderful major debuts of all times

The eponymous title of the sophomore album by "The Wirtschaftswunder" sounds as if it should have been their debut disc. Nevertheless, the name is a good fit, this being the record which sees the band come to terms with their own distinctive sound, one which is completely different to the sum of their parts, as was the case on its predecessor "Salmobray". Here, they have morphed into a funk band, albeit one without any intention of playing funk.

This record was also their first on a major label, although Polydor do not appear to have weighed in on the creative process. The LP spawned just the one single - "Der große Mafioso" – and zero NDW* hits. Whereas other label acts such as Hubert Kah or Fräulein Menke were busy crafting chart material with a New German Wave flavour, The Wirtschaftswunder (possibly aware of their stablemates' efforts) appeared unencumbered by the pressure to deliver conventional success.

The major label influence was at least evident in the departure from the dim haziness of contemporary DIY studios for a production of dazzling sharpness. Cast in this light, The Wirtschaftswunder sound even stranger than in the more familiar environs of their insouciant debut. This might very well be the German music industry's boldest record ever, Ernste Musik (serious music) aside.

Released in early 1982, with few words offered to contextualise matters, the record felt like a statement, an artistic representation of pop music laced with a range of alienating effects which lent it a remarkable precision. Perspective, expressiveness – these are concepts that sit well with "The Wirtschaftswunder".

The characteristic style, the air and, above all, the "sonic mission" are reminiscent of the Junge Wilden - the Young Wild Ones - or, to be more exact, the Mühlheimer Freiheit group of artists associated with them. Indeed, Tom Dokoupil is Jiří Georg Dokoupil's brother and recorded an album with Walter Dahn under the name of Die Partei in 1981.

Unlike their Berlin compatriots, the young and wild ones of the Mühlheimer Freiheit did not understand "the wild" to be something original or primal that had to be recovered, but more a product of civilisation: a cultural-historical legacy that need not be taken as read, but the effects of which could be tapped into or utilised. A good example hereof is Wirtschaftswunder vocalist Angelo Galizia's Gastarbeiter/immigrant (self-) portrayal - clichéd and unpredictable in equal measure. At times, his lyrics sound like language courses spiralling out of control, as on "Erste Hilfe".

The Young Wild Ones' art stemmed from an obsession with pop music. Their pictures often related to the subject like pop songs. The Wirtschaftswunder both followed and mirrored the same principle. Their music imitated fine art imitating pop music. The performance-like tension in the band's physical presence has been preserved on YouTube live clips. With a grand piano, Mark Pfurtscheller slips into the role of an abstract expressionist in front of the canvas, an intriguing contrast to his focused and restrained playing style.

The very first Wirtschaftswunder recordings were new wave renditions, admittedly rough at the edges. They appeared on the "Non Dom-Sampler", a sort of group exhibition for the Limburg Scene which also presented the initial efforts of the Radierer (Wirtschaftswunder drummer Jürgen Beuth's other band, working in similar fashion with the medium of the comic) and Siluetes 61 (Tom Dokoupil's solo project, in which he concerns himself with the genre of collage).

Between 1979 and 1983, the idea that pop music can be fine art and vice versa was a revolutionary one (with David Thomas of Pere Ubu as the Che Guevara poster boy). The border crossings which ensued had little to do with the "Break on through" rallying cry of the Woodstock generation. The fabled "other side" had long since disappeared beyond the border. If anything, a new territory was emerging, one with different rules and laws which would be explored on "The Wirtschaftswunder" – today, the record still sounds more effective in dislocating and dissolving boundaries than anything that esoteric literature or LSD has to offer.

Frank Apunkt Schneider

*NDW = Neue Deutsche Welle = New German Wave

Tracklist

1. Mutter und Vater
2. Kopfgeldjäger
3. Mach dir das Leben schön
4. Rate mal
5. Tapetto Magico
6. La Belle et Lla Bête
7. Erste Hilfe
8. Der große Mafioso
9. Madame X
10. Junge Leute
11. Wildes Tier
12. Die Parade
13. Das weisse Pferd
14. Big Men
15. Zuviel



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