



GERMAN PUNK & WAVE: 1978-1984 VOL.1

VARIOUS
VINYL ON DEMAND

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Classic art is often 'classic' because, yes, it's good and from the soul of a true talent, but also because it has been given patronage; backing for materials, a stage for display or funds for distribution. For, if no-one knows about it, it cannot become popular and will not receive national or worldwide acclaim. Music, especially, gains and suffers from these factors and the sub-genres of punk and wave more than most. Because the DIY ethic provided artistic freedoms, those same freedoms meant that most artists of that ilk were left working without a net... or two pennies to rub together. So we have to thank German record label Vinyl On Demand therefore, for bringing together the eleven bands in this boxset that provides, at least to many UK ears, the first chance to hear a selection of classic German punk and wave music.

They include PVC, inspired by UK punk band The Adverts who, despite being formed in 1977, didn't release anything until 1982; White Russia included ex-members of PVC, releasing two LPs during their lifetime. This set includes an album's worth of tracks from each (eleven and twelve respectively); MDK, purveyors of post-punk with a distinct Clash flavour; Din A Testbild were a new wave, punk-electro outfit who moved into synth experiments as did another band in the box set, Poison Dwarfs, with their brief techno stabs. The Didaktische Einheit will be of interest to cold wave fans with their stripped, raw approach while the Off Band and No More explored the darker areas

of post-punk. Other bands include the wonderful Funtastiklos which provided a unique instrumental electronica providing pastoral electro with elements of Kraftwerk and flavours of early UK outfits like early Human League, Die Werkpiloten (check out the hypnotic minimalism of 'New Arrangements' in this boxset) and Die Gesunden who played unrefined melodies that were no less attractive for it.

Utilising a number of Kenwood, Yamaha, Aiwa and Sony decks as sources, label boss Frank Maier had a gamut of sources for this boxset including, "well preserved DATs and original tapes provided by artists and transferred digitally as WAV/AIF. Some artists provided CDs which they recorded from their original cassettes, tapes or quarter inch reels."

Trying to get the best sound from this hotchpotch of sources proved challenging, as the mastering engineer for this box set, Anders Peterson from GS Mastering & Post, explained. "For any compilation, especially one as big as this, it's often tricky to get a homogenous sound. In this case, with recordings dating back twenty-five to thirty years, the recordings were quite different from each other; varying levels, varying instrumentation and overall sound, varying amounts of hiss and other elements of noise and audio artefacts. But that's what's so interesting, challenging and also inspiring about doing audio post on a project like this, being able to present these recordings in a new light, so to speak."

The music on this box set is often basic and primitive, partly by design but also partly because cash was scarce. Peterson recognised the care he had to take with the sources, therefore. "Making the remastering just clean and polished would not do the music justice. So balance is a keyword to pretty much all aspects of the remastering process."

In practical terms, Peterson had to deal with the fact that these groups did not have audiophile concerns in mind before they started recording. The idea was to get the band together in a space, any space, where they could do their thing and hit the record button. Yet that meant that, "on several tracks, there were several layers of various forms of noise and hiss that had to be removed or greatly reduced. I often use analysis software from the French IRCAM studio to locate the troublesome frequency sections and I have an EQ I programmed myself in Csound, where I can basically alter the amplitude of every single frequency in the spectrum. Such a detailed processing is not always required but it gives fantastic possibilities."

The result has been worthwhile though, because the box set preserves the raw nature of the music and conveys the essence of what the bands were trying to achieve. This was both the beginning and end of music as they knew it at that time. Everything was old, this was new, it was pioneering stuff, classics of the underground in fact, which this box set captures perfectly.

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