



MANUEL GÖTTSCHING INTERSTELLAR MEISTER

| TEXT AND PORTRAIT BY PAUL DAVIES |

JUST LIKE HIS MUSIC – mellifluous, discreetly engaging, subtly driving – Manuel Göttsching is understated and quietly spoken. There is already a considerable repertoire to choose from – four decades worth. Integral to the early *Kosmische Musik* scene in '70s Germany, his band Ash Ra Tempel forged a pathway for early experimental electronics cocooned in dreamlike stasis. “We were anti-'50s music at the time,” he recalls. “Germany had Amon Düül II, Can, a new scene. Berlin’s music originates from '20s cabaret, but the influences in Cologne and Dusseldorf were more about Art.” Factor in the late '60s counter-cultural mood sweeping through Europe, free jazz and Stockhausen, and you begin to understand the beginnings of the sloppily-termed Krautrock movement.

Göttsching’s band experimented with several members and collaborations. Most notably, the *Seven Up* album with renowned LSD guru, Timothy Leary. And Klaus Schulze. As he recalls, “Hartmut [Enke], our bass player, went to London for equipment. It wasn’t easy to find in Germany, and we could only afford second-hand. Pink Floyd’s roadies came in to a shop with all this gear. He immediately bought everything and hailed a taxi for the train station. We had the loudest system in Germany.” Enough for Schulze to come calling and suggest they form a band.

By the mid '70s, Göttsching was already looking for alternatives. He had recorded a home demo, *E2-E4* in '81 and eventually released it three years later. It soon became a sleeper hit amongst the nascent clubbing communities. A generation of nightlife aficionados – firstly in Manhattan’s Paradise Garage, then reinterpreted by techno dons, Basic Channel and Carl Craig – have heralded this beguiling hour-long ambient track. Repetitive electronic loops and a meandering guitar merge into an absorbing sonic trip that still sounds relevant today, thirty years after its inception.

Despite overwhelming demand, Göttsching has only performed *E2-E4* in its entirety once. For its 25th anniversary at the *Metamorphose* festival by Japan’s Mount Fuji in 2006. Last summer, he returned to *Metamorphose* performing his debut solo album, *Inventions for Electric Guitar*. Fellow cutting

edge artists Elliot Sharp, Zhang Shouwang and Steve Hillage played the multi-layered guitar parts. “*Inventions* was the departure point from Krautrock,” he explains. “From '74, I really took a different direction. I was influenced by minimal composers like Steve Reich and Terry Riley, and I wanted to play this on guitar.”

Live performances are increasingly rare nowadays. Despite this, Göttsching surprised the organisers of Glasgow’s highly regarded *Men & Machines* when, after several requests, he agreed to play last December. His first UK performance since 2000, Göttsching is hardly drawn to audience adulation. As he plays a succession of perennial favourites – *Sun & Rain*, *Blackout*, *Trucky Groove*, *Shuttlecock*, and *Deep Distance* – he looks surprised by the enthusiastic reaction. The audience range from early twenties through to fifties, and there is a discernable cheer everytime he picks up his guitar. One man proudly declaring to him afterwards, “I’ve waited all my life to hear you live.”

Göttsching has since been busy preparing new works and remastering original recordings. He has acquired the 35mm print to cult movie, *Le Berceau de Cristal* (1975) starring Nico and Anita Pallenberg. Another of his earlier works, the film is being digitized for re-release. He also soundtracks his wife, Ilona Ziock’s films.

An opera based on the book, *Mildred Harnack and the Red Orchestra* will follow. An American academic in pre-war Berlin and integral to the Nazi resistance movement, Harnack’s execution was personally ordered by Hitler. Jung Jung Shim, Korean composer to the movie, *Old Boy* and Göttsching have a collaboration scheduled to debut in Seoul then Berlin for 2012. “Next year, will be 40 years since Timothy Leary and Ash Ra Tempel’s ‘summer of love’ in Switzerland,” he adds, referring to their celebrated album, *Seven Up*. “There is an unreleased mix that hasn’t been heard before.”

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