



SERGE BLENNER

MAGAZIN FRIVOLE

Reissue (originally released 1981 on SKY records)
Vinyl / CD / digital

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Tracklisting

- 1 Magazin frivole (6:46)
- 2 Envoutement (4:11)
- 3 Derivatif (3:57)
- 4 A l'Ouest (3:45)
- 5 Métropole agile (4:50)
- 6 Phonique (5:03)
- 7 Frivolité (2:44)
- 8 Polyphase (4:52)

Promo

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Cold, concise analogue synthesizer instrumentals — on his second album Serge Blenner remained true to his style, albeit shifting course slightly towards pop territory. The juxtaposition of dark harmonies and pop structures is what makes this album so appealing. In places, it feels like a blueprint for early Depeche Mode.

Having seen his first album *La Vogue* snapped up by the Sky label and fast-tracked for release in 1980, Blenner delivered his second LP (*Magazin Frivole*) the following year. Mindful of the success of its predecessor, Blenner added the name of his debut in big letters to the front cover of the new sleeve. Better to be safe than sorry.

Blenner remained faithful to his musical style, albeit adding more of a pop flavour. *Magazin Frivole* would not look out of place filed alongside Depeche Mode on the record shelf, as a certain resemblance is undeniable. Moreover, Blenner was one of the few proponents of electronic music who preferred to keep his songs concise, in contrast to the meandering odysseys of many of his electronic contemporaries. The far better known French artist Jean-Michel Jarre adhered to similar principles, yet although Blenner was often compared to his compatriot, he claims only to have heard his music long after *La Vogue* had appeared.

Blenner's creative approach is quite remarkable. He is at pains to point out that he is a composer, not a musician. Improvisation does not play a part in his music. Minor chords dominate his harmonies, the bass performs octave leaps which mirror the zeitgeist. Unexpected key changes abound, adding a restless, almost disquieting quality. Overall, *Magazin Frivole* is less dark than the preceding album, but a picture of cheerfulness it is not. Nevertheless, a poppy drum computer introduces a lighter note.

From the very first track, chord changes pop up at unexpected junctures — they seem to come in prematurely, before harmonic sequences have run their course. Blenner doesn't have any explanation for this curiosity, other than to note that "most of the music was played by hand, so of course it wasn't all perfect." Maybe it just wasn't meant to be too catchy. "I did all I could to avoid being successful — on a subconscious level, at least. Unpredictable metrics and irregular beats were definitely part of the process" Blenner admits with an enigmatic smile.

As a matter of fact, Blenner prefers not to listen to his older recordings, dismissive of their adolescent air. Juxtaposed with Blenner's more recent works, one can see what he means. His latest album *Musique de Chambre* (2008) comprises modern classical chamber music, built on digitally sampled real instruments. Besides, Blenner points out, handling all of those analogue devices was a convoluted and complex undertaking. Help was at hand. With an impeccable sense of timing, his friend Wolfgang Palm launched the PPG Wave, the first commercially available digital synthesizer. Blenner sings the praises of the PPG (Palm Products GmbH) today as enthusiastically as when he first got his hands on one. "Suddenly I had all the equipment I needed in one box." He never used analogue equipment again, leaving his first two albums as the only ones of their kind. Which is a real shame.