



Conrad Schnitzler

Con



CD / LP / Digital

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Conrad Schnitzler: In the electric garden

Wolfgang Seidel, May 2020

Independence. If there's a common thread running through the life of Conrad Schnitzler (1937 – 2011), it is his unfailing commitment to independence, something he learned at an early age. In the turmoil of war, his mother was evacuated to Austria, so he and his younger brother made their way through the bombed out ruins of Germany's industrial Ruhrgebiet to get there. He attended an Austrian village school with children of all ages before returning to Düsseldorf where he completed an apprenticeship as a mechanical engineer. This revealed another side to his character: planning and precision were as much a part of him as the desire for independence. The latter came under threat in 1956 when West Germany reintroduced military service, with conscientious objection an unrealistic option in the Cold War climate. A few occupations were exempt from conscription, miners for example. Signing up for the merchant navy presented another loophole. Conditions on board were so unappealing that such an incentive was deemed necessary. Whilst on shore leave in Düsseldorf, Schnitzler heard about a professor at the School of Art (Kunstschule) who also accepted students into his class without high school diplomas. Conrad Schnitzler became one of them.

The spirit of a fundamental new beginning bonded this generation of artists together, with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Gottfried Michael Koenig the most radical proponents. Perhaps it was due to the fact that music had been so corrupted under National Socialist rule, from classical to the Schlager variety. Schnitzler was fascinated by the new sounds he heard on the radio in the evenings. To his ears, they connected the struggle for independence to the planning and precision he had learned as a mechanical engineer. At the same time, he understood that music like this was only possible within an institutional framework to which he had no access. So he set about creating his own framework.

Schnitzler bought his first synthesizer in the early 1970s – a considerable investment at the time. The introduction of the compact cassette had liberated duplication and distribution from the realm of the record company, but Schnitzler also recognized the creative potential of the medium, beyond its practical functions. He built a "cassette organ" out of 12 cassette recorders and two cases for his musical collages. Towards the end of the decade, he could be found on the Kurfürstendamm, West Berlin's premier boulevard, cassette recorders slung over his shoulders as his music boomed out of battery-powered loudspeakers. He sold the cassettes on the spot. It doesn't get more independent than that.

How did he find his way into a commercial studio? Buoyed by the success of Tangerine Dream, Peter Baumann, Schnitzler's successor in the band, established the Paragon Studio. Schnitzler had left after their first LP in the belief that the creative potential of the group had reached its limit, but their friendship endured. Baumann made use of downtime in the studio to pursue his own musical experiments. And then Conrad Schnitzler appeared at the door with a small Korg synthesizer, a sequencer and his EMS Synthi (a portable model in an attaché case), having transported the whole lot on his delivery bicycle. Disciplined artisan that he was, he soon had something decent to show for his efforts. Something, indeed, which could be pressed on vinyl for a wider audience. It was clear in Schnitzler's mind that he needed to leave the studio at least some commercially viable material in return for the chance to work there. Hey, it could even be fun. Con 3. proves as much. The last record to be completed at Paragon reveals Schnitzler's light-hearted rapprochement with German New Wave (Neue Deutsche Welle). However, when record companies rolled out their standard contracts, including the usual clauses obliging the artist to attend interviews and participate in television shows, Schnitzler's independent spirit rebelled. Those contracts remained unsigned.

The Paragon Studio era, with sound engineer Will Roper, whose work with Schnitzler gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his skills in tape manipulation, splicing, editing and looping, came to an end when the studio was sold and Peter Baumann moved to the USA.

Tracklisting

1. Electric Garden
2. Ballet Statique
3. Zug
4. Metall I
5. Black Nails

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Promotion

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