

Kraftwerk - Kraftwerk (1970)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 01 June 2010 23:01 - Last Updated Saturday, 02 June 2018 22:14

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01. *Ruckzuck (Hütter/Schneider-Esleben) – 7:46*
02. *Stratovarius (Hütter/Schneider-Esleben) – 12:05*
03. *Megahertz (Hütter/Schneider-Esleben) – 9:26*
04. *Vom Himmel Hoch (Hütter/Schneider-Esleben) – 9:58*

Personnel:

- Ralf Hütter – organ, tubon
- Florian Schneider-Esleben – flute, violin, electric percussion
- Andreas Hohmann – drums
- Klaus Dinger – drums
- Konrad "Conny" Plank – sound engineer & production

Y'know, it really can't be emphasised enough just how important Kraftwerk are to electronica. As The Beatles were to rock, as Black Sabbath was to metal, these guys really pretty much are the original archetypal electronic band. Seriously. And extending the tortured analogies with other bands, if Pink Floyd had *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, and Led Zeppelin had *IV*, Kraftwerk had *Autobahn*. Unlike both of those 2 albums, however, *Autobahn* is also Kraftwerk's best album, and therefore truly definitive for anyone who has never heard anything by the band before. In typical Kraftwerk fashion they also managed to completely confound expectations with this record. For a start, although this is actually their 4th album, their first 3 have all been deleted at the request of the band, meaning that they are now basically impossible to find, meaning that their first song now readily available is a true masterpiece. The title track of *Autobahn* is their *Echoes*, their *Stairway To Heaven*, their *A Change Of Seasons*; in other words, their legacy. (Seriously, I'll stop with the comparisons now). Weighing in at over 22 minutes long it's an epic in every sense of the word, and somehow completely encapsulates the feeling of a road trip. With stuttering electronica interspersed with sounds of horns blaring, wind rushing by and the simple lyrics of "fahren fahren fahren auf der Autobahn", this sounds like it could be a truly boring piece of music, and yet it's simply near perfect in its brilliance. As is well

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known Kraftwerk would later toy with the boundaries between machine and man on their later albums, but there's something near inhuman about how artificially brilliant this song is. You know what's even more surprising about the song though" The fact that it was a hit single in both the USA and Europe. Somehow it was cut down to approximately 3 minutes in length, really catapulting Kraftwerk to fame. This was possibly helped by the fact that the lyrics sound very much like "Fun fun fun on the Autobahn", turning one of the greatest electronic songs of all time into a sing-along for children in English-speaking countries. While it may not have been intentional, it's undeniably effective.

While the title track has become completely ubiquitous with the album, band and genre, it would be grossly inaccurate to paint this album as merely a "one song wonder". Autobahn is followed by Kometenmelodie 1 and Kometenmelodie 2, forming another 12 minute plus suite of music. Part 1 of this is hugely eerie, with a chilling synthesised effect moving over a thudding bass and slightly discordant collection of sounds. This is possibly the most overtly experimental song on the album, as well as being strangely soothing. Although Kraftwerk may sometimes be criticised for making music which is hard to relate to, this song definitely does not fall into this category, evoking a wide range of emotions in the listener in its 6 1/2 minute running time. Part 2 of the song is far warmer, initially carrying on from where Part 1 left off before developing into a truly majestic song over a melody that just about every band would sell their guitarist to be capable of writing. As with so much of Kraftwerk's work the layering on this track really is quite exceptional with the combination of many instrumental effects and sounds forming a mighty wall of noise in which every individual aspect of the music is still very discernible.

By the standards of this album, Mitternacht is something of an oddity, being a very doomy, claustrophobic song. Now I think of it, you know what this reminds me of" It should be the soundtrack to a horror film set in a disused nuclear power plant, with the disproportionately hunched over bad guy creeping around while gas is ejected from vents in the walls and water drips down from the roof. That's the sort of thing that we're talking about here. Just when we seem set for another longer song it ends very suddenly, just as the listener is really getting into the track-possibly the only near-significant criticism that I have of this album. The final track on this album, Morgenspaziergang is completely different from Mitternacht, opening with a "Mini Moog" (giving the effect of bird whistles), the song builds with flutes, keyboards and bass, all belying the band's reputation for producing pure electronica, in one of the most natural songs that they'd ever produce. This track clearly shows the diversity of the album, and indeed of much of Kraftwerk's material as a whole, sounding completely different from anything that has appeared thus far, and ending the album on a strong note.

Along with Trans-Europe Express this is one Kraftwerk's truly great albums, providing a blueprint for all future electronic based bands to examine. As a band Kraftwerk play the role of both John The Baptist and Jesus; preparing the way for no-one other than themselves to follow,

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constantly subtly experimenting with their sound, and although they may have recorded their best album at the start (well, now anyway) of their recording career, this in no way acts as a criticism of their subsequent material. --- Med57 EMERITUS, sputnikmusic.com

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