

4 | Infrastructure of the German Music Business

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The Krautrock phenomenon formed part of a global revolution in pop music and culture in the 1960s and 1970s, but in sharp contrast to the Anglo-American world, Germany's music business infrastructure for countercultural rock music was initially underdeveloped. That was different in Britain and the United States, where a surge in independent record labels and studios with the latest recording technology followed the rock 'n' roll era. With multitrack recording expanding, artists began to use the studio as an instrument, and more independent producers like George Martin, Brian Wilson, and Phil Spector appeared on the scene. Rock music became more complex and increasingly focused on the record as a work of art. Experimental use of new studio tools, inspired by the production techniques of The Beatles and The Beach Boys and the progressive and psychedelic rock styles of acts like Pink Floyd, Yes, and King Crimson, accompanied a shift from singles to album LPs.¹

Linked to this development was the widespread opening of recording studios independent of major record companies, such as Associated Independent Recording (London, 1965), Trident Studios (London, 1968), Sound City Studios (Los Angeles, 1969), and Electric Lady Studios (New York, 1970), and the establishment of dedicated rock engineers like Tony Visconti, Glyn Johns, and Alan Parsons. The economic infrastructure was changing simultaneously, with established major labels recognising the widespread desire for rock music and the need for new release opportunities. Decca was the first major that in 1966, staffed by young, enthusiastic rock fans, created the sub-label Deram for rock music, releasing *Procul Harum* and *Ten Years After*. EMI and Philips followed suit and opened the sub-labels *Harvest* and *Vertigo*, respectively, in 1969, with Pink Floyd, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, and Uriah Heep on their rosters. Rock music production was progressing, and rapidly becoming more professional, leading to many now-classic albums.

¹ V Moorefield, *The Producer as Composer: Shaping the Sounds of Popular Music* (London: MIT Press, 2010), pp. 40–1.

Live music, also in a state of flux, gave club culture more relevance. Well-known examples are the Whisky a Go Go in Los Angeles (1964) as a prime venue for rock music, or the now legendary Cavern Club in Liverpool, which gained prominence through performances by The Beatles (1961–3). A significant event for the development of international popular music culture was the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, which marked the beginning of the ‘Summer of Love’. Woodstock followed it in 1968, and the Altamont Free Festival in 1969. All three festivals made history and inspired pop festivals all over the world. On the business side of things, dedicated rock managers emerged with renowned professionals such as Brian Epstein (The Beatles), Peter Grant (Led Zeppelin), and Allen Klein (The Rolling Stones). Due to the popularity of Anglo-American rock music, a supportive infrastructure was quickly established in Britain and the United States, contributing to the music’s global success.

In West Germany, there was a profoundly different situation. The infrastructure was much less developed, but it was precisely this disadvantage that provided the breeding ground for Krautrock.² The German music industry was built on *Schlager*, a commercial form of pop music intended to appeal to the sentiments of the public,³ produced by major labels in their own studios. Independent record labels for rock music did not exist, nor was there an adequate club and concert infrastructure for such music. Moreover, roles like music managers were practically forbidden until the mid-1970s. The *Arbeitsamt* (Federal Employment Agency) held a special department for artists and had a monopoly on managing musicians, but it lacked suitable personnel for rock music.⁴ So bands either took over their management duties themselves or recruited an external ‘band member’, neither of which was usually suited for the job. Moreover, both approaches were violations of the law and carried hefty fines.

These structural deficits disadvantaged German artists, but they were also one of the reasons why such an unusual form of rock could develop in Germany with Krautrock. The lack of structure provided ample space for creativity and exploration outside Anglo-American norms, without which Krautrock would probably not have developed as it did. The structural

² U Adelt, *Krautrock: German Music in the Seventies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), pp. 1–14; A Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational. Die Neuerfindung der Popmusik in der BRD, 1968–1978* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), pp. 203–26; D Stubbs, *Future Days: Krautrock and the Building of Modern Germany* (London: Faber, 2014), pp. 21–32.

³ J Mendivil, *Schlager and Musical Conservatism in the Post-War Era*, in U Schütte (ed.), *German Pop Music: A Companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 25–42.

⁴ J Reetze, *Times & Sounds: Germany’s Journey from Jazz and Pop to Krautrock and Beyond* (Bremen: Halvma, 2020), pp. 214–15; Simmeth, *Krautrock*, p. 208.

disadvantage was transformed into an artistic concept. While the late 1960s were still a developmental time for Krautrock, the period between 1970 and 1974 was marked by professionalisation, institutionalisation, expansion, and transnationalisation.⁵ Innovative independent record labels, recording studios, and distribution networks emerged for progressive rock music, enabling experimental German rock artists to produce records and release them internationally. Many of the industry professionals involved were just as relevant to the creative output as the artists.

Clubs and Festivals

German progressive rock bands did not benefit from an established infrastructure of performance venues in the 1960s. Early Krautrock bands had to be content with performing at art galleries and exhibitions, bars and universities, such as the canteen of the Technical University of West Berlin, an important meeting place at the time.⁶ Dedicated rock clubs were rare, one of which was the Star Club in Hamburg (1962–9). Best-known for providing a stage for The Beatles in 1962, it also impacted Krautrock, given that influential recording industry figures were involved in the live events and house label Star Records. For example, Amon Düül II, Popol Vuh, and Can were signed by Siegfried Loch, an artist and repertoire representative at Philips Records and later head of the German branch of American label Liberty Records.⁷ Inspired by Andy Warhol's Factory and the Dom in New York, a club culture began to develop in West Germany by the late 1960s.

Zodiak Free Arts Lab played a crucial role in Berlin. Founded by musicians Conrad Schnitzler and Hans-Joachim Roedelius, the club had, despite its short existence between 1968 and 1969, a profound influence on what later became known as the 'Berlin School' of electronic music.⁸ As an avant-garde space for musicians, artists, creatives, and the counterculture, Zodiak hosted daily open-stage sessions with little distinction between audience and artists. It encouraged anyone to pick up an instrument and experiment with free jazz, progressive rock, and avant-garde styles. The boundaries between performing and rehearsing were fluid. Many Krautrock bands originated there one way or another from those jam

⁵ Ibid., pp. 135–245.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 69–70, 198; U Schütte, *Kraftwerk: Future Music from Germany* (London: Penguin, 2020), pp. 40, 46.

⁷ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 79–90. ⁸ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 112–13.

sessions: multimedia artists Agitation Free were the house band, Edgar Froese and Klaus Schulze of Tangerine Dream were regulars, and Kluster formed directly from the sessions. Besides Zodiak, composer Thomas Kessler's Electronic Beat Studio, a publicly funded semi-professional studio in a music school, provided electronic instruments and recording facilities for early Berlin Krautrock bands.⁹ Ash Ra Tempel were formed in this studio.

Düsseldorf became as equally important as Berlin with the development of a 'Düsseldorf School'. Kraftwerk, its most famous representative, alongside Neu!, La Düsseldorf, and later acts such as DAF, Der Plan, and Propaganda, made Düsseldorf Germany's capital of electronic pop music.¹⁰ Just as in Berlin, the early scene was concentrated in a few central locations. Near the renowned Düsseldorf Art Academy with contemporary artist Joseph Beuys and a thriving art gallery run by Konrad Fischer, Creamcheese (1967–76) was Germany's first psychedelic club to combine pop music and art.¹¹ Even more so than Zodiak, Creamcheese emphasised multimedia elements, realised through light and video projections, art installations, and music, to unite the senses. Spectacular events and performances from bands like Pink Floyd, Genesis, and Deep Purple brought the club considerable media attention. Prominent Krautrock bands Kraftwerk, Can, and Tangerine Dream also performed at Creamcheese.¹²

Other cities also had clubs relevant to Krautrock. In Frankfurt, the Sinkkasten jazz club and Heidi Loves You basement bar became hubs for the local psychedelic scene, and Munich had the PN Hit House with house band Amon Düül.¹³ Even though no club came close to Zodiak and Creamcheese, they all had something in common in that Krautrock musicians initiated and shaped the operation of these clubs, which helped establish a social and performative infrastructure for progressive rock music.¹⁴ In contrast to earlier venues like Hamburg's Star Club that hosted strictly organised live performances by mainstream bands, the new progressive clubs encouraged experimentation and promoted the interplay of art and music. But these clubs were rare, so it was difficult for bands to tour the country.

While clubs provided the breeding ground for bands and their progressive styles, one event was fundamental to the institutionalisation of Krautrock: International Essen Song Days from 25 to 29 September 1968.

⁹ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 96. ¹⁰ Schütte, *Kraftwerk*, p. 13.

¹¹ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 113. ¹² Schütte, *Kraftwerk*, pp. 19–20.

¹³ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 56. ¹⁴ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 115–16.

Inspired by the Monterey Pop Festival of 1967, music journalist Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, who later founded the Krautrock labels Ohr, Pilz, and Kosmische Kuriere, conceived the event as a non-profit festival. The generous support of Essen's Department of Youth made it possible to sell tickets at low prices.¹⁵ Over these five days, more than 200 musicians from Germany and abroad played forty-three performances at eight venues. Among the foreign bands were Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, Alexis Korner, and The Fugs. Notwithstanding a considerable financial loss, the festival profoundly impacted German pop culture. With 40,000 visitors, it was Europe's biggest pop music event at the time and marked the beginning of a festival boom in Germany.

Festivals becoming integral to pop culture triggered the debate between commercial interest and the countercultural authenticity central to Krautrock.¹⁶ Essen Song Days was also a noteworthy event in another respect; Krautrock bands like Tangerine Dream, The Guru Guru Groove, and Xhol Caravan benefitted from both a broader audience and more media attention than was possible with performances at arty clubs and galleries. What followed was the formation of professional networks and Krautrock bands receiving their first record contracts: Amon Düül, Tangerine Dream, Xhol Caravan, and Birth Control were signed to the Hansa label by Peter Meisel, *Schlager* producer and owner of Hansa Studios in Berlin.¹⁷ Due to its myriad influences on German pop culture, Essen Song Days was a momentous milestone, marking Krautrock's inception; some even see it as the beginning of German countercultural pop music.¹⁸

German Record Labels for Independent Rock Music

By the late 1960s, dedicated record labels for rock music did not yet exist in Germany, but it was not long before a new infrastructure of Krautrock-specific independent labels formed. *Schlager* producer Peter Meisel had no vision for handling the newly signed bands Amon Düül, Tangerine Dream, Xhol Caravan, and Birth Control. Without a clear production concept, he recorded Amon Düül's semi-improvised performances in a chaotic session.¹⁹ Meisel was unsure about the result and waited until the band's offshoot project, Amon Düül II, released *Phallus Dei* (*Penis of God*, 1969).

¹⁵ Adelt, *Krautrock*, pp. 8–9. ¹⁶ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 102–4.

¹⁷ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 145.

¹⁸ See Adelt, *Krautrock*, pp. 8–9; Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 94–5.

¹⁹ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 146.

Assured by this release, Meisel finally released Amon Düül's debut album, *Psychedelic Underground*, in 1969 through his major international distributor, Hamburg-based Metronome. The following year meant the beginning of a historical collaboration for Krautrock: together with Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, organiser of Essen Song Days, Meisel founded the first record label for German progressive rock music, Ohr, in 1970.

Set up in Meisel's premises in Berlin-Wilmersdorf and using his *Schlager* network, Ohr offered the burgeoning new psychedelic rock scene professional music production and distribution services,²⁰ as well as Kaiser's imaginative marketing campaigns.²¹ Within its first three years of existence, Ohr released thirty-two LPs and enabled countless Krautrock bands to reach an international audience, including Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel, Guru Guru, and Embryo. The early releases, produced in Thomas Kessler's Beatstudio, sounded a bit raw, unlike many later releases that had internationally competitive quality, owing to the collaboration with Germany's two primary Krautrock producers, Conny Plank and Dieter Dierks.

Kaiser signed many bands in the label's first year, which prompted distributor Metronome to limit Ohr's activities. Kaiser and Meisel then started another label, Pilz, distributed by the German chemical giant BASF, which had just set up the music label Mouse and a distribution system that was used for Pilz releases.²² Pilz was supposed to release more folk-oriented music, whereas Ohr should focus on psychedelic rock, but this distinction did not hold in practice. Within the first two years, both labels had sold 250,000 copies of eighteen albums but hardly made a profit because of high production costs.²³ Kaiser's ambition was to raise the market share of German bands from under 1 per cent to 90 per cent in less than a year.²⁴ Since he had to compensate for often poor artistic quality, his huge advertising and promotional campaigns took increasingly absurd turns. Towards the end of his short-lived career spanning six years, Kaiser claimed that his bands were bigger than The Beatles and played on Mars.²⁵ Such delusions of grandeur made Meisel sever his ties with Ohr and Pilz in 1973. Many artists like Tangerine Dream and Klaus Schulze also wanted to pull out of their contractual obligations, which they finally achieved through lawsuits.²⁶

²⁰ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 216–17.

²¹ See Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 269–73; Stubbs, *Future Days*, p. 392.

²² Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 269. ²³ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 91; Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 271.

²⁴ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 271. ²⁵ Stubbs, *Future Days*, pp. 392–3.

²⁶ Stubbs, *Future Days*, p. 389.

In 1972, before these incidents, leading Ohr employees Bruno Wendel and Günter Körber had already left the company to set up their own Krautrock label, Brain Records, distributed by Metronome. Becoming the main competitor, Brain attracted many acts from Kaiser's roster. In the four years between 1972 and 1976, Brain released fifty-eight Krautrock albums and sold about one million copies of records by Neu!, Embryo, Tangerine Dream, Edgar Froese, Klaus Schulze, Popol Vuh, Kraan, Cluster, Harmonia, and Guru Guru, making it the biggest German rock label.²⁷ Körber left Brain in 1975, intending to pursue a different model; he founded the one-person company Sky Records that served a narrowly defined niche market within the blossoming rock music scene.²⁸ After twenty-five years in business, Sky ultimately closed in 2000, having only released reissues in its final years. Brain is practically inactive but still releases albums, compilations, and reissues of its leading artists, such as Klaus Schulze, Grobschnitt, Harmonia, Birth Control, Cluster, Accept, the Scorpions, Neu!, and Jane.

One of the few German Krautrock labels left today is Bureau B, a sub-label of Tapete Records. Founded as a specialist label for electronic and experimental German music of the 1970s and 1980s,²⁹ Bureau B regularly releases reissues of Brain and Sky, including records by Conrad Schnitzler, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, or Cluster, often with the original design, but also new releases in the Krautrock tradition. Similarly, the Grönland label, founded by German pop star Herbert Grönemeyer, spearheaded the Krautrock revival in Germany by re-releasing all long-out-of-print albums by Neu! in 2001. Box sets compiling key Krautrock bands like Harmonia or the solo oeuvre by former Can member Holger Czukay followed suit.³⁰

Back to Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser: after his business partners Wendel and Körber left, in 1973 Kaiser started a third record label called Kosmische Kuriers (Cosmic Couriers) with his partner Gille Lettmann, distributed by Metronome. The label represented Kaiser's New Age interests and the rather pronounced preoccupation with the mind-altering drug LSD. Its name is inspired by the term populist psychologist Timothy Leary used for LSD dealers.³¹ Sonically the label *kosmische Musik* referred to releases by Ash Ra Tempel, Klaus Schulze, Wallenstein, The Cosmic Jokers, and Popol

²⁷ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 212–13.

²⁸ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 254.

²⁹ S Ziehn, Bizarres Wiederentdeckt: Gunther Buskies vom Label Bureau B im Corso-Gespräch, Deutschlandfunk, www.deutschlandfunk.de/bizarres-wiederentdeckt.807.de.html?dram:article_id=256353.

³⁰ Grönland, About us, www.groenland.com/en/about-us. ³¹ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 91.

Vuh. Of his three labels, it was Kosmische Kuriere that allowed Kaiser to most effectively realise his ideas of promoting alternative spiritualities as well as his vision of ‘deterritorialized, post-national cosmological identity, which involved the consumption of psychedelic drugs and the invention of new sounds, in particular through the use of the synthesizer’.³² During his business years, Kaiser helped boost blossoming careers of groups such as Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel, Klaus Schulze, and Popol Vuh, but this did not save him from declaring bankruptcy in 1975. His erratic, presumably drug-influenced behaviour towards the end of his career had made him a laughing stock, before he disappeared from the music scene altogether.

His pivotal role as a visionary and promoter of Krautrock, however, cannot be overstated.³³ In addition to founding Essen Song Days, he provided the production and distribution infrastructure for Krautrock with his three labels, which indirectly led to the conception of other influential record companies like Brain and Sky. Kaiser’s downfall, though, cannot be reduced to drugs; he was simply too ambitious in his quest to change society through pop music. With his disappearance, Krautrock had passed its zenith.³⁴ Still, several Krautrock artists took the risk of opening their own labels. By 1977, around 100 existed, occupying 9 per cent of the market, but most eventually ended in financial disaster.³⁵

Independent labels like Ohr, Pilz, Kosmische Kuriere, Brain, and Sky were not the only ones interested in German psychedelic rock music. For one thing, all but Pilz were distributed by Hamburg-based Deutsche Metronome, the German offshoot of a Swedish major record company. For another, major labels discovered the market potential of Krautrock. In 1971, Stuttgart-based Intercord opened a sub-label for progressive music called Spiegelei. Even more impactful was Polydor, the pop label of Deutsche Grammophon, whose sub-company BASF later became relevant as the distributor of Pilz Records.

One of the most widely reported signings in the already unconventional Krautrock practices was Faust. The outlet was sold to Polydor in 1970 by journalist Uwe Nettelbeck, who (unofficially) acted as their manager, producer, and marketing expert. Strikingly unconventional and generous, Polydor set up a top-class recording studio, providing living quarters for the entire band.³⁶ The label had hoped for a German version of The Beatles³⁷ but was somewhat stunned upon hearing the results of a year’s

³² Ibid., p. 83. ³³ See Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 223–4. ³⁴ Ibid., pp. 223–5.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 210. ³⁶ Adelt, *Krautrock*, pp. 61–2; Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 137–8.

³⁷ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 60.

work in the studio, heavily influenced by LSD use and experimentation with recording technology. The debut album *Faust* (1971) sold poorly in the British key market; it was still worse in Germany, with less than 1,000 copies sold. Their second album *So Far* (1972) also failed.

Krautrock in the International Market

Just as important as German major labels were German branches of foreign corporations, many of which recognised the economic potential of Krautrock even before independent labels emerged. Given that selling records without losing royalties to German partners was lucrative, foreign companies were keen on opening national branches in Germany. Before Krautrock's emergence, American outfit Liberty/United Artists, founded in 1967 with Siegfried Loch as head of the German branch, was already involved in German rock music. Liberty released early albums by Can, Amon Düül II, and Popol Vuh, which gave artists professional structures and international distribution, and ensured affordable overseas prices, making them successful in Western Europe and Japan.³⁸

Another important player was Virgin in Britain, initially a mail-order company specialising in importing international LPs. After Polydor had dropped Faust, Virgin CEO Richard Branson signed the band and released *The Faust Tapes* (1973), a compilation of unreleased recordings from the Polydor era. Neither *The Faust Tapes* nor the following Virgin-produced *Faust IV* (1974) had any major success in Germany, so Faust disbanded³⁹ before receiving recognition in their home country for their achievements abroad. In retrospect, Faust produced some of the most influential records of the decade, considerably impacting British and American bands.⁴⁰

Virgin was not only relevant for Krautrock because of Faust; they were also pivotal for acts like Tangerine Dream achieving major successes in Britain. Their third album for Ohr, *Atem* (1973), was already becoming the most commercially successful import album in Britain, also winning John Peel's Best Album of the Year award.⁴¹ After Tangerine Dream parted ways with Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, Virgin signed the band and released their fourth album, *Phaedra* (1974). As with Faust, the album did not sell well in Germany. Nonetheless, Tangerine Dream, enthusiastically received in

³⁸ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 73, 211–12. ³⁹ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59. ⁴¹ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 171.

France and even more so in Britain, became the first German band to perform at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1975.⁴²

Many other international partnerships existed; some were successful, some were not. British Vertigo successfully released albums by Can, Amon Düül, and Faust, but the first two Kraftwerk albums did not sell well. Kraftwerk, however, succeeded in the United States, where they were released through Mercury, EMI Electrola, and Capitol. Amon Düül also achieved a high-profile signing with American major label Atlantic to produce the double album *Made in Germany* (1975), which flopped incredibly.⁴³

Krautrock was received very differently in its home country and abroad. As representative examples of the larger Krautrock movement, Faust and Tangerine Dream were commercially successful in Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Japan, Australia, and the United States, though they flopped in Germany. Demand for international touring was highest for Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel, Neu!, Guru Guru, Embryo, Amon Düül II, and Can.⁴⁴ Even though record labels were right in their hope that the international success of domestic rock bands would eventually raise their appeal in Germany, this became only partly true. Popularity and sales never came close to that of other countries. In the early 1970s, less than 1 per cent of all rock album sales were by German bands; British and American records dominated the German market. While frontrunners at Ohr and Pilz sold about 15,000 records, average releases ranged between 1,000 and 3,000.⁴⁵ Such low revenues did not allow bands to tour overseas.

However, it gave them the important 'authentic' or 'underground' identity, which would have been threatened by commercial success – a difficult position for music producers and labels considering pop music's inherent commercial interest.⁴⁶ Nowhere was this better demonstrated than in the downfall of Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser's business due to bankruptcy. Virgin was better positioned with Tangerine Dream, featuring synthesiser-driven anti-rock and a quintessentially 'German' sound.⁴⁷ Their revenue alone exceeded that which Brain made in Germany with *all* of their artists.⁴⁸ Of the many Krautrock records, peaking in 1972 with 222 releases, none reached the German charts.⁴⁹

But the international comparison should not distract from the fact that in the 1970s, the time of the second global economic crisis, the German

⁴² Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 99. ⁴³ Stubbs, *Future Days*, pp. 105–6.

⁴⁴ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 136–7. ⁴⁵ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 227–9.

⁴⁶ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 194–5. ⁴⁷ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 95.

⁴⁸ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 248. ⁴⁹ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*.

music market grew to become the second largest in the world after the United States. The share of German rock bands may have been comparatively small, yet the German music industry professionalised in counter-cultural genres, especially with Krautrock production supported by major and independent record labels.⁵⁰ The government abolished its monopoly on managing creatives, and independent professionals like managers, engineers, studio owners, and record producers entered the scene.

Producers and Studios as Facilitators of Krautrock

Record labels and their distribution arms are essential to make music accessible beyond the local scene. Equally important are recording studios, audio engineers, and producers, without whom recorded music would not exist. In the 1960s, it was common for major labels to own studios and employ staff to produce primarily commercial *Schlager* music. With the emergence of Krautrock, independent studio operators, producers, and engineers, roles often held by one person, were on the rise, mirroring developments in the Anglo-American sphere. Label owners and managers like Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, Peter Meisel, Uwe Nettelbeck, and Günter Körber could be described as producers in the broader sense because they influenced artists' musical visions without necessarily being involved in studio work. The new independent producers, by contrast, operated technology and conducted the recording sessions.

Since they were not record label employees, their job involved many roles besides commission work: finding promising artists, producing music at their own risk, giving record licences to labels, or releasing them through their own publishing outlets. Initially, this new breed of record producers was not popular with major labels, but it did not take them long to recognise these specialists' creative and commercial potential for niche genres, missing in their *Schlager*-centred infrastructure. Two Krautrock producers stood out like no others, Konrad 'Conny' Plank and Dieter Dierks. They shook up the German record industry and were pivotal to the quality and success of most domestic psychedelic rock bands.

Conny Plank underwent formal training as an audio engineer before leaving Saarland Broadcasting in 1966 to start working at Rhenus Tonstudio in Cologne, where he was involved in the very first recordings of Krautrock, including *Klopzeichen* (1969) by Kluster and *Tone Float*

⁵⁰ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 205.

(1969) by Organisation, who later became Kraftwerk. Interested in experimental electronic music, he advised his clients to build on Anglo-American influences but be original with it.⁵¹ Plank worked in various studios around the country, recording Krautrock bands in the cheaper off-peak hours at night, most notably at Windrose-Dumont-Time and Star Studio in Hamburg.⁵² In 1973, he finally opened his own studio in a former barn in rural Wolperath near Cologne, a fifty square metre former pigsty he reconstructed in a DIY fashion.

Plank's mentality matched the counterculture zeitgeist of Krautrock. Unlike the Anglo-American understanding of a producer, Plank saw himself more as a co-producer or 'mediator' between musicians, sounds, and tape, not wanting to determine his artists' music.⁵³ Instead, he was keen to foster a democratic environment where musicians could live out their creativity. For his artistic input, Plank, in his modesty, rarely claimed credit, while other contemporaries sure did, as the example of Eberhard Kranemann shows:

I know . . . the early music of Kraftwerk without Conny Plank: and so I know exactly the work that Conny Plank did for the band. The sound of the band in the early stages was 70–80% Conny Plank; and not Florian and Ralf. It was so important what he was doing at the mixer with the sound and what kind of music he selected and how he supported Ralf and Florian. The sound is very important for Kraftwerk; and the sound has been made by Conny Plank, the great master.⁵⁴

According to reports, from the ideas Plank regularly played on the synthesiser, Kraftwerk chose the ones they liked; yet he was only credited as an engineer, not as producer or co-composer. Today Plank is acknowledged as 'West Germany's answer to Brian Eno . . . part producer, part collaborator, part ideas man'.⁵⁵ With his style, which Plank described himself as 'live dub mixing', he intended to treat the studio as an instrument. Hence he contributed artistically to various compositions by the artists he produced.⁵⁶ Although not an official band member, Plank had a significant impact on the music of the first four albums by Kraftwerk, as well as on Neu!, Guru Guru, and Can.⁵⁷

In addition to his creative merit, Plank's role as a networker and business facilitator deserves attention. Indifferent to the commercial aspect of his craft, he recorded several Krautrock bands for free, enabling Cluster to get

⁵¹ D Buckley, *Kraftwerk: A Biography* (London: Omnibus, 2015), p. 68.

⁵² Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 258–9. ⁵³ Buckley, *Kraftwerk*, pp. 35–6. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7.

⁵⁵ Buckley, *Kraftwerk*, pp. 35–6. ⁵⁶ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 256.

⁵⁷ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 33.

a record deal with major label Philips.⁵⁸ By producing on his own, Plank frequently put bands in a better position to negotiate record deals with labels.⁵⁹ With his Kraut Musikverlag, he founded a publishing company that gave him and his clients essential business connections.⁶⁰ When the Krautrock boom was over, Plank produced electro-pop bands like Ultravox and Eurythmics and played in his own band, Moebius & Plank. He died of cancer in 1987.

Dieter Dierks is the second eminent German Krautrock producer, who began his career as a self-taught engineer. He initially used the attic in his parent's house, which did not suffice for long. So Dierks had a studio built in the yard. Soon the house was turned into a family-run hotel to accommodate bands, allowing them to work whenever they felt creative. Much of the music Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser released on his three labels was recorded and produced by Dierks, including Ash Ra Tempel, Can, Popol Vuh, Embryo, Guru Guru, Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze, Birth Control, and Wallenstein. From the outset, Dierks was interested in experimental music and took the curious Krautrock bands seriously. Like Conny Plank, Dierks was not driven by commercial success. What he had in mind, however, was a music production empire comprising his studio, the record label Venus Records, and his Breeze Music publishing company. By the mid-1970s, he had a state-of-the-art recording studio of his own, with custom-built equipment like a forty-track mixing console and a thirty-two-track tape recorder, which was among the best in West Germany.⁶¹

Dierks, still expanding, enlarged the studio with three more recording spaces and a control room in the basement under the hotel section, allowing several bands to work simultaneously. He also acquired a mobile sixteen-track recording unit, used for live recordings and rental to radio and television stations. With this mobile unit, 'Rockpalast' nights at Essen's Grugahalle were recorded between 1977 and 1986.⁶² Moreover, the first album recordings of German hard rock pioneers Accept and the Scorpions, released on Brain, took place at Dierks' studio. Today, the studio is still in high demand as one of the best-equipped in the world.

In Krautrock's heyday, most albums were recorded at either Plank's or Dierks' studio. Some bands had facilities, most famously Kraftwerk with their Kling-Klang studio in Düsseldorf, and Can with their Inner Space

⁵⁸ Stubbs, *Future Days*, pp. 337–8.

⁵⁹ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 287–90.

⁶⁰ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 259.

⁶¹ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, pp. 284–6.

⁶² Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 258.

Studio, first at Schloss Nörvenich (Castle Nörvenich), then in a former cinema near Cologne. Guru Guru, Cluster, Harmonia, and Klaus Schulze followed suit, preferring rural areas for their studios.⁶³ The main reason for setting up a studio was to boost creativity.⁶⁴ Having one's own private studio was an essential part of Krautrock's aesthetic. Access to one was beneficial because it allowed for exploration and improvisation free from time pressure and external influences like audio engineers and producers.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Germany's popular music industry owes a lot to Krautrock. In the 1960s, there was an infrastructure for *Schlager*, indeed a popular genre, but none for counterculture or youth. With the emergence and sudden proliferation of Krautrock towards the end of the decade, this changed quickly. Major labels discovered the economic potential of countercultural music, and new independent record labels helped jumpstart the international careers of countless Krautrock bands. Professionals independent of major companies and state organisations, but pivotal for Krautrock's aesthetic and worldwide dissemination, entered the scene and made Krautrock an international success story within less than ten years. A rapidly developing, well-functioning and globally operating production infrastructure, inspired by the Anglo-American industry and yet distinct from it, contributed to the Krautrock ecosystem. Germanness is, intentional or not, the most clear-cut characteristic of Krautrock. Critical, though, for the music to be heard beyond Germany's borders were international experiences and the business contacts of key players. Among them were record label representative Siegfried Loch and entrepreneur Peter Meisel, the genre's two primary producers, Conny Plank and Dieter Dierks and, of course, Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser. They all helped to lay the structural foundation for Neue Deutsche Welle (New German Wave), rock, and metal that followed Krautrock in the 1980s and 1990s. Krautrock's successes of the 1960s and 1970s, made possible by independent record labels, studios, and distribution networks, encouraged, if not created, an openness towards countercultural music made in Germany.

⁶³ Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 90.

⁶⁴ D Buckley, *Kraftwerk: A Biography* (London: Omnibus, 2015), p. 92.

⁶⁵ Adelt, *Krautrock*, p. 26; Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 179; Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational*, p. 145.

Recommended Reading

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