

Science Music and the Angel Radar: Being Holger Czukay

Once Holger Czukay tuned into ocean cargo ships and wove their radio messages into the luminous electronic waft of Can's music. Student of Stockhausen, potential rocket scientist, he also used to wear white Japanese gloves when playing bass live. He's continued the legacy of Can's music with a tunestack of individual and influential releases since 1980's 'Movies'. Recent reports state he's working on a Techno release. Hoping to be lateral I thought these would be among the interesting reasons for approaching science and technology in another way.

Since the release of 'Movies' in 1980, a well-timed and influential record on the shores of post-punk, a minority of music freaks, many of whom were post-punk graduates and who found the culture which was growing out of eighties values difficult to remain in step with, looked expectantly towards each subsequent Holger release, awaited as much for the sheer surprise level, as the strange ingenuity and shimmering, crystal production of the music.

Czukay had been a member of Can. And Can was one of the bands for whom the punk world of the late seventies was looking to as foreshadowers of the soundworlds it was discovering. Bands who were mentioning Can as a significant influence were at the forefront of punk and early postpunk. Public Image, Buzzcocks, Cabaret Voltaire, this heat and various others. As if to seal the connection of mutual respect, Jah Wobble, emissary from postpunk and Public Image bassist, at the time, began a series of collaborations with various members of Can, notably Czukay. It continues to this day, Wobble turns up on a track off Czukay's current CD release, 'Moving Pictures'.

Czukay tells a possibly apocryphal story, when asked about his place of birth, Danzig, or as it is known by its Polish name, Gdansk. "I was about five years when I left. So I was a pretty small child then. But I remember everything, especially the house I was living in. When I was four years old I remember the birthday when I became four years old. On that birthday I went with my younger brother to see the trams coming by. I wanted it to get out of the rails. I was very successful. It was a very triumphant day." He wheezes with amusement. Czukay was born in 1938. He moved to Germany

during the war, and later, presumably afterwards, went to the Gerhard Mercator Scientific school in Duisberg. "A horror", is how he describes the school. Mercator was a Belgian Renaissance scientist, the most knowledgeable Geographer of his time and was among those who developed the original Globe or Planisphere, an influential instrument in the contemporary development of cartography and navigational mapping. At the school, where Czukay says Werner Von Braun was also a pupil, he learnt a lot of physics and maths, potentially useful for space research. "I thought I wasn't bad in physics, but I was best in musical language." He says that he always knew that he would end up in music, that it was the "best language I could work on."

Can were a '68 group which meant and still means a lot in Germany. They were small scale in their influence, though such influence continues with new listeners. Irmin Schmidt once recalled that by the mid-seventies they had reached maybe 40,000 pairs of ears. They toured in Germany, France and England. They were perhaps particularly popular in France. The band in its various versions produced a series of remarkable concertos of music, or soundworlds. There is though much else unreleased. After the departure of their Japanese singer Kenji Suzuki they regrouped, as initially the original core four-piece, before bringing in much of the Traffic rhythm section; Rosko Gee on bass – thus relieving Czukay of his bass playing – and Reebop Kwaku Baah on percussion. Czukay, (who by this time was wearing, as with Japanese etiquette, white gloves for his musical activities), made a definite sideways move into the investigation of playing a new found instrument, the long wave radio. He would pick out of

