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THE MONKS

www.the-monks.com



besides being a mystery, the monks are one of the most influential groups of the 60es...
5 GIs stationed in germany who set the world on fire! forget the velvet underground, here
comes the world's first avantgarde rock'n'roll band of all times!

out in october 2006:

silver monk time

a tribute record to the monks

international musicians take on the legacy of the monks

with: the fall, faust, fehlfarben, die goldenen zitronen / chicks on speed, ptv 3 (psychic tv),
(international) noise conspiracy, alexander hacke, michaela melian, barbara manning &
the go-luckys s.y.p.h., alec empire / gary burger, silver apples / alan vega , mouse on
mars, the raincoats, jason forrest, 27 / 11, singapore sling, cycle, nista nije nista, 5,6,7,8's,
jon spencer / solex, gossip, charles wilp & monks and many more

the monks – the transatlantic feedback

a documentary film by dietmar post + lucia palacios
(98 min - usa/germany/spain – play loud!)

*to celebrate these 2 releases the original, re-united monks come for a short tour through
europe - only handpicked special venues.*

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what people say about the monks:

"American soldiers stationed in Germany who became anti-Beatles: a banjo with a microphone in it to make it electric, a fuzz bass in '66, and an amazing singer, not to mention the drummer and organist, both out of this galaxy with what they were doing. I Hate You is probably their masterpiece – "I hate you with a passion baby ... but call me!" True grit. Their melodies were pop destructive and must be played to your younger brother."

(The White Stripes)

"To this day, there is nothing in art, rock, punk rock or nut rock that comes close to the goony conceptual rigor of the Monks' image and the crude, avant-biergarten sound of the group's sole LP, Black Monk Time. Long before disgruntled draftees in Vietnam were getting baked on hard drugs and Jimi Hendrix records, the Monks brought the neuroses of Cold War-era front-line service to bear on rock & roll."

(David Fricke, Rolling Stone Magazine)

"The 1966 album "Black Monk Time" is a touchstone of contentious, aberrant rock that anticipated Pere Ubu and the Sex Pistols."

(Jon Pareles, New York Times)

"It was like seeing Eraserhead for the first time."

(Schorsch Kamerun, Goldenen Zitronen)

"What's so interesting about the record is its hypnotic element. Something you also see in Velvet Underground. A sort of trance-like, hypnotic, pulsating structure."

(Thomas Meinecke, Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle, FSK)

"The Monks are up there with Little Richard."

(Jon Spencer, Jon Spencer Blues Explosion + Pussy Galore)

"Like any good artist, the Monks were able to turn a tin can into the atomic bomb. To me they were the first weightless group in history and the forerunners of techno."

(Charles Wilp, Afri-Cola-Guru and adman)

"There are very few records I go back to constantly, CAN's Monster Movie and the MONK's Black Monk Time."

(Mark E. Smith, The Fall 2005, The Fall already covered four different monks' songs)

"I am a direct descendant of the monks."

(Jochen Irmeler, Faust)

The band abandoned many accepted musical norms of sixties rock n roll: They have very little emphasis on melody, their songs are rhythmic, rather than melodic. The rhythms are heavy and repetitive, with the drums supplying a sound often described as 'tribal'. The drum kit was played without cymbals, leaving the beat as unembellished as possible. Song structures are minimal and repetitive, but do not tend to follow the standard verse-chorus-bridge patterns of a pop song. The band's lyrics are dadaist and playful, yet paranoid.

(www.wikipedia.org)

1966. London was swinging, the Byrds soared on the wings of their most innovative single, "Eight Miles High," Brian Wilson labored in the studio on a legendary lost masterpiece and the Yardbirds fronted the mightiest lineup in rock'n'roll, with Messrs. Beck and Page on dual lead guitars. Pop Art and its bastard stepchild, Psychedelia, were about to rule the airwaves. But from Germany there came dark rumblings that hadn't been heard since the Nuremberg Rallies of the 1930's. Guitar and organ howled in orgiastic competition as a thunderous tribal beat bludgeoned song structures into strange forms. Rhythmic cadences echoed the slap of jackboots goose-stepping down Berlin's boulevards. There were also strained and shrill vocals, eerily reminiscent of a sputtering orator disposed of only 20 years before in the ruins of the Reich Chancellery's garden.

All that was missing were the chorus of hoarse "Sieg Heil"s. Even then, there were aural equivalents in a song called "Complication." The lead singer chanted: "complication, complication" as the backing vocalists intoned "people cry for you, people die for you" over and over. The effect is mesmerizing, as is the rest of the Monks' 1966 debut album, *Black Monk Time*.

Strangely enough, there wasn't a war criminal in sight, just five decent, clean-cut American boys playing rock'n'roll. It's taken over thirty years for music to catch up with the ground work laid by the Monks on their one and only album.

Recorded in the waning days of '65, the album was an anomaly. Harsh and abrasive, the music has not only withstood the test of time, it's grown more pertinent with every passing year. A grotesque and fantastic tale precedes the release of *Black Monk Time*, though.

Formed in 1964 by five American GI's stationed in Germany, the Monks started off as a very traditional rock'n'roll outfit. Initially called the Torquays, the band played the standard beat music of the day. The musicians (Gary Burger, lead guitar/vocals; Larry Clark, organ/vocals; Dave Day, rhythm guitar/vocals; Roger Johnston, drums/vocals and Eddie Shaw, bass/vocals) covered Chuck Berry tunes, surf music and various songs by British Invasion artists.

Fortunately, the band was comprised of highly imaginative musicians. They soon tired of the expected format and began experimenting with their sound, focusing almost solely on rhythm. "We got rid of melody. We substituted dissonance and clashing harmonics," bassist Eddie Shaw said. "Everything was rhythmically oriented. Bam, bam, bam. We concentrated on over-beat." The music did not come out of the blue, however. The lead guitar player, Gary Burger, elaborated on the process. "It probably took us a year to get the sound right," he recalled. "We experimented all the time. A lot of the experiments were total failures and some of the songs we worked on were terrible. But the ones we kept felt like they had something special to them. And they became more defined over time."

One of the components in this alchemy of sound was feedback. Burger discovered feedback independently of the many English players who have all been heralded at one time or another as the inventor of said effect.

"We were practicing and I had to take a leak," Burger said. "I laid the guitar against the amp and walked off the stage. I forgot to turn it off and the thing began to make this god-awful racket. It started off humming and then it increased in volume. Roger started hitting his drums and it sounded so right together." Eddie Shaw went one step further when describing that initial bout with feedback. "Just imagine the sound of the Titanic scraping along an iceberg," he said. "It was like discovering fire."

Around this time, the rhythm guitar was traded in for a six string banjo. The band wanted to sound as grating as possible and a banjo fit the bill quite nicely. Dave Day played this instrument, an oddity in rock'n'roll. To amplify the banjo, he stuck two microphones inside it. He chorded it like a guitar and the horse gut strings produced strange clacking sounds. Day's frenzied attack is one of the most unique aspects of the group's departure from conventional rock'n'roll music.

After being discharged from the Army, their image evolved. They dropped the first name, exchanging it for a new moniker, the Monks. Momentous changes were ensuing in their style, both musically and sartorially. "We went into a barbershop on the spur of the moment and either me or Dave Day got our head shaved in a tonsure like a monk's," the drummer, Roger Johnston recalled. "Then the rest of the guys did. I really don't know why, but we did it."

There was initial reluctance on some of the members' parts. It had taken them many months to grow their GI haircuts out to an acceptable length that was in keeping with a hip band's image. Once shorn, though, the musicians realized they were no longer **just** a beat group. The Monks dressed in black at all times, wearing ropes tied around their necks. Eddie Shaw explained the unusual reason behind this. "I think we all live with ropes around our necks. Ours were plain and visible. It caused people to stare at us," he said. "The people with the painted silk ropes are the ones you have to watch, but even then, when they get smart, many of them trade theirs in for either an invisible one or a plain one. No matter what the ropes look like, they are all used for the same thing."

The image, in conjunction with the music's ongoing mutation, startled German audiences and induced an anarchy of perception. The reaction ranged from enthusiastic paeans in some urban areas to outright hate in the rural regions. At a provincial show, a young man became enraged at what he took to be blasphemy; a mere beat group dressed as religious ascetics.

"I had a guy jump on stage one night and begin choking me," reminisced Burger. "He kept it up with diligence until he received the tuning-peg-end of my guitar in the chops. That pretty much settled the issue."

The band also assaulted the crowds sonically, demanding their complete and undivided attention. If the audience tried to interact socially with one another, the Monks turned the volume up to ear-splitting levels. "We didn't want anybody to do anything but listen to us," Roger Johnston said. The results were electrifying. Phil Spector might have invented the legendary "Wall of Sound," but the Monks hammered out a "Steamroller of Sound."

A residency at Hamburg's famed Top Ten Club solidified the band's approach. The Monks giggered incessantly, playing six hours a night on the weekdays and eight or more hours a night on the weekend. They still played some of the standard beat material, but their originals became the core of the sets. The crowds were perplexed, to say the least.

"Some of them loved us. But others . . . well," Gary Burger said, pausing to laugh. "They didn't have a clue what was going on. I think the image confused them as much as the music. We were a freak show to them."

Even in jaded Hamburg, though, the Monks were a tad different than the usual rock'n'roll fare. "The image was sometimes a little too strong, but we got used to it. We were generally safe on the streets, even in the worst parts of Hamburg at four in the morning," Eddie Shaw said. "We looked too serious and officious to mess with. Strangers were

generally confused by us because our actions didn't reflect the dress. It was strangely androgynous and almost artificial looking. Some people told us we didn't look real. Walking through a crowded nightclub, I could feel people touching my head to see if everything was indeed real."

He elaborated on the audience's reaction to their strange garb and coiffures. "If a certain person had enough courage they would walk up and ask if they could touch our heads. Girls would draw back their hands and squeal. The whores of Hamburg considered us kinky. They loved us," Shaw said.

By November of '65, the Monks were ready to enter the studio. They had already laid down some demos, but now their management secured them a recording contract with Polydor. The album opened with their theme, "Monk Time." This song often caused tension when they played it live for off-duty American servicemen. In it, Burger waxes inarticulate vehemence, damning the conflict in southeast Asia. "Why do you kill all those kids in Vietnam/ Mad Vietcong!/My brother died in Vietnam."

Thankfully, the LP was recorded with analog technology on a four track machine. The instruments bleed together, creating dynamics that digital is sadly unable to achieve. The bare bones production on the album reflected what the band sounded like live. There was nothing on *Black Monk Time* they could not replicate on stage. "We sounded about the same on the album as we did live," Larry Clark said. Gary Burger qualified this statement to a slight degree. "We never played a song the exact same way twice. The structure was similar, but we'd really stretch out," he said. "And the recording process available really couldn't capture the feedback right. It was really loud on stage. But yeah, we sounded similar live and on the album."