

An Interview with Martin Zeichnete.

Berlin. February 2013.

Q: Hello Martin, we'll start at the beginning I suppose. Where did you grow up?

I was born in Pesterwitz, which is near Dresden, in 1951. Before the war my parents had been teachers. Afterwards my father worked for the FDGB and my mother sometimes gave music lessons.

Q: Where did you begin your music career?

My first job was as an apprentice sound editor for DEFA, (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft), in the Trickfilme (Animation) department in Dresden. I learned techniques in tape editing and 'special effects' which I would put to good use later on in my 'invisible' career. Perhaps because we provided music for animated film we managed to sneak in some avant garde ideas that would not be tolerated elsewhere. Some of us saw it as a game. Between us and the state censors.

Q: Tell me about the music that inspired Kosmischer Läufer?

Although we were of course aware of popular Western music at the time, very little was available to us. Our primary source came from radio stations broadcasting from the West. Due to the geography of the area this proved difficult in Dresden! There was a station I could get from Düsseldorf that played Kosmische Musik, you know, Kraftwerk and Cluster and Neu! and so on. To me, sitting in the attic tuning the radio dial, searching for anything, hearing these beautiful new electronic sounds, it did seem like music from the cosmos. I would record it and pass tapes on to my friends. We did have people in the East doing electronic music, such as Paul-Heinz Dittrich, but I found their version of it all too studious. The music from the West was fun. It had energy.

Q: How did the idea come about?

I was a keen amateur runner and when out I would play these motorik, repetitive songs in my head. I thought somehow it could be used as a training aid for athletes. The electric pulse sort of thing. I thought it could benefit the athletes mind as well as body, the music would be hypnotic, it would bring focus. Then at work I was shown a prototype design of Andreas Pavel's 'Stereobelt' and I knew this could be possible.

Q: So how does it go from an idea to a reality?

It was not in a good way! I shared my ideas with colleagues at work but as was often the case in those times I perhaps spoke in front of the wrong person. One day at the studio two SED members arrived and took me away in an official car.

Q: What did you think was happening?

Well. I didn't know, you think of everything you have said, everyone you have said it to, but I think I knew it would be about the music. I feared I would lose my job, at the very least. It would be very bad for someone who worked on party films to be seen to be influenced by the enemy, you know, Western culture.

Q: Where were you taken?

We drove in silence to the outskirts of Berlin to what I later found out was an athletics camp. They knew all about me and my idea. They questioned me about the concept for hours then left me alone in the room. Later an official from the Nationales Olympisches Komitee came in and told me I would begin to work on the project immediately.

Q: Just like that! It seems very matter of fact?

Yes, I was stunned, but sometimes that is how things happened then. We know now that the athletic directors were trying anything to gain an advantage in those times. At least my idea did not harm the athletes. I was in a studio in Berlin the next day.

Q: Did you work alone or with other musicians?

To begin with it was just myself, the engineer and always a state official who would sit in the corner observing. The first things I tried were basically electronic metronomes at various paces with very little melody. These were tested but the athletes didn't respond very well so I began writing more 'musical' pieces. Sometimes I would be joined by a drummer and a guitarist. It was incredible, when I would explain to the musicians what we were going to do, you could tell immediately the ones who 'got' what the music was. We would be in the live room doing 20 minute space rock pieces while a government official sat bored on the other side of the glass. It was surreal.

Q: What equipment did you have access to?

It varied. We had some Western technology in effect units and such but the synthesizers were mostly Soviet in origin and could be very temperamental. The studio in Dresden had a Subharchord which I had used before on animation soundtracks, it was a great machine. I filled in many claim forms for equipment. Sometimes it came, sometimes it didn't. The Moog didn't. I do know that the athletes in the program were probably the first people in the East to have Walkmen as I saw the order for 300 units.

Q: Did you ever meet the athletes?

Not really at the time, always there was a minder there when I met with them and the coaches to discuss what they needed. It was a shame, they were my only audience. Years later, after reunification, one former Olympian I met confessed to me that he would try and swap the training cassettes supplied to him for Western music at international meets.

Q: How long did the project continue?

I would be summoned to Berlin generally in the winter to produce tracks for the upcoming athletics season. The last work I did was in 1983 doing pieces for the gymnastic team's floor performances. The project stopped as suddenly as it had started. I was given no explanation. I think it may have been due to the boycott of the Los Angeles Olympics.

Q: How did you retain the music?

Well, I was not supposed to take the music from the studio as it was state property but I did manage to sneak a lot out. I thought the master tapes had been destroyed or lost in the chaos after the wall came down but one of the engineers, who 'got' it, had rescued a lot of them. We transferred them to digital in the early 90s.

Q: Why release this now?

I made this music for people to train to. Because of the time and place I did it only a select few got to use it. I would like for more people to finally use and enjoy it. It is as simple as that.

Kosmischer Läufer Volume 1 - The Secret Cosmic Music Of The East German Olympic Program 1972-83 is released by Unknown Capability Recordings on the 3rd of June 2013.

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