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AUTHOR	Grönholm, Pertti
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ABSTRACT

Ash Ra Tempel was a psychedelic rock band active in 1970–1975. Their self-titled debut album, released in 1971, is recognized as one of the classic recordings of Krautrock. Later, Ash Ra Tempel would have a deep influence on space rock, electronic music, and ambient music.

The only permanent member of Ash Ra Temple was guitarist Manuel Göttsching. After the break-up, he has cultivated the legacy of the band both as an innovative solo artist and as the central figure of Ashra. Göttsching's career spans from the era of Krautrock through the heyday of the electronic Berlin School in the mid-seventies and the birth of electronic dance music in the eighties.

Göttsching continues to perform and release music.

Since 1972, Klaus Schulze, one of the original Ash Ra Tempel members, has also produced an imaginative and unique body of musical work as a solo artist. Besides several collaborations, Schulze created many pioneering electronic solo albums in the seventies, and his active career has endured through five decades until the present day.

This chapter is an overview of the evolution of Ash Ra Tempel, its successor Ashra, and the solo careers of Göttsching and Schulze. With its emphasis on the seventies, the chapter focuses in the ways in which the musicians were able to adapt to and recreate themselves in the turbulent environment of rock and pop.

KEYWORDS

Ash Ra Tempel, Ashra, Berlin School, electronic music, experimentalism, improvisation, Klaus Schulze, kosmische Musik, Manuel Göttsching, psychedelic rock.

Ash Ra Tempel, Ashra, Manuel Göttsching, and Klaus Schulze

Pertti Grönholm

Ash Ra Tempel represents an archetypal group of *kosmische Musik* and psychedelic rock; an ensemble that became strongly associated with the desire for musical experimentation and detachment from the Anglo-American rock of the 1960s. The original band and the later solo projects have gained a cult over five decades. Their music has inspired musicians in space rock as well as electronic ambient, techno and trance. The focus of this essay is on the original line-up of the band Ash Ra Tempel (1970–1973), and Ashra, which has continued its legacy. In addition, the essay offers an overview of the solo production and collaborations of two founding members of the band, Manuel Göttsching and Klaus Schulze.

Manuel Göttsching, who studied classical guitar for years as a youngster,¹ grew up with rock music in the late 1960s, listening to Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton. With his friend Hartmut Enke (1952–2005) Göttsching played in various school bands, later the Steeple Chase Blues Band, which was inspired by blues but played more free self-expression and psychedelic rock.²

In 1969–1970, a Swiss composer, Thomas Kessler, who had his own electronic music studio in Berlin, mentored Göttsching. Beat Studio was located on Pfalzburger Strasse, in the premises of a publicly funded music school. From Kessler, Göttsching received both a spark for electronic music and the basic skills of improvising and composing.

Another musician who wished to escape from Anglo-American formulas was Klaus Schulze, who had played drums in several rock bands in the late 1960s. The most notable of these was Tangerine Dream, in whose early line-up Schulze played until summer 1970, then joining Ash Ra Tempel. Like Göttsching, Schulze was also interested in electronics, sound manipulation, and recording.³

Kessler's guidance strongly affected the emergence of the "Berlin School".⁴ Although Kessler was not so enthusiastic about the bands' aspirations to abandon the idea of composition, he continued channelling the youthful energies of the musicians. In autumn 1970, Göttsching and Schulze, Ash Ra Tempel already existed for three months, joined live sessions of Eruption, formed by Konrad Schnitzler and Klaus Freudigmann. The experience gave them extra confidence since Eruption's goal was to create music completely free of the hierarchies and conventions of existing styles.⁵

In the summer of 1970, Enke travelled to London to look for inexpensive used music equipment hard to find in Germany. He returned to Berlin with four large WEM amplifiers, which had been

touring with Pink Floyd. Only the wealthiest bands and biggest festivals in Britain used similar cabinets. Schulze, who had just parted from Tangerine Dream, saw the towering amplifier set in the Beat Studio and suggested to Enke and Götttsching that they should form a band with him. Two weeks later, the band played their first gig.⁶ Enke and Götttsching were only 17 at the time.

Götttsching (guitar), Schulze (drums) and Enke (bass) formed a trio with the outlandish name Ash Ra Tempel, translating as ‘the remnants of the temple of Ra’ (the sun god in ancient Egyptian mythology). The group positioned itself in the emerging scene of new German rock as a band of psychedelia and experimental music. According to Götttsching, the activities of the band were intensive, creative, and free, but rather unprofessional.⁷

In the latter half of the 1970s, Ash Ra Tempel performed regularly in Berlin, two or three times a week. The band gained a reputation as musicians who were able to improvise in front of an audience for several hours, communicating with each other only through their instruments.⁸ In addition, they played at exceptionally high volume. According to Götttsching, the performances of Ash Ra Tempel were always long, from 45 minutes to three hours and purely improvisational. The only thing the members agreed on in advance was who would start playing. The band performed in restaurants as well as at community centres, galleries, and the Academy of Arts: ‘The audience liked that. We didn’t have any big advertisements, word got around. Perhaps the actual music was not that important at our first concerts. There were a lot of people and something happened, that’s why you went there.’⁹

Entering the Empire of Kaiser

Overall, the music circles in Berlin were remarkably informal; jazz and rock musicians as well as experimental sound artists met and formed short-lived gig ensembles.¹⁰ In his subsequent interviews, Götttsching has emphasized that from the beginning, Ash Ra Tempel was one of the bands which tried to get rid of the influence of Anglo-American blues structures and create new sounds and music.¹¹

With the help of label manager Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, who was seeking out new bands in Berlin, Ash Ra Tempel also organized a studio in the autumn of 1970, which not only allowed artistic freedom but also almost endless recording, listening and jam sessions.¹² Ash Ra Tempel were able to record their debut album for the Ohr (ear) label, founded in 1970 by Kaiser.¹³ In early 1971, after overcoming many obstacles, sound engineer Konrad “Conny” Plank helped Ash Ra Tempel that

entered a recording studio in Hamburg. Götttsching remembers that Plank was very excited and proposed all sorts of technical experiments.¹⁴

The self-titled *Ash Ra Tempel* album, released in June 1971, consisted of two improvised instrumental tracks.¹⁵ Both ‘Amboss’ (‘Anvil’) and ‘Traummaschine’ (‘Dream machine’) are intense but distinct works which transport the listener into the post-rock world. ‘Amboss’ progresses with Schulze’s hectic rhythm and Götttsching’s guitar playing that distances the listener from the rock and blues conventions. ‘Traummaschine’ is a twenty-five-minute jam that initially pulsates very softly, soothing the listener with gentle sounds and the ethereal vocals of Götttsching. After that, the trio cautiously wake up the listener while the rhythm becomes stronger. Supported by bongos and bass, the rhythm finally reaches a timeless cosmic sphere. Plank managed to create a strong sense of space for the whole album. Inspired by ancient Egyptian culture, the cover art of the LP’s very special folded cover attracted attention.

Ash Ra Tempel continued playing to full venues in Berlin and elsewhere. The band also toured in Switzerland.¹⁶ Their performances were much more intense than the studio sessions, as can be heard in a few surviving concert recordings from summer 1971, which Götttsching released in the 1990s. They used to immerse themselves in extended improvisations, based on Schulze’s fast drumming and Enke’s distorted bass-playing. On top of those, Götttsching played solos, roaring feedback, and rhythmic parts with the help of delay effects.¹⁷ Schulze left Ash Ra Tempel right after the Swiss Tour in September 1971 and was replaced by drummer Wolfgang Müller. In interviews, Schulze stated that he would rather create music than play as a member of a band. However, his relationship with the other members remained close.¹⁸

Ash Ra Tempel’s second album *Schwingungen* (1972) was recorded with a different line-up. Wolfgang Müller, a partner of Götttsching and Enke from the Steeple Chase Blues Band, joined the core group on drums and percussion. The change is particularly noticeable in the album’s first track, ‘Light: Look at Your Sun’, which introduced Manfred Peter Brück (a.k.a. John L.) as a guest vocalist. He was a former member of Agitation Free and a famous figure in the rock circles of Berlin. ‘Darkness: Flowers Must Die’ takes the listener into psychedelic despair and aggression, where both Götttsching’s guitar and John L.’s roaring vocals are processed with a heavy phaser effect. Additional guest musicians Matthias Wehler (saxophones) and Uli Popp (bongos) bring fresh overtones to an increasingly chaotic song.

The B-side of the album is very different. The seamlessly seagued songs ‘Suche’ (‘Search’) and ‘Liebe’ (‘Love’) fill the entire side with cosmic ambiance. ‘Suche’ begins with Müller’s low-key

vibraphone. Gradually rising from the background, Götttsching's organ and guitar complement the band's gauze-like weaving, slightly reminiscent of 'Traummaschine'. The ethereal atmosphere is broken by Müller's drum beat, which rises from the distance in the front, restlessly wandering and then fading again. Götttsching's occasional glissandos on guitar and his whining organ, as well as Müller's cymbals, suggest an ascent such in 'Traummaschine', but the album ends with a melodic ballad flavoured by Götttsching's wordless singing and Müller's cymbals. Kaiser's trusted engineer Dieter Dierks¹⁹ recorded the album.

Psychedelic Encounters and Collaborations

In 1972, Kaiser and his partner Gerlinde "Gille" Lettmann commercialized the concept of *kosmische Musik* and associated it with German electronic rock. The concept smoothly mixed the escapism and esotericism of psychedelic rock with the dreams of the space age, science fiction, and the soundscapes of electronic music. In particular, Ash Ra Tempel, Klaus Schulze and Popol Vuh, Wallenstein, and Mythos, got the label of cosmic music through the marketing efforts of Ohr.²⁰

According to Harald Grosskopf, a drummer from Wallenstein who later played with both Götttsching and Schulze, the musicians involved in Kaiser's projects were people who, instead of radical political activism, chose to withdraw from society and focus instead on philosophy, drugs, and esotericism.²¹ Hence, it was not a big surprise that in 1972, Ash Ra Tempel ended up in one of the most peculiar ventures in the history of German rock.

The band had dreamed of collaborating with Ginsberg, but their attempts at establishing contact had not succeeded.²² In 1972, Timothy Leary, a former professor of psychology at Harvard University and an evangelist for LSD, had ended up in Switzerland after escaping from prison in the United States. He had to hide and change his whereabouts to remain free, but he received help from the Swiss author and esotericist Sergius Golowin. Leary's travelling companion included the British writer Brian Barritt, who considered himself a forerunner of the psychedelic counterculture.²³

Enke travelled to Switzerland to give Leary and Barritt the album *Schwingungen*. Neither of them knew of the band before, but they considered the music appropriate to advance their agenda and outlined the concept of the release with Enke. The goal was an album built on Leary's theory of the seven steps of consciousness. Leary felt that Ash Ra Tempel could produce an appropriate soundtrack for his lyrics. Klaus D. Müller, the road manager of Ash Ra Tempel and a later collaborator with Götttsching, has recalled that throughout the recording project, everything but the

music was chaotic. A wide variety of people gathered around Leary and Barritt, and drug-driven parties and general unrest disrupted the project. Neither Leary nor Kaiser knew how the album would be structured and produced. At some point, Edgar Froese offered Kaiser to step in for Ash Ra Tempel.²⁴

However, Götttsching and Enke had ideas about the music and their own role. With the help of Dierks, they managed to finish the recordings in three days at the Sinus studio in Bern. The title of the concept album, *Seven-Up*, referred to Leary's theory of the seven stages of consciousness. The album was recorded in August 1972 at Sinus Studio in Berne, with the help of various guest musicians. Micki Duwe took the lead vocals. Götttsching and Enke created the songs on A-side ('Space') in response to Leary's recitations, but gradually the players got a grip, and the B-side of the album ('Time') sounds like the more familiar Ash Ra Tempel.²⁵ According to Götttsching, Leary was initially only supposed to write the text and recite a little on tape, but eventually he emerged as the leading vocalist.²⁶

At his studio near Cologne, Dierks mixed in some new instrument and vocal parts with various session musicians and singers and added electronic effects. Götttsching and Enke, along with lead vocalist Duwe, finalized the album with the help of several session musicians. In the end, as many as thirteen musicians and singers appeared on the album.²⁷ Released in 1973 under the Kosmischen Kuriere (cosmic couriers) sub-label, *Seven-Up* gained a reputation as a somewhat failed project whose ideas looked better on paper than the music actually sounded. However, Leary's desire to harness rock music as a vehicle of the LSD revolution, as was to be expected, did not lead to a societal breakthrough.²⁸

Reunion, the End of the Original Line-up, and Schulze Solo

In 1972, Götttsching, Schulze and Enke became also involved in Kaiser's second collaborative project, where they, along with other musicians including Schulze, made music for Walter Wegmüller's *Tarot* (1973) album. The Swiss-born artist drew inspiration from Tarot cards, and the album contained plenty of spoken words.²⁹ Released in 1973, *Tarot* remains Wegmüller's only album, and many commentators, such as Julian Cope and David Stubbs, have valued its jam sessions.³⁰

Ash Ra Tempel's fourth album *Join Inn* was released in 1973. The album again consisted of a pair of long tracks. 'Freak and Roll' begins with wild jamming. Schulze's hyperactive drumbeat is both

dynamic and precise. Göttching's guitar moves seamlessly from blues solos to ethereal moods. Enke's bass mourns mostly in the lowest register. Electronic glissandos and noises from the synthesizer pop up here and there.

The contrast with the song 'Jenseits' ('Beyond') on the first side is enormous. The band takes listeners into a dream space filled with vibrating guitar, organ, and synthesizer sounds, all coloured with tremolo, wah-wah, phaser, and delay effects. Enke joins the sonic landscaping with very slow bass patterns. On top of it all, Rosi Müller, Göttching's partner and muse at the time, slowly recites her text: 'Let us dance on the wet grass. Look at me, please. Do you believe in peace? Sometimes it is so incredibly beautiful. Take me with you. Far away, you hear? The road is so long. Do you know the way – a little?'³¹ *Join Inn* epitomizes both sides of Ash Ra Tempel, with psychedelic visions and distressing bursts of energy, as well as serene sound spaces that invite the listener's own imagination and emotions.

In February 1973, Ash Ra Tempel performed three concerts in West Germany and France. At these concerts, Schulze's synthesizers seasoned the overall sound of the band and Göttching's playing was more sophisticated than earlier.³² However, these concerts also marked the end of the original line-up. In the middle of the last concert in Cologne, Enke gave up his bass guitar and sat down on the edge of the stage. Afterwards Enke stated: 'Yeah, the music you played was just so beautiful I didn't know what to play. I preferred listen to it.'³³ Troubled by many personal problems, Enke resigned from Ash Ra Tempel and never played again. He died in 2005 at the age of 53.³⁴

Klaus Schulze embarked on a solo career at about the same time. His solo works allowed him to transcend the role of a drummer in a way that set free his creativity, which was not quite possible in his former bands.³⁵ *Irrlicht: Quadrophonische Symphonie für Orchester und E-Maschinen (Will-o'-the-Wisp: Quadrophonic Symphony for Orchestra and E-Machines, 1972)* is a dark pseudo-classical album, populated by treated orchestral recordings, organ sounds, and electronic droning. His music is both restless and static and manages to escape the conventions of musical time. *Irrlicht* somewhat approaches to Tangerine Dream's *Zeit* (1972) but is even more alienating. *Cyborg* (1973) is perhaps his most radical work. It introduces the EMS VCS 3 synthesizer, which Schulze elaborates on intensively, creating soundscapes and pulses. *Cyborg*, which takes up the man-machine trope later to be developed by Kraftwerk, consists of four tracks, all exceeding 20 minutes in length. As in *Irrlicht*, the strongly meditative organ parts and the orchestral sections create a strong sense of murky cosmic ambience.³⁶

In these two albums, Schulze's distinctive musical qualities began to take shape. Both build on soundscapes and moods created at the mixing desk. Obtrusive electronic sounds and a mysterious atmosphere distinguish Schulze's early releases from the later ambient. Carefully created sound panning, delays and echoes build Schulze's space in an exceptionally vivid manner for the time. However, his early records still strongly divide the opinions among his fans; some see them as experimental masterpieces, while others find them too extreme and challenging.

Cosmic Superfluity and the Departure from Ohr

In spring 1973, Schulze and Götttsching took part in recording sessions organized by Kaiser and Lettmann. The all-night, drug-driven jam sessions produced about sixty hours of recorded music for the future releases of the Kosmische Kuriere sub-label.³⁷ In 1972, Kaiser had run into trouble with his early Ohr partners, Bruno Wendel and Günther Körber, who, after leaving the company, had formed a competing record label, Brain Records. Kaiser and Lettmann sought to raise the profile of their releases with glaring slogans and marketing, merging psychedelia and LSD culture into music. Especially Schulze and Tangerine Dream's Edgar Froese disliked Kaiser's marketing style.³⁸

Despite that, Schulze and Götttsching, and a few other musicians, such as Wallenstein's Grosskopf and Jürgen Dollase, surrendered their jam sessions to Ohr. In 1974, Kaiser and Lettmann released some parts of the sessions on a series of albums entitled *Cosmic Jokers*, *Galactic Supermarket*, *Planeten Sit in* and *Sci-Fi Party*.³⁹ After Kaiser edited the session tapes to a proper length, Lettmann added her own vocal parts to some of the songs. Despite the fact, that the musicians received monetary compensation for the sales, many of them, and Schulze in particular, protested against the arbitrary actions of Kaiser and Lettmann.⁴⁰ Flamboyant words and sci-fi tropes became a routine in the marketing. For example: 'The time ship floats through the Galaxy of Joy. In the sounds of electronics. In the flashes of light. Here you will discover Science Fiction, the planet of COSMIC JOKERS, the GALACTIC SUPERMARKET and the SCI FI PARTY: That is the new sound, Space. Telepathy. Melodies, Joy.'⁴¹

Such verbally overbearing marketing of Ash Ra Tempel's music put the band in a strange light. Even their musician friends began to worry. For example, Froese described that 'Ash Ra Tempel live in a dream world. They think that everything will turn out okay, that the explosion of consciousness will conquer the world and all the problems will solve themselves.'⁴² Götttsching, though, had no problems with Kaiser. However, he did not appreciate the idea about the mind-expanding effect of musical awareness, while Enke kept tirelessly explaining the matter to

outsiders. Later, Götttsching associated the talk about a higher consciousness as part of the West German music culture of the early 1970s, where all rock music had to have some political content or social purpose. Götttsching himself just wanted to play his guitar.⁴³ Eventually, he also began to disassociate himself from the influence of the Kaiser-Lettmann couple.

The Final Band Album and Innovations with Tape Machines

The last Ash Ra Tempel album under Ohr is *Starring Rosi* (1973). Starring Götttsching on vocals, guitars, bass, mellotron, synthesizer, electric piano, and congas and Rosi Müller on vocals, speech, vibraphone, and concert harp, the album also featured Grosskopf on drums. In addition, Dierks played bass and percussion on a few tracks. This relaxed-sounding album is closer to new age-inspired folk rock and light progressive rock than the band's previous recordings.⁴⁴

In 1974, Kaiser's cosmic empire was collapsing because of debts, lawsuits, and the departure of bands. Götttsching's first solo album, *Inventions for Electric Guitar* (1975), remains one of the last releases by Ohr, which initially marketed the album as Ash Ra Tempel's sixth album.⁴⁵ Later, it was re-released as Götttsching's solo album. He recorded the album at home using only his electric guitar, a few pedals, and two open-reel tape recorders. The tape machine became a revolutionary musical instrument for Götttsching; with a two-track recorder and a guitar, he could create rhythmic delays, while a four-tracker captured his playing one track at a time.⁴⁶ This is how Götttsching made use of the skills of tape manipulation that he had learned from Kessler. Pulsating guitar playing and harmonious interaction of melodies layered on top of the rhythmic parts revealed Götttsching's inspiration of minimalist composers, especially Steve Reich and Terry Riley.⁴⁷

Filling the entire A-side of the album, the track 'Echo Waves' is quite experimental with its rhythmic patterns and panning guitars. Still, it is unobtrusively captivating. The only guitar part that is classifiable as a proper solo only emerges at the end of a nearly eighteen-minute piece. Second track 'Quasarsphere' is a subtle, melodic recollection of the early years of Ash Ra Tempel. On the B-side, 'Pluralis' weaves a swinging, discreetly evolving pattern of delayed rhythm guitars. The album features many of the elements upon which Götttsching has created music, especially in his solo career. These elements include repetitive patterns and theme variations, as well as melodic and rhythmic loops.⁴⁸

In December 1974, Götttsching and guitarist-keyboardist Lutz "Lüül" Ulbrich from Agitation Free began to perform together as Ash Ra Tempel. In 1975, the duo played in West Germany, France,

and Britain to audiences of up to several thousand people.⁴⁹ Especially in France, the band was still very popular. Contrary to *Starring Rosi*, the music of these concerts sprouted from the band's earlier style. This especially applies to the songs which Götttsching and Ulbrich composed for the soundtrack of Philippe Garrel's *Le berceau de Cristal* (*The Crystal Cradle*, 1976), a French experimental film which featured Nico, Dominique Sanda and Anita Pallenberg.⁵⁰

The base of the soundtrack consisted of ethereal guitar patterns that cruise between organ and synthesizer sounds, sometimes merging into a harmonic aural environment. The overall sound is rather electronic, as the duo played also guitar synthesizer and a programmable rhythm machine. The film music remarkably resembles the style that Götttsching, Ulbrich and Grosskopf adopted later in Ashra. The recording was issued only in 1993 as an Ash Ra Tempel release.

The Electronic Minimalism of Ashra

From 1974 onwards, the music of both Götttsching and Schulze is impossible to associate with the Krautrock of the early 1970s. Both artists moved further away from psychedelic rock and found inspiration in synthesizers and various genres of music. However, if we understand Krautrock not as a style category but rather as a quest for new means of expression, the same desire to experiment and discover still drove both musicians in the latter part of the decade.

Götttsching continued in making music at his Berlin-based Studio Roma and began collecting ARP, Moog and EMS synthesizers and sequencers. His first distinctively electronic album was *New Age of Earth*, released by French label Isadora in 1976. For this album, Götttsching played all synthesizer parts by hand.⁵¹ However, at his 1976 solo concerts in France, he already performed with pre-programmed sequencers and synthesizers.⁵² The initial release was credited to Ash Ra Tempel, but after Götttsching obtained a record deal with Virgin in 1977, he shortened the band name to Ashra to avoid confusion and it The new moniker was intended to serve all future projects, both solo and band efforts.

New Age of Earth and the following *Blackouts* (1977) were both solo albums, but for *Correlations* (1979) and *Belle Alliance* (1980), Götttsching invited his former partners Ulbrich (guitar and synthesizer) and Grosskopf (drums and synthesizer) to form a trio. Initially, Ashra trio assembled only for a London concert in August 1977. However, the trio would remain the heart of the band until the first decade of the twenty-first century.⁵³ *New Age of Earth* combined Götttsching's interest in minimalism and the use of synthesizers. His arpeggios, chord progression, shimmering chords

and propulsive rhythms created an uplifting atmosphere. Songs such as ‘Sunrise’ and ‘Deep Distance’ push the listener forward. In ‘Ocean of Tenderness’, he created an ethereal sphere upon which the sound of guitar was able to float freely. The difference from *Inventions for Electric Guitar* is significant, as the guitars now played only a minor role. The album received a lot of praise from the music reviewers.⁵⁴

Götttsching has said that he wanted to get rid of the limitations of guitars.⁵⁵ However, in *Blackouts* his guitar returned to the forefront and the synthesizers were to create a base for Götttsching’s long solos and other guitar parts. His playing not only echoed the Krautrock era, but it had also elements of jazz and funk. The side-long ‘Lotus Parts 1–4’ initially resembles the slowly evolving melodies and hypnotic groove of *Inventions for Electric Guitar*, but in the middle of the piece, electronic sounds are set free and tonal harmonies become suppressed by sudden distortions and dissonance. Many reviewers also welcomed *Blackouts*.⁵⁶ These two albums started Götttsching’s intense home studio period. In addition, he toured with Schulze and Ashra and made music with Michael Hoenig (Agitation Free).⁵⁷ With the help of sequencers, Götttsching began to play long improvisations at concerts as well as at fashion shows.⁵⁸

Ashra fused pop elements into *Correlations* and *Belle Alliance* yet did not forget the psychedelic roots. Electronic instruments still played an important role in Ashra’s music, but in balance with band playing. Many of the songs relied on funk and disco rhythms and bass lines, which Götttsching became mesmerized with while visiting the United States in the late seventies. Good examples of this are the tracks ‘Club Cannibal’ and ‘Phantasmus’ from *Correlations*. The tracks ‘Screamer’ and ‘Aerogen’ from *Belle Alliance* are faster and more rocking. Not surprisingly, Virgin requested more material that could attract the pop audiences.⁵⁹

An Ambassador from the Synthetic Spheres: Klaus Schulze

In the mid-1970s, Klaus Schulze released many albums such as *Blackdance* (1974), *Timewind* (1974), *Picture Music* (1974) and *Moondawn* (1976). His music evolved to be more rhythmic and structured than his earlier output, and to some extent, it also began to resemble Tangerine Dream’s style in their early Virgin era. In the media, his music – along with Ashra’s and Tangerine Dream’s production – became labelled the Berlin School, which also referred to their common background as the apprentices of Thomas Kessler’s Beat Studio. From 1974 onwards, Brain and Virgin started to release Schulze’s works.⁶⁰ Gradually, his sound palette expanded to include acoustic instruments, such as flute, trumpet, acoustic guitar, drums, piano, and percussion, and the human voice.

For *Blackdance*, Schulze used a rhythm machine and a guest singer for the first time. On *Timewind*, he introduced a Synthanorma sequencer, an ELKA string machine, and EMS Synthi A and ARP 2600 synthesizers. *Picture Music* and *Moondawn* were coloured by the then-famous Minimoog synthesizer. As a live performer, Schulze was very conscious about the power of electronic instruments as visual and material attractors and used them extensively; he became famous for piling the stage set with synthesizers, string machines and sequencers.⁶¹

Schulze dedicated *Timewind* to his favourite composer, Richard Wagner. Later, Schulze returned many times to Wagner's music with his electronic interpretations and compositions inspired by Wagner. The role of melodies, harmonies and rhythm in Schulze's music grew larger. However, a certain structural inertia and rhythmic immobilism remained his musical hallmarks through the seventies. The casting of vast sonic layers and building tensions without surrendering to a cathartic climax was typical of his musical language.

In the late seventies, Schulze expanded his repertoire to soundtracks in erotic films (*Body Love, volumes 1 & 2*, 1977), historical figures (*X*, 1978) and works drawing on scientific fiction and fantasy (*Dune*, 1979). *Mirage* (1978) strongly manifested the liberating force of electronic music. For Schulze, the synthesizer represented a universal music machine that could overcome all restrictions of time, place, and social limitations. Schulze assured that electronic music could bridge the mind and the universe in a way that is neither a dream nor a hallucination. In the late seventies, Schulze achieved fame as a proponent of both electronic music and new age music, which allowed him to build a relatively large and enduring fan base. In 1979, Schulze began releasing albums under the pseudonym Richard Wahnfried. With *Time Actor* (1979), he joined forces with the eccentric singer-musician Arthur Brown. In the 1990s, Wahnfried's style began to resemble the electronic ambient and trance music of the time, and since then Schulze has gained recognition as one of the pioneers of trance.

From a New Opening to the Second Coming of Ashra

Göttsching's first solo offering *New Age of Earth* (1976) proved commercially successful upon initial release in France. This led Virgin offering a lucrative nine-album deal and releasing the album world-wide in 1977. *Blackouts* (1978), too, sold very well. It was only with *Correlations* (1979) that sales figures stagnated, causing Virgin to release "Belle Alliance" (1979) in Germany only.

Götttsching's home sessions did lead to an unpredictable and far-reaching acclaim. In December 1981, he recorded a piece where a couple of synthesizer sequences revolved around two chords and a drum computer set the pace for the other machines. On top of that, Götttsching played guitar solos and riffs. He recorded a nearly hour-long piece directly on a tape without any doubling, mixing, or editing. A few years later, Götttsching offered the recording to Schulze's Inteam label, which released *E2-E4* in 1984.⁶² Named after a typical opening move in chess and the droid R2-D2 of the *Star Wars* franchise, the release anticipated the rise of electronic dance music and influenced its evolution.

In 1984, German newspapers downplayed the release as an example of the inability of the vintage Krautrockers to regenerate.⁶³ Coincidentally or not, *E2-E4* became a small hit on a radio, trendy stores and DJs playlists in Europe and the United States. Surprised by the success, Götttsching assured that he had never thought of it as a dance piece.⁶⁴ Ultimately, on *Sueño Latino* (1989), an album two Italian producers built upon the 'E2-E4' sample, established the song's status as one of the early cornerstones of house and trance. Despite that, Götttsching, like many other Krautrockers, found himself on the margins, playing as a guest on other artists' records and making soundtracks for fashion shows and television. Only in the late 1990s the legacy and influence of the German electronic musicians of the 1970s became widely acknowledged.⁶⁵

In the 1980s, Ashra recorded only two albums. On *Walkin' the Desert* (1989), Götttsching and Ulbrich revived their minimalist ambitions. The release of the exotica-style pop album *Tropical Heat* (1991) was delayed for five years. In the mid-1990s, a handful of companies began to reissue Krautrock albums, which by then had become rarities but increasingly attracted young fans of techno, ambient, and progressive rock. Interestingly, it was a French label that showed interest in the branch of the Berlin School under discussion here, with Spalax re-releasing the majority of the albums by Ash Ra Tempel, Ashra, and Manuel Götttsching.

Ashra's second coming began in 1996, when Steve Baltes joined the line-up and helped to update the band's sounds and live performances. Ashra updated their rhythms with electronic dance beats that brought plenty of new fans for example in Japan where the quartet toured in 1997. Concerts in Germany and the Netherlands re-mobilized thousands of Ashra's older fans.⁶⁶ Ashra released three concert albums between 1998 and 2002 as well as a compilation in 1996.

Götttsching has been active during the last three decades. In 1991, he released a previously unreleased solo album *Dream & Desire*, recorded in 1977. Since the early 2000s, samplers and music software have allowed Götttsching to perform solo concerts with a guitar, portable computer,

and keyboards.⁶⁷ In 2000, Schulze and Götttsching reunited to play in London at the Cornucopia Festival. The duo performed as Ash Ra Tempel and released a live recording, *Gin Rosé* (2000). In addition, they made even more music together and released an album entitled as *Friendship* (2000). Worth noting is also the live DVD *Ashra: Correlations in Concert* from 2013. Götttsching remains very much active today, with several albums released in 2019 and 2021.

Short Conclusion

Ash Ra Tempel has gained its place in the history of rock music as a group of three musicians who did not compromise their vision but challenged many of the rock conventions of their time. Since the break-up of the original line-up, both Manuel Götttsching and Klaus Schulze have proved that the most intense and chaotic years of Krautrock in 1970–1973 were eventually a fertile breeding ground for experimental and ambitious musicians – despite the volatility of the rock music trends, conflicting ideas, and disappointments in the music business.

In the music of Ash Ra Tempel, the influence of electronic music has especially manifested itself as an innovative mind-set and experimentalism. Exploration of new sounds and musical structures started even before actual synthesizers entered the studios and on stage. Götttsching's and Schulze's solo careers have also introduced their earliest musical output to the new generations of fans. Ash Ra Tempel's fame as an acclaimed pioneer of psychedelic and experimental rock has remained among musicians, rock journalists and reviewers.

Essential Listening

Ash Ra Tempel, *Ash Ra Tempel* (Ohr, 1971)

Klaus Schulze, *Irrlicht* (Ohr, 1972)

Manuel Götttsching, *Inventions for Electric Guitar* (Kosmische Musik, 1975)

Ashra, *New Age of Earth* (Isadora, 1976)

Klaus Schulze, *Mirage* (Brain, 1978)

Manuel Götttsching, *E2–E4* (Inteam, 1984)

- ¹ T Gatward, The Story of E2–E4: Manuel Götsching’s accidental masterpiece, in: *Loud and Quiet* 6 (2019) @ www.loudandquiet.com/interview/the-story-of-e2-e4-manuel-gottschilds-accidental-masterpiece.
- ² T Baumgärtel, Ganz simpel, in: *Tageszeitung*, 12 December 2006; D Stubbs, *Future Sounds: Krautrock and the Building of Modern Germany* (London: Faber, 2014), p. 297; C Wheeldon, *Deep Distance: The Musical Life of Manuel Götsching* (King’s Lynn: Waveform, 2015), p. 5.
- ³ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 297, 399; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 5.
- ⁴ J Reetze, *Times & Sounds: Germany’s Journey from Jazz and Pop to Krautrock and Beyond* (Bremen: Halvma, 2020), pp. 250–251.
- ⁵ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, p. 291.
- ⁶ R Barry, Everything was in the moment: An interview with Manuel Götsching, in: *The Quietus* @ thequietus.com/articles/21928-manuel-gottsching-interview-ash-ra-tempel-e2-e4.
- ⁷ Red Bull Music Academy [RBMA], Manuel Götsching talks Ash Ra Tempel and E2–E4 @ www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqVxw7x1urg&list=RDCMUCd4mTFLK9Ct4bgLIKAbhbcw&index=1, 22:20–25:10.
- ⁸ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 7; Barry, Everything was in the moment; Gatward, The Story of E2–E4.
- ⁹ Baumgärtel, Ganz simpel; cf. also Barry, Everything was in the moment.
- ¹⁰ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 299–300.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2014, p. 399; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 8.
- ¹² Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 8–9.
- ¹³ For more on Ohr and Kaiser, cf. Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 267–286.
- ¹⁴ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 9; RBMA 2018, 20:20–22:30 mins.
- ¹⁵ Gatward, The Story of E2–E4.
- ¹⁶ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 12.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ On Dierks, cf. Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 256–258.
- ²⁰ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 373–375.
- ²¹ K Breznikar, Harald Grosskopf interview, in: *It’s Psychedelic Baby Magazine*, 28 December 2013 @ www.psychedelicbabymag.com/2013/12/harald-grosskopf-interview.html/.
- ²² Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, 15; RBMA 2018, 30:00–31:00 mins.
- ²³ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 381–383; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 15.
- ²⁴ Email from Manuel Götsching, 30 November 2021.
- ²⁵ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 384–387. Cf. also Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 276–277.
- ²⁶ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 17–18; RBMA 2018, 37:15–37:35 mins.
- ²⁷ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 17–18.
- ²⁸ J Cope, *Krautrock sampler: One Head’s Guide to the Great Kosmische Music – 1968 Onwards* (Yatesbury: Head Heritage, 1996), pp. 75–76; Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, p. 388, Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 19; J Littlejohn, Krautrock: The development of the movement, in: U Schütte (ed.), *German Pop Music: A Companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 63–84 (73).
- ²⁹ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 21–22.
- ³⁰ Cope, *Krautrock sampler*, pp. 80–82; Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 398–399.
- ³¹ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 24. Müller later collaborated with Claudia Skoda in the Dominas project.
- ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 24–26.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ³⁴ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, p. 394.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 298–299.
- ³⁶ For more, cf. Littlejohn, Krautrock, p. 74.
- ³⁷ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 26–27; Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, p. 275.
- ³⁸ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, p. 389; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 27; Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 275–276.
- ³⁹ For more on these albums, cf. Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 31–34; Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 281–283.
- ⁴⁰ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 390–392; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 27.
- ⁴¹ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, p. 390.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 392–393, 395; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 28.
- ⁴³ RBMA 2018, 22:30–23:00 mins.
- ⁴⁴ For more, cf. Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 36–37.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40; RBMA 2018, 43:00–50:00 mins.
- ⁴⁷ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 45.
- ⁴⁸ Baumgärtel, Ganz simpel.
- ⁴⁹ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 46–49.

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- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 50.
- ⁵¹ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 40, pp. 53–54; Barry, Everything was in the moment.
- ⁵² Baumgärtel, *Ganz simpel*.
- ⁵³ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 61.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 54.
- ⁵⁵ RBMA 2018, 59:30–1:00:00 mins.
- ⁵⁶ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 64.
- ⁵⁷ Barry, Everything was in the moment; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 55.
- ⁵⁸ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, p. 90.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 70–71.
- ⁶⁰ Stubbs, *Future Sounds*, pp. 301–302; Littlejohn, Krautrock, p. 74.
- ⁶¹ Reetze, *Times & Sounds*, pp. 322–323.
- ⁶² Baumgärtel, *Ganz simpel*; Barry, Everything was in the moment; Littlejohn, Krautrock, pp. 73–74.
- ⁶³ Gatward, *The Story of E2–E4*; Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 84–85.
- ⁶⁴ Barry, Everything was in the moment.
- ⁶⁵ RBMA 2018, 1:10:00–1:13:00 mins.
- ⁶⁶ Wheeldon, *Deep Distance*, pp. 116–117.
- ⁶⁷ RBMA 2018, 1:17:30–1:18:00 mins.