

The 1971-73 discography of Ash Ra Tempel remains a delirious head trip

By Daniel Spicer

Ash Ra Tempel

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MG.ART LP

Schwingungen

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Join Inn

MG.ART LP

Timothy Leary & Ash Ra Tempel

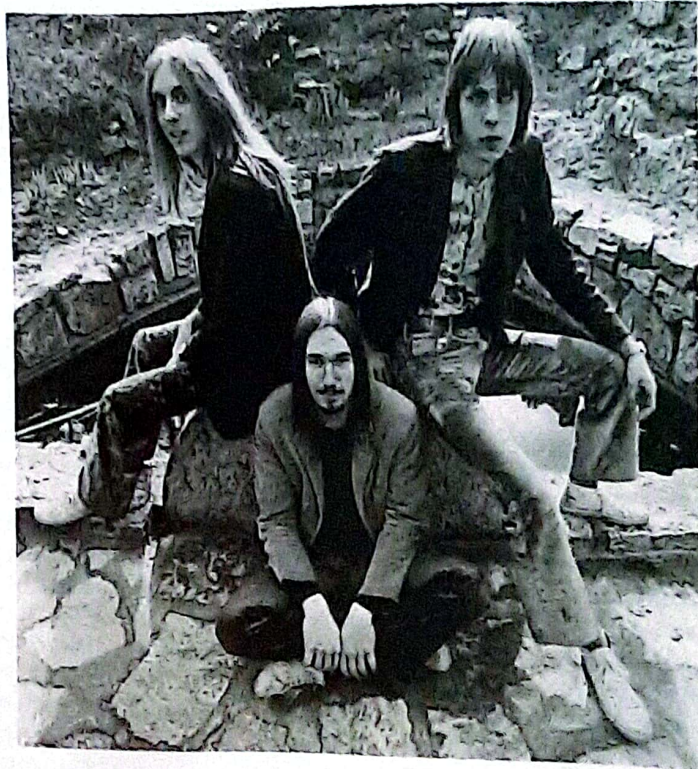
Seven Up

MG.ART LP

Founded in 1970, Ash Ra Tempel grew out of the whoosh of creative activity taking place at West Berlin's experimental music venue, the Zodiak Free Arts Lab. Guitarist Manuel Göttsching, bassist Hartmut Enke and drummer Klaus Schulze had all been involved in Conrad Schnitzler's multi-disciplinary Eruption collective, and Schulze and Schnitzler had played in Tangerine Dream. But, as Ash Ra Tempel, they proposed a partial return to the most primal roar of rock, specialising in ferocious improvised jams transformed into delirious head trips via electronic augmentation.

The 1971 debut consists of two sidelong tracks. "Amboss" is a relentless free rock freakout with only vestigial traces of the blues intact in Göttsching's licks, and Schulze pounding out crazed tattoos that completely avoid the tyranny of the backbeat. On the flip, "Traummaschine" is, as the notes suggest, "an electronic Nirvana which no longer allows the concrete identification of actual instruments". It's a heavenly haze with delicate guitar motifs drifting in and out of the miasma, devoid of percussion save for a few echo-heavy bongo beats.

By the time they recorded 1972's *Schwingungen* Schulze had departed, replaced by Wolfgang Müller, whose drumming provides a slightly more conventional feel on opening track "Light: Look At Your Sun" - a gorgeously mellow daydream with weeping guitar modelled on Peter Green's "Albatross". As the piece builds in intensity, the phrase "We are all one" is repeated with monomaniacal desperation by John Laka Manfred Brück - a singer and dancer known for performing naked with a brightly painted penis. "Darkness: Flowers Must Die" begins as another ambient soundscape before thrashing drums and raw sax bleats suggest *Fun House*-era Stooges tripping way too hard to keep anything resembling a song together. The high point is the title track, which begins with Müller's vibraphone echoing in space, pierced by thin beams of organ, a slow and spacious



Ash Ra Tempel, 1971

abstraction that crests with Göttsching strumming an epic chord sequence that he believed to be the sound of heaven - the sonic code for unlocking the treasures of the universe.

1973's *Seven Up*, a collaboration with Timothy Leary, was recorded in Switzerland in 1972 while the notorious acid guru was on the run having just escaped from prison in California. Leary drags the band back to a more straightforward blues-boogie sound as he yelps out lyrics based on his and writer Brian Barritt's work mapping neurological states. These only partially successful jams are inserted into collages of ethereal synth throb and abstract choogle, peaking with a reprise of Göttsching's sound of heaven sequence.

Klaus Schulze returned to drum on 1973's *Join Inn*, driving the A side's aptly named "Freak 'N' Roll". Göttsching flings out some of his most searing shredding as the group display an intuitive telepathy, spurring forth into a breakneck thrash or a pouting stomp at the flick of a switch. On the B side, "Jenseits" is a billowing cloud of cosmic gas with fleeting filaments of melody arising out of thick organ drones and vocalist Rosi Müller delivering a wide eyed spoken narration describing in German the mythical meeting with Leary. It was the last hurrah for Ash Ra Tempel - released the same year, the group's final album *Starring Rosi* featured just Göttsching and Müller in a more conventional setting playing shorter, song based pieces. You can only stay so high for so long. ●