



Zühn Wöhl Ünsai: Live 1974

Magma

Made in Germany Music - MIG01102

Available from MVD Entertainment Group.

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
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In case you weren't able to puzzle out this CD twofer's cryptic title, don't feel too badly, as it's in Kobaian, a fictitious tongue created by Magma's founder, the classically trained drummer Christian Vander, long considered one of progrock's most magnificent madmen. Kobaian was and is a language created to fit certain sonic, rather than linguistic, needs and thus only just so translatable. Vander formed his ensemble pursuant to a grave ecological vision he held of Earth's future, thus one might well roughly equate him with Buckminster Fuller, Rachel Carson, Paolo Soleri, and other eco-spiritual visionaries.

From his arcane pseudo-language was taken, by progcrits, a new category of progressive rock, the so-called 'zeuhl', but, sad to say, prog 'journalists' aren't terribly bright, are in fact the responsible party overall for the style never achieving to the commercial heights it has always richly deserved. That and many other sins being the case, really, when all is said and done, despite all claims re: Weidorje and other seemingly kindred ensembles, only Magma is 'zeuhl'.

Most of the reason for that individuation of distinction is Vander's completely unique standing in his venue. The man has blended rock, jazz, classical, neoclassical, operatic, serial minimal, and other forms to achieve a synthesis deriving from and residing within only his brain and personality. That is, Magma is Christian Vander, and Christian Vander is Magma. There will never be another, come prog, neoprog, zeuhl, hell, or high water. The man's impossible to duplicate, and attempts to transfer his force majeure opuses and highly idiosyncratic exoticisms into different flesh, as proccrits have attempted, are fallacious.

Vander/Magma, however, most definitely co-populates a sparse pantheon of very unique ensembles transcending past and present genre parameters: Gentle Giant, King Crimson, the Moody Blues, Univers Zero, Art Zoyd, Thinking Plague, and so on. I'd definitely include Bergeron ([here](#)) in that grouping, but, as the entire prog community has had its panties in a wad for three decades over my work, I'll let the comparative lie, at least for the moment, and save those poor bastards heart strain and unnecessary trips to the laundromat.

Needless to say, partisans of Magma, myself included, are fanatical, and this release of a 1974 Radio Bremen broadcast by the increasingly interesting MIG label (which, huzzah!, has been re-releasing Chris Farlowe, Birth Control, and other rockers lost on American shores) is a godsend, once more emphasizing the band's mindbending prowess in its usual blow-the-doors-off fashion, unstoppably cyclonic, incredibly complex, and irresistibly energetic. Be warned, though, that listening to a Magma disc is like running a marathon, and the band was never interested in leveling the playing field. Instead, from the very beginning, it upended the goalposts and set the mark so stratospherically high that newcomers and even long-established acts can only look on in wonder.

The menacing intro dramaturgy to the second disc illustrates why the recently deceased H.R. Giger was contributing artwork to the band while working on the *Alien* film. Vander's growly demonism is followed by a very long drum solo such as would induce rapture into even Ginger Baker and Stomu Yamash'ta. It occurs well into the repertoire, and not content with enrapturing and exhausting the audience up to that moment, Christian then launches into the 25:49 *Theusz Hamtaahk*, a combination of prime Soft Machine (third thru sixth LPs), Canterbury, ersatz Gregorian chant, future opera, and God only knows what else.

All that as a given, I think you can, see that *Zühn Wöhl* is not just another Magma landmark for the coterie of staunch devotees but an absolute indispensability for all non-parochial music lovers of any stripe. Miss it and you risk fading into normalcy, God help you.

Track List:

Disc One

- Sowiloï (soï soï) (12:24)
- Mëkanik Dëstruktiv Kömmandöh (35:12)
 - Hertz Fur Dëhn Stëckëhn West (8:46)
 - İmah Süri Dondaï (4:42)
 - Kobaïa İss Deh Hünd'in (2:23)
 - Da Zeuhl Wortz Mëkanik (7:41)
 - Nëbëhr Gudahtt (7:40)
 - Mëkanik Kömmandöh (4:01)

Disc Two

- Korusz II (20:29)
- Theusz Hamtaahk (25:49)

All songs written Christian Vander.

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