

High Bias

Listening with extreme prejudice

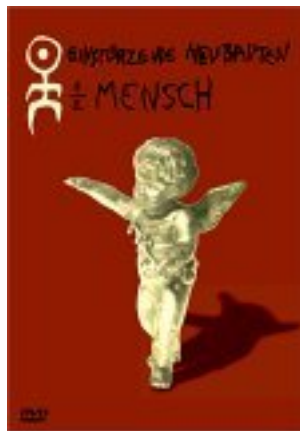
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Audio-Visuals

EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN: ½ MENSCH

Directed by Sogo Ishii
([Some Bizarre/Cherry Red](#))

Despite the band's two-and-a-half decade history, I never heard Einstürzende Neubauten until last year's **Perpetuum Mobile** album. While I thought it a great record, I also knew it was atypical: melodic, fairly sedate, closer to avant garde mood music than the hell-bent cacophony I'd read about. Which I was why I was excited to receive **Einstürzende Neubauten: ½ Mensch**, a collection of promo clips corresponding to each song on the band's 1985 classic **Halber [½] Mensch**.



Basically what you get is this. Inside an abandoned ironworks, surrounded by fires, Mark Chung sets off a throbbing, repetitive bassline. N. U Unruh, Alexander Hacke and the muscle-bound FM Einheit bash and clang on the German group's wide-ranging collection of scrap heap instrumentation, including a chainsaw, pipes of various sizes and densities, a hanging piece of sheet metal to which a sandscraper is applied, a shopping cart with contact mics and a Fender amp attached, an ominous contraption that looks like an outboard motor with a schlong and behaves like a jackhammer, a hanging metal block to which a sledgehammer is violently applied and anything else that's nailed down and can't get away. Hacke and frontperson Blixa Bargeld (at the time also a member of Nick Cave's Bad Seeds) sometimes scrape and slash at cheap Fender guitars, and Hacke also manipulates a mixing board. The impossibly thin, rooster-haired, bug-eyed, leather-clad Bargeld wields a microphone, into which he emits a steady stream of vocal noises ranging from guttural mutters to cat-in-the-woodchipper shrieks. Chung's bass and the dynamics with which the band handles its junk percussion keeps the relationship to music

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intact, if strained. Pieces like "Zerstore Zelle," "Sehnsucht" and "Abfackeln!" really are actual songs, despite evidence to the contrary. This is real industrial music, made with found objects and non-musical instruments, with a lot of passion and nary a dance beat in sight.

There are a couple of conceptual clips as well, for the songs "Halber Mensch" and "Z.N.S." The Japanese director invests these with the same kind of tortured cultural imagination that gives rise to cinematic nightmares like **Tetsuo: The Iron Man**, so be prepared for deeply unsettling pretension. Some footage of Neubauten performing for apparently rabid Japanese fans and an all-too-brief look at the members preparing their mutant machinery round out the disk. It's unclear to me whether the performances are real or lip-synched, but I'm assuming the former. Why would you mime smashing a block of metal with a sledgehammer when it's so much more convincing (not to mention fun) to do it for real? **Einstürzende Neubauten: ½ Mensch** is a perfect way to introduce yourself to an avant garde musical institution without risking flying shrapnel. *Michael Toland* [[buy it](#)]

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