



Artist: Einstuerzende Neubauten
Title: Palast der Republik
Label: MVD Audio

Rating: 8.5 out of 10

There are few bands with a more dedicated and fanatic following than Einstuerzende Neubauten, the godfathers of everything industrial. The band, led by charismatic mastermind Blixa Bargeld (who has also played guitar in the less avant-garde band The Bad Seeds), has evolved into a five-piece since their inception, in 1980, and along the way cultivated a diverse audience for its experimental electro-noise.

Dating back to the band's early days, when blowing up refrigerators and setting fire to the stage, Einstuerzende Neubauten's concerts have always been something out of the ordinary, even more so than their albums. Over the years the Berlin-based outfit made a name for itself with an array of custom made instruments, equipment often assembled from local junkyard scrap the day before a show. Operating with such an unusual and creative method for a quarter century will garner almost any band a legion of fans, and in the fall of 2004 Einstuerzende Neubauten culminated a mini-tour with a fans-only performance at the Palast der Republik in Berlin. Leading up to the event the band culled a choir from users of its website, giving some of the songs more depth and making the concert a truly interactive experience. The event was recorded and released both as a DVD concert film and as Palast der Republik, a live CD from what was clearly a remarkable show; Palast der Republik, the former DDR Parliament building, was nothing but a steel skeleton of ruins when Bargeld found it, making it the perfect setting for a Neubauten concert.

The Palast der Republik set opens with one of Neubauten's best songs, "Haus der Luege," a track that, like the rest of the album, benefits from amazing sound quality. The group's industrial noises are very crisp, and Bargeld's voice rings clear and true, piercing like a hot needle. Later on the band cuts through versions of "Armenia," "Perpetuum Mobile," and "Sabrina" as well, covering enough ground to qualify Palast der Republik as a good starting point for those not already familiar with Einstuerzende Neubauten's body of work.

Although this release's sound quality makes it audible, one of the most striking highlights from Neubauten's performance in Berlin is only partially captured; not only did the band play their handcrafted instruments (which tend to look like unsuccessful high school science projects), but they played the Palast itself as well, rapping on its steel skeleton and bouncing sounds off its walls.

After two and a half decades at the forefront of experimental, industrial, and electronic music, Einstuerzende Neubauten continue to find new ways of expressing themselves and their art.

Although Einstuerzende Neubauten continues to soldier on (over the past two years they have released a series of 14 downloadable tracks inspired by Bargeld's dreams), the Palast der Republik building is no more; it was torn down shortly after the band's performance. If nowhere else, the crumbling parliament building will live on in the archives of a band appropriately named "Collapsing New Buildings." It's all very poetic and beautiful.

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