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Einstürzende Neubauten

Palast Der Republik [DVD]

(MVD)

US release date: 13 March 2007

UK release date: 4 December 2006

by **Tim O'Neil**

PopMatters Associate Music Editor

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The Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR) ceased to exist in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany. The Palast der Republik was home to East Germany's parliament, and a vivid symbol of the regime, finally and fittingly demolished in 2005 to make way for a new City Palace. However before the building was destroyed, it bore witness to one additional spectacle in its long and colorful history: a performance by German industrial godfathers Einstürzende Neubauten.

Einstürzende Neubauten have always been preoccupied with architecture—an admittedly recondite subject for most popular music, but integral to the group's conceptual backbone. Anyone who knows the group knows that the form and function of their music is indistinguishable from the conceptual framework it occupies. Using the discarded detritus of industrial waste and refuse—scrap metal and PVC piping, plastic jugs and tin cans—they create a riotous clatter offset not only by the surpassing subtlety of their songwriting skill but by the bilingual lyrical acumen of singer Blixa Bargeld. It is one of the great ironies of modern pop that a group that set out to play punk contributed so much to the creation of industrial music, before evolving beyond even the wide definition of industrial and into one of the most distinctively subtle entities in contemporary music.

Palast Der Republik presents the group in fine form, playing for an enthusiastic hometown crowd in a historically unique venue. Live, Einstürzende Neubauten do not present much in the way of spectacle: no fancy light shows, no video installations, no makeup or flames. What the band may lack in flash, however, they more than make up for in substance. The creation of their music is oftentimes as visually stimulating as it is adventurous, and the well-lit and clear-eyed presentation on this DVD gives the audience a perfect vantage with which to see every percussive stroke of genius: from the drum set composed of serrated sheet metal to the air compressors that blow through the spinning garbage pile (which resembles, as Bargeld points out during the audio commentary, the wedding cake on the cover of the Rolling Stones' *Let It Bleed*), the DVD offers the viewer a unique birds-eye view of the post-industrial clatter.



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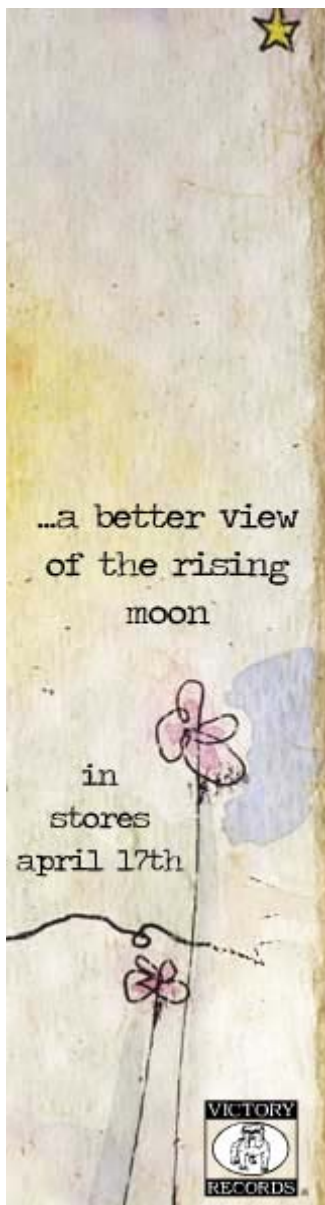
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The set draws heavily from their recent material, specifically their 2004 album *Perpetuum Mobile* as well as 2000's *Silence is Sexy*. "Youme & Meyou" and "Dead Friends (Around the Corner)", two understated highlights from *Perpetuum Mobile*, appear early in the performance (the latter invariably bringing to mind the work of fellow traveler Nick Cave, for whom Bargeld served a long tenure as lead guitarist in the Bad Seeds). The romantic ballad "Sabrina", off *Silence*, appears near the end of the program. In the commentary, Bargeld notes that he was especially grateful for the audience's decorum on this date, as a rowdy audience can disrupt the extended quietude which "Sabrina" demands—thankfully, the house remains respectfully quiet, rapt throughout the performance.

The group intersperses these quieter moments with what might be described as their more traditionally noisy tracks. The set opens with "Haus Der Luege", one of the oldest continually performed numbers in the Einstürzende Neubauten catalog, a track which also most closely hews to their industrial reputation. "Was Ist Ist", off 1998's *Ende Neu*, is performed with the aid of a 100 member choir assembled from members of their fan club. There are also a few passages of pure improvisation, offering an intimate look at the group's creative process in action (as is explained during the commentary, most of their songs are composed of elements created during improvisatory studio sessions). One of these such passages, an attempt to play the metal railings of the Palast itself with drumsticks, fails miserably—as the band explains, they had miscalculated just how the building would sound, and it sounds fairly boring. But it's fun to watch, in any event.

Two concert staples—"Die Befindlichkeit des Landes" and the climactic "Redukt"—are notably absent from the performance, although both are present in the form of separately recorded encore footage. Considering that the concert itself only clocks in at 80 minutes, the absence is odd—perhaps the permits necessary to perform in the Palast building necessitated a brief performance? (The commentary doesn't indicate one way or another.) As far as bonus material goes, the extra tracks and commentary (presented, annoyingly, in both English and German, as the band lapses in and out of their native tongue over the course of the film) are good but hardly exceptional. Thankfully, the show itself is good enough that you hardly miss the bells and whistles.

I was lucky enough to be able to see Einstürzende Neubauten on the first leg of their 2004 tour, on what Bargeld said might well be their last-ever American dates (not that the band is breaking up, just that they hate the consolidation of American venues under corporate sponsorship). Other than the fact that the DVD performance is a bit shorter than when I saw them, the show is as revelatory as expected. Although they may differ considerably from your average hard rock ensemble, they are nevertheless one of the most compelling bands in

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existence, and well worth the effort to see live. Given that they don't plan on returning to the States any time soon, US-based fans are well-advised to seek out this disc as a snapshot of one of the best bands on the planet at the height of their powers.



Einstürzende Neubauten - Haus der Lüge

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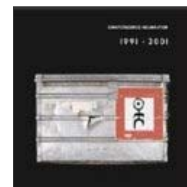
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