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Kraftwerk and the Electronic Revolution

Of the things that the Düsseldorf fab four of Kraftwerk are known for, their notoriously lengthy tracks certainly ranks high on the list; the 20-minute opus "Autobahn" being the jewel in their German crown of electronic pop classics. So it comes as no surprise that the latest film about the groundbreaking electronic act is three hours long. Aptly named Kraftwerk and the Electronic Revolution, the documentary not only covers the namesake band - starting with their conception as hippies with long hair and flutes in the late 1960s, under the name Organization - it also covers the ensuing development of the Krautrock genre as a whole, from Amon Duul to Neu.

The film's coverage of the broad spectrum of German art-rock, within which Kraftwerk came to be not just a vital component but a monolithic patriarchal figure, is very in-depth and extremely interesting for anyone with the least bit of curiosity as to how modern music came to be as it is today. While it is now common knowledge that Kraftwerk shoulder much of the responsibility for what is now broadly referred to as 'electronica', few know much about the theorization and evolution of the scene that led to icy precision sounds so ubiquitous in today's popular music. This web of influence, from Kraftwerk's inception four decades ago through subsequent periods of popular resurgence, is all mapped out in the film.

From the beginning Kraftwerk continually pushed the boundaries of what music was and could be, and through the three hours of Kraftwerk and the Electronic Revolution we're guided through the history of innovative music by icons like former Kraftwerkian Karl Bartos, Klaus Schulze of contemporaries Tangerine Dream, and Dieter Moebius. The words of these pioneers of synthetic music lend an undeniable level of credibility to the documentary, and even though the film itself was not authorized by Kraftwerk (and is devoid of any interviews with founding members Florian Schneider and Ralf Hütter), it is still one of the most detailed and comprehensive films on the band and the electronic seeds of the Krautrock scene in existence.

With rarely seen footage from the early days of Schneider and Hütter (with their sprightly flutes), and anecdotes from an aging Bartos (who incidentally might be the nicest and most humble man in music history), there is never a dull moment during the documentary's 180 minutes. Sure, there are some technical drawbacks - the lighting during the interviews is not the best - but who cares about petty details like that when the content is so extraordinary?

Taken alongside similar considerations of the pioneering act, Kraftwerk and the Electronic Revolution is a great summary and informative history of one of popular music's most interesting bands. Don't let the lengthy run time scare you off; see it as a treat. When it is over you will not regret having watched this documentary, and then you'll still have the bonus materials ("The Düsseldorf Scene vs. The Hamburg Scene," extended interviews, extensive biographies) to look forward to.

VIDEO: "Autobahn"

VIDEO: "The Robots"