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CD Review: Grobschnitt - 2008 Live 2010

Few rock fans in North America have ever heard of **Grobschnitt**. Even among that group's subset of progressive rock fans, this German band isn't very well known. For myself, I stumbled across them [wholly by accident](#); it's safe to assume I would have never heard a note of their music otherwise. And that would have been a shame, because what this band offered up during its heyday was some decidedly original music.

Combining elements of the sounds one might hear on a [Genesis](#) or [Gentle Giant](#) record, Grobschnitt ran those influences through a Teutonic filter; as many rock historian/journalist types are fond of saying, the German corollaries to other Western rock were often simpler, more direct, more, er *martial* in their beat. (See [The Rattles](#) or the “adopted German” [Monks](#) for evidence of this). Still, a vaguely pastoral (by way of the Black Forest, one imagines) aesthetic permeates Grobschnitt's work.



The band operated through the 1970s and 80s; the end of their time together represented the low point for progressive sounds, so that was as good a time as any to throw in the towel. But during the height of their popularity, they were known as a sort of German answer to the **Grateful Dead** or **Bruce Springsteen**. No, they sounded not a bit like either of those acts, but they did play long concerts. Really long concerts. Really, *really* long ones. In fact a centerpiece of many of those shows was the album-length “Solar Music” (aka “Sonnentanz”). Putting such epic-length works as Genesis’ “Supper’s Ready,” **Pink Floyd**’s “Echoes” and **Utopia**’s “The Ikon” to shame, “Solar Music” ran in excess of forty minutes.

To be fair, it's a bit ponderous. I mean, at that length, how could it not be? The song weaves through psychedelic, prog, folk, rock and other styles, and although the tune is among hardcore fans' most-loved numbers, they could do better.

In fact they did. The sole Grobschnitt album to be issued outside Germany (*West* Germany, if we wish – and indeed we *do* wish – to be historically accurate), *Rockpommel's Land* came a bit late in the 70s prog-rock timeline (1977), but it represents the band at its best. Lyrics sung in pidgin English (by a chap calling himself **Willy Wildschwein**, no less) and some highly interesting musical twists and turns make that record a delight from start to finish. Fascinating work on all instruments abounds, but the keyboard and percussion work are especially tasty. Anyone who appreciates 70s Euro-prog should give *Rockpommel's Land* a listen.

Owing to their legendary status in their homeland – and, perhaps casting an **Eagles**-like eye toward their retirement packages – Grobschnitt re-formed in the 21st century. The group always had something of a revolving cast, not unlike fellow European pranksters **Gong**, and the 21st century lineups drew upon some of the original members' kids. A pair of concert recordings from recent tours has been collected on a new 2cd set called (somewhat clumsily) *2008 — Live — 2010*. For anyone interested in either of the epic-length works mentioned above, this set is an ideal place to start.

2008 – Live – 2010 is worthwhile not only because one can actually *find* this set, but because the music is excellent. Firing on all cylinders, and with the added exuberance and precision that comes from adding younger players to the mix, these two CDs present “Solar Music” in its entirety, and all of the *Rockpommel's Land* album-length suite. Moreover, on the second disc, the original *Rockpommel's Land* songs are bookended with additional material that previews, reinforces and restates the musical themes found in the original work. The extra tracks are every bit the equal of the classic ones.

The first disc adds in five more songs(!) alongside “Solar Music.” Oddly, the whole thing opens with a tune called

“Powerplay Finale,” but the song itself is a high-energy number that might call to mind **Boston** or other more mainstream 70s artists.

Clearly, for Americans it requires an adventurous spirit, a small leap of faith and a bit of cash to dive into the catalog of a little-known German prog band. But *2008 – Live – 2010* is a good place to start.

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