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SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN ONLINE

January 3, 2007

The sounds of Berlin and Beyond

Monks and Einsturzende Neubauten docs prick up Germanophile ears at this year's film fest.

Monks: The Transatlantic Feedback (Lucía Palacios and Dietmar Post, Germany/US/Spain, 2006). How to describe the Monks? Try atonal and angry and hard to dance to despite a tom-tom and an electric banjo keeping time. Plus, they tended to shout their lyrics, the more comprehensible of which were along these lines: "Hey, well, I hate you with a passion baby, yeah I do! (*But call me!*)" And that's without even mentioning that the five-piece was composed of American ex-GIs who lingered in Germany after their early 1960s service was up. Or that they dressed in all black, with nooses for ties, and sported matching, entirely unflattering tonsure haircuts. The band name and costumes may have been artfully styled gimmicks (thanks to a pair of crafty German managers well familiar with deconstruction, minimalism, and the art of advertising), but the music was no novelty act. Some say the highly influential Monks invented feedback (widely disputed, of course); others insist their experimental, anti-Beatles sound foretold the coming of both techno and heavy metal even as it left boogie-happy fans of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" stone-faced.

Whatever you make of songs like "Higgle-dy Piggle-dy" (lyrics: "Higgle-dy piggle-dy, way down to heaven, yeah!"), there's no denying the ballad of the Monks comes fully stuffed with rock 'n' roll lore. Dietmar Post and Lucia Palacios's lively doc *Monks: The Transatlantic Feedback* tracks down all the band members, now in advanced middle age and living quiet lives that barely hint at their prepunk pasts (drummer Roger Johnston passed away after filming his interviews). All five are given equal time to reflect as well as share impressive caches of memorabilia (especially photos with detailed captions) that suggest someone, at least, was aware that the Monks' lightning-in-a-bottle moment would later be eagerly revisited by future devotees of incredibly strange music. A reunion concert — marking the group's first-ever stateside show — nudges the film in a *Bands Reunited*

press clippings / monks – the transatlantic feedback



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direction, but for the most part *Monks* is propelled by the triumphs of the group's past, which include 30-year-old tunes that still sound wholly creative (and ever so off-putting) even today. **(Cheryl Eddy)**

Jan. 17, 3 p.m. Castro Theatre, 429 Castro, SF. \$6–\$9. (415) 621-6120, www.castrotheatre.com

Einstürzende Neubauten (Danielle de Picciotto, Germany, 2006). Perhaps appropriately, April Fool's Day 1980 marked the first appearance of Einstürzende Neubauten, at the Moon Club in Berlin. After taking the stage frontperson Christian Emmerich (better known as Blixa Bargeld) and percussionist Andrew Chudy (N.U. Unruh), plus others, proceeded to bemuse their audience with a Dadaesque display of hammers banging on metal sheets mixed with accompanying electronic sound effects. For reasons perhaps even they can't explain, their aggressive approach to experimental music gained an immediate following — one that has held firmer than architecture for more than 25 years. Though they announced during a 2004 tour of the United States that they would never again play live here (due to the expense of transporting their enormous, self-engineered instruments), you still have the opportunity to see them in this one-of-a-kind concert film, also from that year.

Performing in the stripped shell of emblematic East Germany eyesore (and former seat of Parliament) the Palast der Republik, Bargeld and company jump immediately into the past with "Haus der Lüge" (House of lies) from 1989 and even further back with the chilling "Armenia" from 1983. The insectile droning of Alex Hacke's bass, Jochen Arbeit's guitar, and Ash Wednesday's programmed samples give way to Bargeld's blood-curdling yowling, which rivals that of Armenian-blooded shriek chanteuse Diamanda Galás. Newer converts to the Neubauten mystique are not left adrift in a sea of nostalgia for long, though. The reason for playing at an abandoned building slated for demolition is revealed midway through the show as the Palast becomes a site-specific instrument and a chorus of 100 volunteers adds to the general clamor. Pushing the boundaries of their musicianship with seemingly infinite inventiveness, Einstürzende Neubauten signal that while their touring days may be behind them, their creative juices are in no danger of drying up. **(Nicole Gluckstern)**

Jan. 16, 11 p.m. Castro Theatre, 429 Castro, SF. \$6–\$9. (415) 621-6120, www.castrotheatre.com