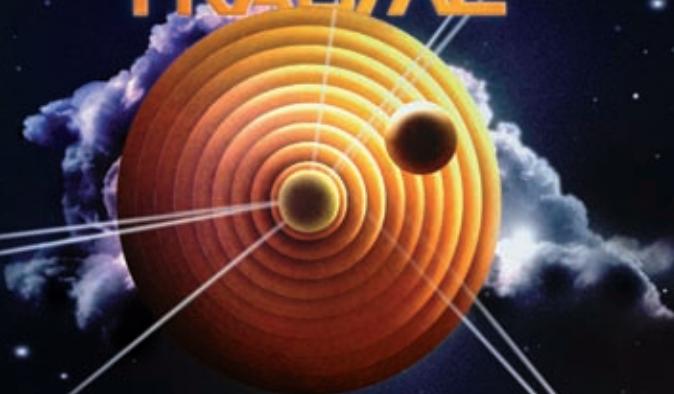




ELECTRONIC ESCAPES  
FROM THE DEUTSCHE DEMOKRATISCHE REPUBLIK 1981 - 1989

# MANDARINEN TRÄUME



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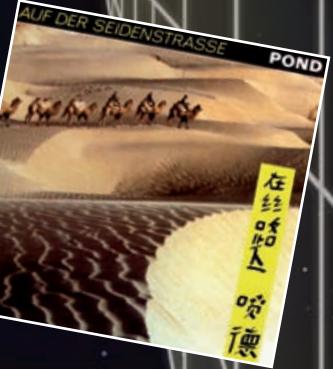
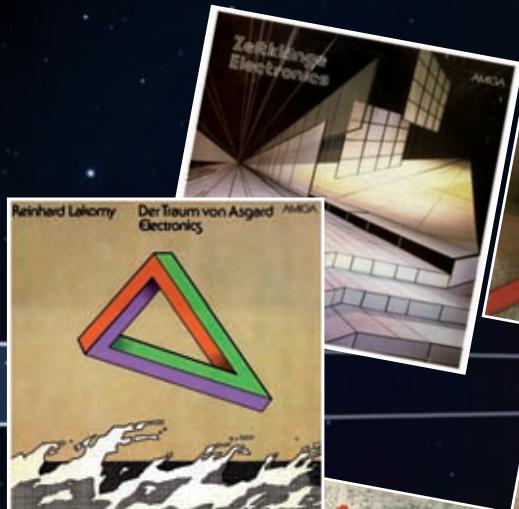


Reinhard Lekomy

Der Raum von Asgard  
Electronics



AEX





## COSMIC FLIGHT

Their country wasn't particularly big – in fact at times it felt downright claustrophobic to them, hemmed in by an impenetrable border. How vast and wide open outer space seemed by comparison, expanding above their heads to infinity. No wonder then that one day some of them began to flee their cramped country into the cosmos. Not literally, of course. Instead of Energia rockets and Soyuz space capsules, their means of space travel were synthesizers, drum machines, and samplers. Out of those devices artists in the German Democratic Republic – post-war socialist East Germany – created dreamy, spacious electronic music that let musician and listener flee from the everyday realities of East Bloc life. Off into a swirling, nebulous fantasy landscape. Into strange, faraway galaxies. And sometimes straight into a pumping discotheque in a space station orbiting the earth.

Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze, Jean Michel Jarre, Ash Ra Temple, Manuel Göttsching, and Vangelis were their conspirators in flight, along with Genesis, Pink Floyd and Emerson Lake and Palmer. The West Berlin band Tangerine Dream played a seminal concert on January 31, 1980, in East Berlin's Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) – the first pop band from the West to play there. Many of the

artists who would make up the Eastern electronic scene were in attendance, fascinated and inspired. By the time they were finally able to bring out their own albums in East Germany between 1981 and 1989, this style of music had already been successful in the West for almost a decade. The lag time was a result of how heavily the socialist state regulated pop music. There were licenses necessary to play live, and only state-sanctioned artists were allowed to put out albums on the one state owned record company, the Volkseigener Betrieb Deutsche Schallplatten Berlin DDR and its label, Amiga. The raw materials for manufacturing records were scarce, limiting the number of LPs being brought out.

But at some point in the early 1980s, the East German government leadership decided microcomputers were the future and gave the green light to the then futuristic sounding music made with them. Still, Eastern electronic musicians had the problem of getting hold of synthesizers and drum machines from Japan or the US and smuggling them into the GDR. None of them wanted to work with the few available home-produced music machines – they were considered too unreliable. In the beginning the musicians could only hear the bands that inspired them surreptitiously, listening illegally to Western radio. Cassette tapes of the West Berlin radio show "Steckdose" (Plug), which billed its focus as "com-



puter music/music computer," were passed around among members of the Eastern scene. Only from 1986 on could they could listen legally via the East German youth radio station DT64 and its radio show "Electronics." DT64 also organized several festivals for electronic music in the late 1980s.

From the inception in the 1980s on, East German musicians began to produce their own versions of Western electronic music from the 1970s. The amazing thing: In a land where engineers and cosmonauts were held up as heroes, nobody, it turned out, was allowed to release machine-like electronic music on the state-owned label. No influence of Kraftwerk, for instance, or industrial music can be found on the albums of the time. Instead, it was all about expansive jams that were so psychedelic it's hard to imagine they were not fueled by drugs (though everyone involved claims they really weren't). There were endless synth epics describing trips to distant galaxies. There were Balearic ambient sounds that made you daydream about the nude beaches along the Baltic sea. There were disco tracks with guitar solos as heartbreakingly emotional as they were cheesy. There were Italo-disco odysseys from artists who had never been anywhere near Lake Garda. It was a series of daring ideas, virtuosic rip-offs, serendipitous screw-ups, and beautiful misunderstandings. I was first intrigued by East German electronic

music when I ran across an old album being used as a prop in a display at a well-known Swedish furniture chain. On the back of the sleeve was a photo of two men in identical overalls; on the front was a cyclone swirling above a computer-grid-like horizon. Across the top, written in digital alarm clock letters, was written Pond – Planetenwind. It was, the liner notes said, electronic music from the GDR! Having grown up in West Germany, I didn't know such a thing existed. My first thought was to steal the record. Instead I asked one of the employees at the furniture warehouse if I could have it. It had spent many years molding in the attic of one of his colleagues, and was now nothing more than decoration. Which was a real shame, as I would discover as soon as I listened to it at home. But where that had come from, there must be others. I began scouring flea markets in Eastern Germany, slowly assembling a collection. I sought out the original musicians, getting them to tell me their stories and to play me their vintage music. For all of them, the end of the GDR in 1989–1990 marked a stark break in their personal histories. What is preserved are twelve LPs of electronic music issued between 1981 and 1989. A forgotten branch on the evolutionary tree of electronic music, but one on which some delightful obscurities blossomed.

Florian Sievers



Reinhard Lakomy, born in Magdeburg 1946, was famous in the GDR for his albums of children's music, jazz, and rock. Inspired by Tangerine Dream, in 1981 he became the first East German artist to release an electronic album: *Das geheime Leben* (The Secret Life). According to the liner notes, the music – made with "electronic instruments, band mellotron, piano" – speaks about "cosmic longing." And that description is spot on. The epic opening track "**Es wächst das Gras nicht über alles**" ("Grass Cannot Grow Over Everything") is taken from this album. The song title is an idiom equivalent to "time doesn't heal all wounds." Were there political undertones to this? "Not at all," says Lakomy, "it's just an eternal truth." "**Das unendliche Rätsel**" (The Endless Riddle) is another track from *Das*

*geheime Leben*, featuring dark, brooding cloudbursts of synth built atop a complex structure. This is like Klaus Schulze with evil premonitions. "**Der Traum von Asgard**" (Asgard's Dream) is the title track of Lakomy's 1983 second electronic album: a melancholic urban elegy, complete with bursts of industrial noise. Could Detroit be in East Germany? Asgard is the glistening paradise of excess that upon closer examination turns out to be rotten at the core – obviously a commentary on the capitalist West and the way many Easterners looked enviously at it. In 1985 Lakomy released *Zeiten* (Times) in co-operation with Rainer Oleak. 1991 he ended his foray into electronic music with the album *Aer*. Today Lakomy produces records for children together with his wife.





# REINHARD LAKOMY





POND





Pond was led by Wolfgang "Paule" Fuchs. He was born 1948 in the Prenzlauer Berg borough of Berlin, and was to become the commercially most successful electronic musician of the GDR. Fuchs founded Pond in 1978 as a prog rock band; from 1981 on he and his partner Harald Wittkowski – both inspired by Klaus Schulze and Tangerine Dream – concentrated on instrumental electronic music. Fuchs and Wittkowski wore matching overalls in concert and presented themselves as music engineers from another planet. "**Planetenwind**" (Planetary Winds) is the title track of Pond's 1984 debut album. It was the biggest electronic music hit in East Ger-

many, selling over 100,000 copies, topping the charts, and being used constantly on TV. A shuffling beatbox, a catchy spacey melody, and a grandiose fanfare in the bridge – this is great pop music. While the LP version of the track is 18 minutes 30 seconds long, this is the more concise radio edit. The same LP features "**Cassiopeia**," a soundtrack to an imaginary rave in a communist youth camp with an almost whipping snare, chugging bass layers, and a bubbling synth melody that together make for a track which still kills on the dance floor today. In 1986 Pond released *Auf der Seidenstraße* (On the Silk Road), the sound-

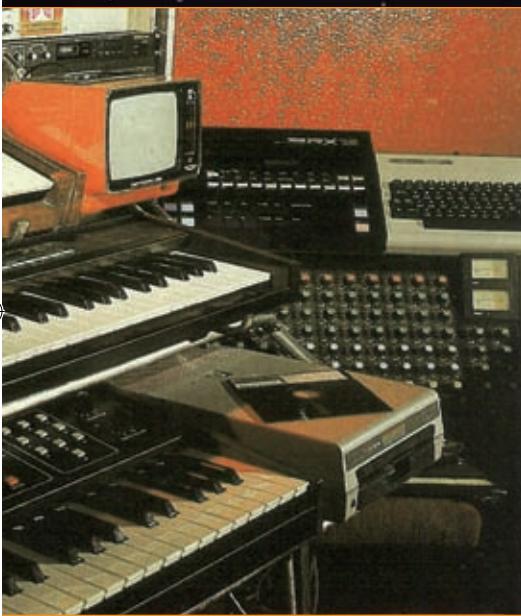
track to a TV documentary. From this LP comes "**Galaxis**" (Galaxy), in which a space ship blasts off toward the final frontier, where no cosmonaut has gone before. Bombastic, pompous, opulent. And all with that uniquely brittle synth sound. Galactic disco from the plastic fantastic East. In 1990 Pond released their last album on the Deutsche Schallplatten label, *Maschinenn Mensch* (Machine Man). After the fall of the wall, Fuchs produced Eurodance and commercial techno music for a while. Today he has returned to more abstract electronic music and has just released the soundtrack to an exhibition of the famous GDR painter Willi Sitte.



Julius Krebs was born in Stalinstadt, today Eisenhüttenstadt, in 1954. The trained engineer was a big fan of Emerson, Lake and Palmer and Genesis and started his solo project JSE ('Julius Krebs – Sinfonische Elektronik') in 1981. But "**SE**" from 1985's compilation *Kleebatt No. 14 – Electronic-Pop* is not symphonic electronics, as the abbreviated title suggests, but rather bass synths and an orgiastic guitar solo – think "Miami Vice" on Rostock's beach, with the glowing lights of the harbor in the background. "**Intro.**" from the same compi-

lation, showcases pumping disco funk, and in the breaks sirens sing from the cliffs of the Oder river. Moving. According to Krebs, he was the first East German artist to play live on stage with a C64 and a 303. After the wall came down, he ran his own studio until 2001 and worked as a product tester for a synthesizer company. Today he writes books about synths, translates manuals, still runs a small home studio and recently recorded a compilation in Cuba. And, not to be over-looked, he also produces music for a trashy 1980s disco pop project.





JULIUS KREBS





## JULIUS KREBS







Hans-Hasso Stamer was born in a small village in Brandenburg's brown coal mining area in 1950. He started to play piano as a child, and was also fascinated by circuitry. Later he studied information technology and became an electrical engineer. He built his own synthesizers from parts he took home from work and modified units he was able to get from the West. From 1980 on, he performed live with his English titled solo program Live Electronics. In addition to this he parlayed his two obsessions – circuitry and music – into a pair of radio shows he co-hosted: "Kontakt"

about electronic music and "Datenbank" about computer technology. According to articles written about him at the time, his apartment was littered with hot soldering materials and music composition notebooks. "**Sonnenregen**" (Solar Rain) appeared on the 1985 compilation *Kleeblatt No. 14 – Electronic-Pop*. This track is a sun-filled deep breath. His solo album with the visionary title *Digital Life*, featuring great old school computer graphics, and was only released as the GDR was collapsing – lost in the vortex after the fall of the wall. Today Stamer works as a piano teacher.





## HANS-HASSO STAMMER





KEY





Key was founded by Andreas Fregin and Frank Fehse in 1984. They were the most pop of the GDR electronic musicians and played everything "from Bach to break", as their slogan went. Key even performed live with break dancers in the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) in Berlin in the late 1980s. Their 1988 album *Key* included cover versions of Jan Hammer's "Crockett's Theme" and Harold Faltermeyer's "Axel F." On "**Solaris**," from that album, Key play a Captain Future version of disco funk, culminating in a rousing finale. "**Ketchup**," from the compilation *Kleebatt No. 14 – Electronic-Pop* (1985), showcases Key playing a tight bit of synth funk. The hammering chords weren't created on a sequencer – Fehse

did them by hand. And then his synth even starts to make turntable-scratching sounds. Fehse, the main man behind Key, was born in a small village near Cottbus in 1953. He studied music in Leipzig in the university's then new department for "dance and entertainment music," and worked as a session musician for orchestras and TV studios. After the fall of the wall, he earned his living as a piano player on cruise ships, making up for the long years behind the Iron Curtain by traveling the world. Today the excellent musician showcases new pianos, keyboards, synthesizers, and even digital accordions at music tradeshows. His Key partner Andreas Fregin has returned to his old job as a construction engineer.



Servi was founded 1975 in Bautzen as Servi Pacis (Servants of Peace) by Jan Bilk (born in 1958) and Tomáš Nawka (born in 1957). The band played church services and religious youth conferences – activities associated with opposition in the strictly secular GDR. Nevertheless, in 1986 the renamed Servi were allowed to officially bring out their debut album, *Rückkehr aus Ithaka* (Return From Ithaca). The sanctuary of the church, coupled with a captive audience, allowed the two musicians to experiment extensively with electronic music, the results of which found its way onto their debut LP. The track "**Laistrygonen**"

from this album, is named for giants and cannibals from Homer's *Odyssey*, but at heart it's a song about homesickness and longing for another place – like all the songs assembled here. In 1988 a second, more pop oriented Servi album followed, called *Pas De Deux In H*. After the fall of the wall, Bilk and Nawka started a publishing company and wrote music for theatre and music productions. 1995 the band began occasionally to perform live again. Today Nawka runs his own graphic design company while Bilk operates a studio in the basement of his house and manages his daughter, a well known Theremin player.





SERVI





## WOLFGANG PAULKE

Wolfgang Paulke, born in Berlin in 1952, made an early career in sports as a member of the national ice speed-skating team. Later he worked as a sound engineer at a pantomime group. When his grandmother from West Berlin sent him some money in the mid-1980s, he used it to buy synths and sequencers. This, combined with influences from Ash Ra Temple, resulted in the beautiful combination of guitars and machines that can be heard on "**Zeitmaschine**" (Time Machine) from 1987's compilation *Zeitklänge – Electronics*. His "**Frau in Blau**" (The Woman In Blue) from the 1985 compilation *Kleebatt No. 14 – Electronic-Pop* is a Cosmic GDR tune with stuttering marching drums, whining synths, and an over-the-top plastic guitar solo. Like windsurfing on the lakes of Mecklenburg. Today Paulke runs a small studio and produces meditative music.





## RAINER OLEAK



Rainer Oleak was born in 1953 and studied piano, composition, and music theory at the renowned Berlin music college, Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler. He played keyboards in various pop and rock bands before being asked by Reinhard Lakomy to record an album together. The two started to jam and out came *Zeiten* (Times, 1985), a concept album about time. "**Raumzeit**" (Spacetime) is taken from that album. The first part of the track is woozy and ethereal, then it breaks into a frenetic rave fanfare. It all finishes with a tense *Blade Runner* style denouement. Today Oleak writes movie soundtracks and his name can often be found in the end credits of German TV movies. He produces the successful "East rock in Classical music" shows for nostalgic former-GDR citizens and runs a substantial studio out of his home.



1. Reinhard Lakomy  
Es wächst das Gras nicht über alles

Band-Nr. B10379.

Kompositionen, Arrangements und Tonregie: Reinhard Lakomy,  
Produktionsjahr: 1981, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Sony  
Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

2. Pond  
Planetenwind

DEC739800566,

(Composer: Wolfgang Paule Fuchs), Performer: Pond, © 1983, BMG  
Berlin Musik GmbH/Amiga Germany, Published by: Copyright  
Control, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Sony Music  
Entertainment Germany GmbH

3. Reinhard Lakomy  
Das unendliche Rätsel

Band-Nr. B10379.

Kompositionen, Arrangements und Tonregie: Reinhard Lakomy,  
Produktionsjahr: 1981, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Sony  
Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

4. Wolfgang Paulke  
Zeitmashine

Band-Nr. 50-653,

Kompositionen und Arrangements: Wolfgang Paulke,  
Produktionsjahr: 1987, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der  
Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

5. Reinhard Lakomy / Rainer Oleak  
Raumzeit

Band-Nr. B11141,

Kompositionen, Arrangements und Produktion: Reinhard Lakomy /  
Rainer Oleak, Produktionsjahr: 1985, Mit freundlicher  
Genehmigung der Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

6. Julius Krebs  
SE

DEC73980053,

(Composer: Krebs), Performer: Julius Krebs, © 1985, BMG Berlin  
Musik GmbH/Amiga, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Sony  
Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

7. Reinhard Lakomy  
Der Traum von Asgard

DEC730800001,

(Composer: Reinhard Lakomy, Lyricist Reinhard Lakomy),  
Performer: Reinhard Lakomy, © 1982, Amiga Germany, Published  
by: Copyright Control, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Sony  
Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

8. Hans-Hasso Stamer  
Sonnenregen

Band-Nr. 50-569,

Kompositionen und Arrangements: Hans-Hasso Stamer,  
Produktionsjahr: 1985, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der  
Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

9. Wolfgang Paulke  
Frau in Blau

DEC739800569,

(Composer: Paulke), Performer: Wolfgang Paulke, © 1985,  
BMG Berlin Musik GmbH/Amiga, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung  
der Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

10. Key  
Solaris

Band-Nr. B11896,

Kompositionen und Arrangements: Frank Fehse,  
Produktionsjahr: 1988, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der  
Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH



### 11. Key Ketchup

Band-Nr. 50-569,

Kompositionen und Arrangements: Frank Fehse,  
Produktionsjahr: 1985, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der  
Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

### 12. Pond Galaxis

DEC730800130,

(Composer: Wolfgang Paule Fuchs), Arranger: Wolfgang Paule  
Fuchs, Performer: Pond, © 1986, BMG Berlin Musik GmbH /  
Amiga, Published by: Copyright Control, Mit freundlicher  
Genehmigung der Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

### 13. Julius Krebs Intro

Kr+K Julius Krebs, © 1985, BMG Berlin Musik GmbH / Amigo,  
Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Sony Music Entertainment  
Germany GmbH

### 14. Pond Cassiopeia

Band-Nr. B10944 DEC730800128,

(Composer: Wolfgang Paule Fuchs), Arranger: Wolfgang Paule Fuchs,  
Performer: Pond, © 1984, BMG Berlin Musik GmbH / Amiga,  
Published by: Copyright Control, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung  
der Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

### 15. Servi Laistrygonen

Band-Nr. B11390,

Kompositionen und Arrangements: Jan Bilk/Tomas Nawka,  
Produktionsjahr: 1985, Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der  
Sony Music Entertainment Germany GmbH

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