Wild Spaces

*Krautrock Eruption: An Introduction To German Electronic Music 1970-1980* (CD, Bureau B)
*Electric Junk: Deutsche Rock, Psych and Kosmische 1970-1978* (4CD, Cherry Red)

*Krautrock Eruption* is a CD to accompany a book of the same name, which revisits the old Federal Republic of Germany and considers its unique music, tracing influences and aspirations, its social context (squats and political struggle) and offering up a concise discography of 50 albums from the era.

It is those 50 that have been culled even further for a new 12-track CD compilation, with a very clear focus on electronic music rather than the sprawling expanse and experiment of krautrock. A lot of this music hasn't aged particularly well – I suspect mostly because of technological developments – and sounds fairly thin and dated. There are lots of pulsing and bleeping rhythms overlaid with symphonic sounding keyboards (mellotrons?) and several tracks are record company edits, which don't allow for total listener immersion.

The best tracks are those by the most well-known names: a rather pretty and unrepresentative Faust track, and pieces by Cluster, Kluster, Roedelius, Eno Moebius Roedelius, Moebius & Plank, but even they can't rescue this anthology from being a bit tame and non-inclusive and – to be honest – not at all representative of the wider picture.

For that we have to turn to *Electric Junk*, a vast 4CD anthology which shows how German music scooped up heavy rock, psychedelia and krautrock (or Kosmiche music) to take on the West and hippy freedoms at its own game. Here are the rhythm generators and interstellar sounds of Tangerine Dream, Faust's hypnotic and noisy 'Jennifer', and much stranger and more representative tracks by Roedelius, Conrad Schnitzer and others from *Krautrock Eruption*

Obscurer bands such as Novalis and Silberbart interrupt themselves with squawks and treated electronics, My Sold Ground chant in the rhythmic darkness, Electric Sandwich have a guitar and keyboard freakout to create a version of 'China', whilst My Solid Ground are lost in 'Dirty Yellow Mist' where vocals echo and refract as muffled guitars stab at the rhythms and listener.

You can feel the tug of heavy metal and progressive rock here, with a lot of bands here stuck in the middle, wondering where to take their creative explorations next, but thankfully different bands went off in their own directions to expand the sonic universe. Here are Os Mundi producing a kind of prototype world music, with flutes and ethereal vocals, whilst Sweet Smoke close the whole set with a prayerful evocation to some deity or other, pleading to be taken from darkness in to light, whilst instruments weave and layer behind the plaintive vocals.

Many of the groups rely on propulsive drumming and percussion (and/or electronic sequencers) to riff, sing, improvise and groove over. There's something vaguely Eastern in tone about Hoelderlin's 'Schwebebahn', while Guru Guru (as expected) go for tribal wigout on 'Stone In'. Frame sound more mainstream as their 'Frame of Mind' ventures into Moody Blues territory, whilst Orange Peel seem to have heard and been inspired by Jefferson Airplane, which is no bad thing.

As I hope you can tell, this box set is mostly fantastic stuff and has lots of new and intriguing inclusions. The only downside are some of the vocals because, as is often the way, instrumental prowess seems a main concern, and the occasional presence of keyboard choirs, ooh-oohing in the mix. Apart from these minor niggles, however, it's a glorious, free-range wander through the surprising and intriguing music of the time, with no junk in sight.

Rupert Loydell

(600 words)