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Guru Guru biography

"We're not cosmic rock, we're comic rock."
Mani Neumeier, 1973

A free form jazz mentality, avoiding musical clichés and commercialism, has always characterized the music and philosophies of German freak 'n roll band GURU GURU who have categorically occupied their own special stage within the realms of modern music. From it's LSD induced origins in the late '60s to it's present day configuration which still rocks and grooves with intensity, countless personnel changes have occurred making it more of a succession of musical ventures and concepts under the moniker GURU GURU, which came about as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the BEATLES and their guru worshipping of the late '60s. GURU GURU were one of the first bands to become associated with the German Krautrock movement from that era along with bands such as XHOL CARAVAN, AMON DUUL and CAN. However, the band was not partial to the absurd stereo-typing and preferred the terms "acid space" or simply, "acid rock" which better described their loud, trippy, improvisational music.

The constant driving force behind GURU GURU since it's inception as THE GURU GURU GROOVE BAND in 1968 has been the unusual intellect and masterful musicianship of drummer MANI NEUMEIER. During the first half of the 1960s he embraced the jazz interpretations of JOHN COLTRANE, THELONIOUS MONK, MAX ROACH and other jazz mentors from which he would develop his own style of impulsive drumming. During this period he played with various traditional jazz groups in Zurich, Switzerland culminating with work with Swiss jazz pianist IRENE SCHWEIZER. It was during this time that he hooked up with bassist ULI TREPTE with whom he shared the desire to create louder more adventurous music which would follow the paradigms of JIMI HENDRIX and FRANK ZAPPA. Joined by guitarist EDY NAGELI, they played their first gig in Heidelberg, Germany in August 1968 and shocked audiences who had been familiar with Neumeier's work in the more mainstream European jazz scene.

After a few more lineup changes, during which they briefly became a quartet, they were joined by ex- AGITATION FREE guitarist AX GENRICH whose pyrotechnical aspirations were just what Neumeier and Treppe were looking for. On the insistence of their fans who followed them from gig to gig, their debut album, "UFO", was released in early 1970 on the Ohr record label which by that time was already known for promoting avant garde music. Their guitar driven music was wild and imaginative and also incorporated many primitive atmospheric effects using echo boxes, fuzz pedals, wah wah pedals, processed signals and microphone distortion which predated the electronic instrumental music of the seventies. Drug experimentation with LSD also acted as a catalyst and their live performances were often better than material recorded in the studio because of the high decibel levels of their playing. This extravagant free nature of their music was also meant as a left wing political statement as the band was also part of the Socialist German Student Union who would read out political statements during their performances. These free-thinking attitudes were also reflected through their communal lifestyle, living on the road and later in a house with their groupies and roadies

Tripped out philosophies as well as a nod towards one of their rock'n roll heroes, BO DIDDLEY appeared on their next acid soaked LP, Hinten in 1971 while the following album, Kanguru, took musical experimentation to soaring heights. With the aid of German production wizard CONNY PLANK it was one of the first albums released on the new German Brain record label which was created by former employees of Ohr Records. It contained long discordant compositions with psychedelic textures which incorporated more recognizable elements of jazz, hard rock and pop music laced with all kinds of bizarre humour and drugged out vocals, not surprisingly becoming an underground favourite of long haired freaky people everywhere.

The first personnel changes occurred on a self-titled album which was released in December 1972 with ex-NIGHT SUN bassist BRUNO SCHAAB replacing ULI TREPTE who disappeared under similar circumstances to those which resulted in the decommissioning of SYD BARRETT from PINK FLOYD. Attempts were made at a couple of psychedelic '60s sounding singles as well as another far out tribute to a rock'n roll hero, this time a medley of EDDIE COCHRAN classics from the '50s. But long trippy abstract compositions remained their forte and the album also spawned a whacked out piece of music which would become their trademark entitled "Der Elektrolurch". It was about an imaginary electric amphibian creature that Neumeier and Genrich cooked up while travelling on their tour bus which Neumeier would act out on stage during live performances wearing a costume he designed much like PETER GABRIEL of GENESIS was doing around the same time.

In 1973 GURU GURU were signed to the heavy hitting Atlantic Records (UK) label for their fourth album " Don't Call Us We Call You " which brought on further changes in personnel and significant musical departures. Bassist HANS HARTMAN, a veteran of the European jazz scene replaced BRUNO SCHAAB and with his more precise and dominating bass playing giving the band a tighter sound. AX GENRICH also watered down his guitar experiments to include more streamlined blues explorations as well as some country ingredients. A group of Schoshonen native Indians spent some time with the band in their communal ways of life during this period and Neumeier's tribal curiosities resulted in an ethno track entitled "Round Dance". There was also more emphasis on Neumeier's quirky vocals but nonetheless the album didn't sell as well as Atlantic had anticipated. This signaled the end of an era of the band which many consider to be GURU GURU's definitive years.

Persian / German guitarist Houschang Nejadepour who had played with the recently dissolved German progressive jazz-rock band Eiliff joined the band in early '74. This generated the most technically spectacular GURU GURU album, Dance Of The Flames which sounded at times like THE MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA minus the keyboards and violin as a result of Nejadepour's fluid speed-of-light guitar lines and eastern influences (he also played the sitar while with Eiliff). Like their previous album, "Dance Of The Flames" also had world beat elements with African and Latino rhythms along with the inevitable psychedelic blowouts and silly vocalizations. The album was greeted with mixed sentiments by fans and the press alike and The New Musical Express even called it : "absolutely terrible music". Nejadepour's tenure was brief and he left in July '74 and was replaced temporarily with Connie Veit who had previously played with the psyched out "GILA" and the highly experimental avant garde band POPOL VUH. An unofficial CD which surfaced in the late '90s documented some live performances from this period with Veit on guitar.

In 1975 Neumeier would rethink the GURU GURU concept by inviting a potpourri of musical friends to perform with himself and new members Sepp Jandrist and Jurgen Karpentel on guitar and bass respectively on an album appropriately titled "Mani Und Seine Freunde" (Mani And His Friends). Members from KARTHAGO, HARMONIA and KRAAN gave the album a wonderful jazz-rock feel to most of the tracks while members of CLUSTER added surreal touches on a couple of ambient adventures which also included ethereal environmental sounds. It had a joyous feel to it and Neumeier considered it to be the most satisfying GURU GURU project to date.

The more upbeat approaches on " Mani Und Seine Freunde" set the stage for the next GURU GURU record, "Tango Fango" which would become the template for the funky jazz-rock flavoured attitudes which would colour GURU GURU's music for the remainder of the seventies. Back on the Brain label, it introduced a full time keyboard player, INGO BISCHOF as well as sax / guitarist, ROLAND SHAFFER who would become a GURU GURU fixture to the present day. In March 1976 the band became the first act to be featured on the acclaimed German rock music TV program Rock Palast (Rock Palace) playing music from "Tango Fango" as well as the spaced out signature numbers "Der Elektrolurch" and "Ooga Booga". They also starred in a movie called "Notwehr" in which they played a freaky hippie band called Rattenfanger (The Ratcatchers) which takes over a small German Hamlet much to the chagrin of the townspeople. On the music side of things two further albums were released " Globetrotter " (1978) and "Hey Du" (1979) interspersed with a long awaited double live album in 1978. . These albums didn't completely forget the band's earlier more spaced out socio-political deviations and included weird compositions which spoke out against nuclear power, called for the re-unification of the two Germanies as well as another extended freakout, " Atomlch " which was reminiscent of the dark sonic images of "Der Elektrolurch". By the end of the decade GURU GURU had played hundreds of concerts all over continental Europe, parts of the United States as well as acquiring a vibrant following in Japan which still exists to this day.

In the early 1980s the GURU GURU entity went into stasis while Neumeier focused on jazzy solo work as well as other side projects. He also furthered his musical education by taking instruction with an Indian drum master and released an esoteric drum album entitled "Privat" in 1991.

The GURU GURU creature crept back to form with " Guru Guru Jungle " which included a female vocalist, Lisa (Lysa) Kraus and contained freakish new wave electronica experiments with the idiosyncratic GURU GURU touch. They also became regular performers at the Finkelbach free music festival which they co-founded and continued to record periodically. Throughout the 1990's and into the 21st century GURU GURU's music fluctuated between pilgrimages to their psychedelic past, straight rock, more freak techno excursions as well as jazz-rock.

Neumeier's ongoing native tribal drumming convictions from all corners of the planet which have constantly instilled primeval visions into GURU GURU's diverse sound are more conspicuous than ever as the Gurus transcend the new millennium. Continuing to elude any notions of mainstream identity GURU GURU's eternal quest for freedom and contentment through their wonderfully strange music forges on to this day. Their live performances still breath fire and shine with exuberance with no sign of letting up any time soon with concert dates planned well into the year 2010.

Ian Gledhill (Vibrationbaby), a fan from Canada