

Band of the Week: Can

Resident sound-nerd [Tom Killingbeck](#) thumbs through reams of musty vinyl so you don't have to. Here are his weekly recommendations...

Monday 6 June 2011

#30: Can



Who: Damo Suzuki, Holger Czukay, Michael Caroli, Jaki Liebezeit, Irmin Schmidt.

When: 1960s-1970s.

Where: Germany.

Why: [Can](#) were always outsiders in the grand scheme of rock & roll. Formed initially by a conductor/concert pianist, an avant-garde composer/flautist and a music teacher, they weren't exactly your standard bunch of bar-dwelling wannabes. [Irmin Schmidt](#) was classically trained at numerous prestigious schools, conducting the [Vienna Symphony Orchestra](#) before eventually settling in Cologne. His respectable musical upbringing was corrupted during a trip to New York in 1968. Falling in with visionary minimalists like [Steve Reich](#) and [LaMonte Young](#), he was later exposed to [Andy Warhol](#) and [The Velvet Underground](#). On return to Germany, he set about with muso friends [Holger Czukay](#) and American experimentalist David Johnson, and, intrigued by the possibilities of the new frontier of rock, set about prophetically remodelling it.

The core line-up would be in place by the time Johnson had left (on account of the project being too rock orientated) and incorporated Michael Caroli, a 19-year-old guitarist pupil of Czukay, and Jaki Liebezeit, a jazz drummer. On vocals; [Malcolm Mooney](#), a schizoid but über creative New York sculptor. Deciding upon the name 'Can', they would later decide that this stood for 'Communism, Anarchism, Nihilism'. The music would come to be just as confrontational and radical as the principles of their acronym –so much so that

after the release of their debut *Monster Movie*, Mooney would return to America due to his psychiatrist's assertion that the hypnotic, trance-inducing sounds were bad for his mental health. [Kenji 'Damo' Suzuki](#), a young Japanese nomad who was discovered busking outside a Munich café, ably replaced him. *Tago Mago*, the first album to solely feature Suzuki's unearthly recitations, is perhaps the most legendary LP in the krautrock canon. The LP has a magical aura, perhaps a result of its connections to occultist [Aleister Crowley](#) – its name is a reference to the Isla de Tagomago, which he visited. But it's the music that's the real witchcraft – lyrics that tickle the subconscious, mesmerising rhythms and repetitions, all manner of unprecedented effects, songs bubbling and pleasantly flowing before cresting into great waves of sound.

The band's next few releases would form the jewels in the crown of their discography. *Ege Bamyasi* was a slightly more accessible cousin of *Tago Mago*, sessions beleaguered by Damo and Irmin obsessively playing chess. *Future Days* took the band into yet more ambient territory, before Damo left to become a [Jehovah's Witness](#). Can recorded throughout the next decade, but never quite recaptured the genius of their early 70s triumvirate. But their legacy has only become more apparent with time. The motorik drumbeats and somehow unattainable atmospheres, the womblike caverns of bass and innovative use of electronics have been plundered by pretty much any reputable underground band you'd care to name. Post-punkers – [The Fall](#), [Joy Division](#), [Public Image Limited](#) – all snagged Can's fusion of dub basslines and effects with garage rock and sold it as their own. Likewise, the trip-hop groups of the 90s would replicate their amniotic ambience, [Massive Attack](#) and [Portishead](#) particularly indebted. Recently even commercial hip-hop's cottoned on – Kanye West [sampled](#) 'Sing Swan Song'. And of course, [Radiohead](#) often sound like a bunch of middle-class Oxfordshire nerds who've formed a half-arsed Can tribute band. These German cosmonauts remade and remodelled pop music as we know it – who knows where we'd be without them...

Influences: The Fugs, The Velvet Underground, Pink Floyd, Miles David, The Monks.

Influenced: The Fall, Pere Ubu, Stereolab, Radiohead, Portishead.

Sample Lyric: 'Well I was born, and I was dead / Well I saw mushroom head'.

Which Record: *Tago Mago* (United Artists, 1971)



Most Read **Discussed**

1. [Review: Little Mix – LM5](#)
2. [Led Astray – The Case Against Greta Van Fleet](#)
3. [Review: Some Rap Songs – Earl Sweatshirt](#)
4. [Review: Simulation Theory – Muse](#)
5. [Live Review: Sigrid @ Albert Hall, Manchester – 8/11/18](#)
6. [Band of the Week: Magma](#)

Write for Nouse Music

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

More in Music

[Review: Some Rap Songs – Earl Sweatshirt](#)

[Review: Little Mix - LM5](#)

[Live Review: Sigrid @ Albert Hall, Manchester - 8/11/18](#)

[Live Review: Within Temptation @ O2 Academy Birmingham 9/11/18](#)

[Radio Gaga: Evolution of a Star](#)

[Review: Simulation Theory - Muse](#)

[About Nouse](#)
[Who's Nouse](#)
[Website Credits](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Archives](#)
[Student Discounts](#)
[Print Editions](#)
[Mini-Sites](#)
[Nouse on Twitter](#)
[Nouse on Facebook](#)
[Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964-2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

