

REAL TIME, 18.04.2007 (Australia)

KRAUTROCK

When five American GIs stationed in Germany started their own band in the '60s, little did they know they would go on to influence plenty of later groups such as Can and Faust.

ANTHONY CAREW speaks to DIETMAR POST, director of a documentary on the group.



The Monks' story is one of the more odd ones in annals of obscure music. It's the early-1960s, and five American GIs, living in Germany, undergo an evolution from generic Beatles-aping beat-group into something they called the "anti-Beatles", playing a heavily-distorted, highly-rhythmic music chronicled on their one-and-only, lost-classic album, 1965's *Black Monk Time*. Oh, and they did all this whilst wearing cassocks, with tonsures shaved on their heads.

"During the punk and post-punk heydays, it was pretty common in Berlin that you'd got to a party, and you'd listen to the Clash, and Einstürzende Neubauten, and Wire, and Gang Of Four, and also The Monks," recalls Dietmar Post, director of the documentary *Monks - The Transatlantic Feedback*, which is screening this week as part of the Goethe-Institut's Festival of German Films. "That was probably due," Post continues, "to the first re-release of the record, which was issued in '79 in Germany. In Germany, the record *Black Monk Time* has always been considered a real part of 'rock history'."

Perhaps it has been held aloft in Germany because of the Monks' obvious antecedents: the kraut-rockers; with the band's focus on rhythm – playing a kit with no symbols, relentlessly hitting on the beat – presaging the exercises in repetition staged by Can and Faust half-a-decade on. It's a notion offered by Julian Cope in his book *Krautrock sampler*, which calls "the Monks the missing link between '60s beat-music, and '70s kraut-rock". And it's one that Post believes, too.

"All these years later, when I listened to *How To Do Now*, I instantly compared it to Can, to a song like *Yoo Doo Right*," Post offers, on his re-listening to the Monks in the 1990s. "They sound so similar. So I made that connection, but

I couldn't actually prove it. But when we called Joachim Irmeler, from Faust, who actually opens the film, and when he told us that when he saw *The Monks* on TV as a teenager that it changed his life, that made us very happy, because there it was, there was the connection."

Post, and his co-filmmaker Lucía Palacios, began making *The Transatlantic Feedback* when *Black Monk Time* was reissued in the US in 1997. Reaction to the record was that it was a long-lost garage classic, something which Post thought was wrong. So he set about making a film, to uncover the true story, and their true origins. Over a decade later, he feels as if his finished film satisfied such a desire. "In the end, it's pretty clear that it was *not* a garage band," he states.

The members of The Monks, "felt flattered that someone was interested in their story," and were happy to talk about a band they didn't speak about for a 25-year period. Yet, uncovering the true origins of their specific sound, and their creation of the 'Monks' image, wasn't so simple. "When talking about their histories, both Eddie Shaw and Gary Burger had kind of left out the whole story about their managers," Post offers. "They were both reticent to talk about the managers, and the influence they had. You can tell, in the film, that they're all still coming to terms with that element of the band."

Like most great '60s bands, The Monks were presided over by the requisite svengali figure; though, in this case, there was two of them. A pair of German art-school existentialists, named Walther and Karl, who worked in the advertising industry, were the ones who "branded" the Monks with their corporate image. In such, they hoped to sculpt the band into an evolutionary art-group, composing a point-by-point Monks manifesto, and setting them up with space-cadet photographer/composer/ad-man Charles Wilp (himself another legendary 'lost' figure from pop's forgotten margins). "There was such a very different vibe on (*Black Monk Time*), and I think it was instigated by those two German managers. The Monks never would've been The Monks without those two guys," Post says.

Monks - The Transatlantic Feedback is on at Festival of German Films, screening from Wednesday 25th to Saturday 28th April at either Palace Cinema Como or Palace Brighton Bay.