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## Monks: The Transatlantic Feedback

(Documentary -- Germany-U.S.-Spain) A Play Loud! production in association with 3sat and ZDF. Produced, directed by Dietmar Post, Lucia Palacios.

**With:** Gary Burger, Larry Clark, Dave Day, Roger Johnston, Eddie Shaw, Charles Wilp, Jimmy Bowien, Gerd Henjes, Wolfgang Gluszczewski, Joachim Irmeler, Jon Spencer, Byron Coley, Genesis P-Orridge, Peter Zaremba.  
(English, German dialogue)

By [DENNIS HARVEY](#)

**A unique footnote in '60s pop music history gets definitive docu treatment in "Monks: The Transatlantic Feedback." Dietmar Post and Lucia Palacios' feature tells the curious tale of five American G.I.s stationed in Germany who were -- briefly -- turned into one of the era's odder, more obscure rock experiments. Duly rediscovered for cult status by musicians and fans in recent years, the Monks were a memorably outre, ahead-of-their-time act. Archival material and interviews with now-middle-aged former band members dominate this excellent if slightly overlong pic, which merits DVD (and possible limited theatrical) pickup in sympathetic territories.**

Like nearly everywhere else in Europe, early 1960s Germany had finally traded privation for prosperity and was in a partying mood. A youthquake began to rumble in cultural, artistic and political terms. It was an exciting time for footloose American soldiers stationed in cities like Hamburg, where the Beatles had first found success and where such "beat music" fueled a sleepless nightclub scene.

Five young Yanks stationed there began playing as a cover band while still enlisted.

**press clippings / monks – the transatlantic feedback**



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Dubbing themselves the Torquays, they were like a hundred other such combos. But this quintet attracted the attention of Karl-H. Remy and Walther Nieman, two enterprising Germans with shared backgrounds in design and advertising. They were looking for a band to manage -- and mold, for concept they had in mind. Having already signed off on their military tours, Torquays Gary Burger, Larry Clark, Dave Day, Roger Johnston and Eddie Shaw blithely signed on.

Remy and Nieman envision a conceptual art piece masquerading as top-40 pop fodder. "Monk music" would strip songwriting to the bone, with sarcastic or nonsensical lyrics, Burger's shrill vocals, hammering beats, dissonant guitar, violently strummed banjo, hypnotically basic organ and bass lines.

The Monks themselves were required to sport haircuts like Franciscan monks, wear black uniforms, and otherwise follow strict rules outlined by their mentors at all times, onstage and off.

Quickly branded "the anti-Beatles" for their aggressive, even hostile look and sound, the Monks quickly grabbed local media attention, although they were never exactly popular. Launched even earlier than the likewise image-and-sound "negative" Velvet Underground back in the States, sans Andy Warhol's stamp of celebrity endorsement (though the V.U. failed commercially, too), Monks were a caustic avant-garde incongruity in the developing Peace & Love climate of the times.

Nonetheless, the group scored myriad gigs (once opening for Jimi Hendrix), a few TV appearances on Euro "Shindig"-type shows, released several flop singles and one 1966 album.

The German manager-masterminds (who declined to participate in this docu) lost interest as the act failed to catch on. Meanwhile, band members felt increasingly restricted. In 1967 they simply quit. All returned to the U.S. and built lives completely unconnected to rock.

Helmers do a vivid job etching the creatively fervid times, with an editing style whose dynamism echoes that of "Monk music." Pic drags only in the last stretch, when it takes a bit too much time sketching the present-day circumstances of all the former Monks. However, their thrill at finally playing the U.S. at a New York City reunion gig (which attracts several indie-rock celebrities) 35 years later is contagious.

Tech package is crisp. Camera (color/B&W, DigiBeta), Post, Palacios; additional camera, Renato Falcao; editor, Dieter Jaufmann; additional editing, Karl-W. Huelsenbeck; music, Monks; sound, Post, Palacios; Reviewed on DVD, San Francisco, Jan. 10, 2007. (In Berlin & Beyond Film Festival.) Running time: 100 MIN.