



Cluster Cluster II

July 11, 2025
CD / LP



Cluster can be counted among the most important international protagonists of the electronic avant-garde. Some credit them with having invented ambient music, others as pioneers of synthesizer pop, whilst to some they are firmly embedded in the krautrock universe. There is some truth in all of these notions. Cluster (or Kluster as they were in the beginning) were founded in 1970 in Berlin by Conrad Schnitzler, Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius. A change in direction and musical differences moved Moebius and Roedelius to split from Schnitzler after which the duo recorded 10 regular studio albums between 1971 and 2009. Their debut album ("Cluster 71") was in Wire Magazine's "One Hundred Records That Set The World On Fire" list. "Cluster II" is influenced by Berlin and Hamburg; situated somewhere in the middle of artistic happenings, musical outrageousness and drug abuse: an urban mixture.

Cluster II was born in two big cities. Back in 1972 Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius still lived in Berlin, where they were part of the city's swirling underground scene, situated somewhere in the middle of artistic happenings, musical outrageousness and drug abuse: an urban mixture that perceptibly influenced Cluster II, but the album was recorded in Hamburg; one track a live performance at Hamburg's concert hall "Fabrik". This is made all the more interesting in that it gives the listener a chance to compare the studio recordings to the music performed live on stage. When doing so it becomes obvious that, as far as the music was concerned, Cluster acted in a similar way in both cases, making moderate use of technical equipment. It goes without saying that they could not do completely without electricity, but they mostly manipulated their keyboards and other electric devices in an improvised way, as if rolling their sleeves up for some real manual work. This way Cluster never saw their role reduced to pushing buttons and pressing switches. It is obvious that Roedelius and Moebius were not late in discovering the tape loop as a method of creating repetitive patterns. They also incorporated an analogue rhythm machine into Cluster II, even though it did not yet play an essential part on the album but what they firmly relied on was not their equipment, but rather their intuition and the option to decide at any point what was supposed to happen in the next few moments. The fact that they were always ready to run the risk of musical failure is something that cannot be respected highly enough. So Cluster proceeded in a different way not only from a musical point of view, but also displayed a completely new attitude. Moebius and Roedelius never submitted to their machines but let their personalities as heart and soul musicians be heard at all times to create "electronic music with a human face".

Conrad Plank, the ingenious sonic magician, who regularly hosted Cluster, Harmonia and others in his studio, displayed so much enthusiasm and inspiration in helping put these new ideas into practise. Bravely and without fear, Cluster had ventured out on a journey without knowing where it would lead them, stepping into fascinating, virgin territory. Those who were not among the lucky ones to see them live could at least listen to the tunes pressed on vinyl; Cluster II was not the first, but the hitherto most impressive album, presenting itself as an extract of Cluster's early music as well as a remarkable milestone in the field of new electro-acoustic music on the whole. The new thing about it was, first of all, that the tracks were relatively short (15 minutes for the longest and hardly 3 minutes for the shortest one)—fellow musicians of the genre usually used to fill an entire side of a record without any interruption. Cluster, however, used to restrict themselves to the most essential. They were not at all interested in extended a musical idea beyond what was necessary, thus avoiding nerve-wrecking repetitions. Their compositions and musical structures created on stage clearly show that they were capable of listening and reacting to each other - cardinal virtues for any successful improvisation. They used to create their sonic material only partly by using electronic devices (e.g., a sinus generator), but always attributed at least as much importance to stringed instruments and electric keyboards as they are used by any old solo entertainer. What they created on Cluster II goes to show in an impressive way that they managed to make a virtue of necessity by creating something new and different, regardless of the restrictions they had to face. Their music is in a constant flow, and sounds are sometimes harsh without being brutal: Another thing that was unique in an environment of psychedelic tunes.

The question as to whether Cluster II has to be considered part of serious music or rather of popular music seems as obsolete today as it was back in 1972. Interestingly enough, however, the album was among the first ones to leave people in confusion when trying to tell what musical category it belonged to. As opposed to now where there is a large transitional area situated somewhere in between the two poles and made up by all sorts of electro-acoustic music, serious and popular music were still categories strictly set apart at the beginning of the seventies. Moebius and Roedelius, however, simply did not care about categorising their music, thus contributing to the trend towards abandoning the categories altogether. When listening to Cluster II today, fifty years after it was recorded, the album's historic significance becomes as clear as never before. A lot has already been written about Cluster's historic impact. Let me just underline in this context that it was not least this album that opened up doors through which generations of electro-acoustic musicians were yet to step.

- *Asmus Tietchens*

Tracklist

A1 Plas

A2 Im Süden

A3 Für die Katz'

B1 Live in der Fabrik

B2 Georgel

B3 Nabitte

BB406

CD 270582

4015698399851

LP 270581

4015698208733

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