



Bio information: **SONAR**

Title: **STATIC MOTION** (Cuneiform Rune 374) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: ROCK / EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

To the uninitiated, minimalism may seem like an intimidating concept, but in reality it's just the embodiment of the common axiom "less is more." And in the case of **SONAR**, less happens to be a *lot* more, especially on their second album, *Static Motion*. You don't even realize how much extraneous material exists in most of the music you hear every day until you listen to something like *Static Motion* and get your senses realigned. By hewing to a cunningly crafted set of constrictions on this album of nine ultra-streamlined instrumentals, the Swiss quartet somehow manages to wring the maximum amount of music out of a minimalist agenda.

To truly understand the story of *Static Motion*, the band's first album for **Cuneiform Records**, you have to go back to the '70s, when a teenage **Stephan Thelen** was discovering the wonders of the darkly dreamy world of **King Crimson**. The King Crimson incarnation of 1972-'74 was probably the most mysterious and powerful band I ever heard," Thelen rhapsodizes, "and that's what SONAR is ultimately about, for me at least: mystery combined with power. The King Crimson incarnation of 1981-'84 was also important because of the two-guitar setup and the gamelan-inspired idea that a rock group can also play like an orchestra without soloists." Captivated by the band's iconoclastic guitar anti-hero **Robert Fripp**, Thelen began building sonic castles in his mind that finally began to take shape decades later when he met fellow guitarist **Bernhard Wagner**, with whom he would eventually take part in **Fripp's Guitar Craft** classes. "We had similar interests and often talked about a joint project," remembers Thelen, "but I felt that we needed to have a really strong concept before we even started to play. When that concept came in the summer of 2010, the band came together very quickly."

With bassist **Christian Kuntner** and drummer **Manuel Pasquinelli** on board, SONAR found its feet and began moving forward with nary a backward glance. Their uncompromising vision was first heard on their 2012 debut album, *A Flaw of Nature* (on ECM recording artist **Nik Bärtsch's Ronin Rhythm Records**), and later that year, on the EP *Skeleton Groove* on Thelen's own imprint. "I consciously wanted the music to be different from anything else that was going on," says Thelen. "We wanted to explore the possibilities of the tritone tuning, experiment with complex, polymetrical grooves, and concentrate on the live performance of unfiltered music, not on special effects and computer tricks. It was also important to play as a real group, not just a collection of soloists."

True to the plan, SONAR has successfully flexed its performance muscles everywhere from the **2013 Sonic Circuits Festival of Experimental Music**, held at the Atlas Performing Arts Center in Washington, D.C., to the **Vortex Jazz Club** in London, **Band on the Wall** in Manchester, and Liverpool's International Arts Venue, **Capstone Theatre**. And those tritones he's talking about are intervals that might initially sound ominous to the virgin ear; not for nothing was the tritone dubbed "the devil's interval" centuries ago. But it plays a crucial role in the sound of *Static Motion*. "For me, it has a very mystical and bold feeling," Thelen says, "full of power and tension. Historically, in Western harmonic thinking, it is thought to be the most dissonant interval, however, I think that is only true if your ears are used to major/minor harmonies. In a more harmonically advanced system, your ears very quickly get used to the tritone and it can sound very consonant."

There were other adventurous concepts at work as well when the band set out to make *Static Motion*. "The ideas are based on aesthetic principles, mathematical structures and symmetries, games with numbers," explains Thelen, "but also of course on personal experiences and emotions. The main principle is minimalistic: do as much as you can with as little material as possible. In '**Twofold Covering**,' for instance, the whole piece is based on the opening bass riff. Everything you hear in the piece is connected with that riff. Sometimes it is played twice as fast an octave higher, but it is always that riff, and variations. I think that makes the music very coherent; packing too many different ideas in one piece makes it sound random to my ears."

Don't let that last comment fool you -- SONAR packs plenty of ideas into every track on *Static Motion*. It's just that they're all so artfully organized according to the band's musical manifesto that the whole album achieves a laser-focused accuracy in its impact on your ears. Utilizing nothing more than two guitars, bass, and drums, SONAR crafts pieces full of complex rhythms, interlocking patterns, and -- considering the limitations the band set for the compositions -- a surprisingly broad array of textures and tones. Thelen and Kuntner get more out of paring their palette down to muted strings and chiming harmonics than most guitarists achieve with an army of effects pedals and an excess of testosterone. Diving into tunes like "**Continuum**" or the album's title track is like leaping into an analog clock and going for a ride on the complex collection of gears as they bounce you up, down, and sideways with power and precision at once.

Running on its own rules, *Static Motion* makes for an aural experience like nothing you're accustomed to; SONAR's sound is singular and distinctive. "I like music that pulls the floor from under my feet," muses Thelen, "that makes me feel that I'm discovering a new world that I didn't know existed before, that opens up new possibilities." It makes for an undeniably immersive musical moment in time. With a 2014 tour schedule that already includes Switzerland, Germany, and the U.K., SONAR is set to bring *Static Motion* to life in front of as many people as possible. "Nik Bärtsch told me that it took him a few minutes to get used to our sound world," Thelen says, "but that he then found it very difficult to leave. I think that is a very a good description of what can happen if you are willing to immerse yourself in our music."

For more information on Sonar:

www.sonar-band.ch - www.cuneiformrecords.com