

“...it’s rare to find a group that not just changes the way music is made, but the way it’s defined. ...Sonar has its own language, based on tritone harmonics, poly- and isorhythms, and Stephan Thelen and Bernhard Wagner’s interlocking guitar. ...relatively clean tones and natural methods...introduce tonal variety. There’s no looping and minimal post-production editing;...just four players interacting...with faultless accuracy on three sets of three compositions—a triptych of triptychs—that are hypnotically trance-inducing while...absolutely commanding of conscious attention.

...the title track tips Sonar’s hat to Mahavishnu Orchestra’s “Meeting of the Spirits,”...and Fripp’s “Fracture,” from Crimson’s *Starless and Bible Black*...while “Continuum” lifts a line from Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s title track on *Tarkus*...Where Sonar takes these slight but unequivocally recognizable touchstones, however, is somewhere else entirely.

...Sonar remains a rare outfit looking ever forward, with unrelenting emphasis on the true meaning of the word “progressive.” There may be no ‘trons, epic songwriting or instrumental pyrotechnics, but *Static Motion*...is an album whose slow-build approach to dramaturgy, couched in intrinsic minimalism, reveals plenty more with each and every listen.”
- John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, March 2014

“AllMusic rating: 4 of 5 stars. ...On *Static Motion*...electric guitarists Stephan Thelen and Bernhard Wagner and bassist Christian Kuntner tune their instruments...to the tritone interval of C and F#, and the musicians extensively employ the natural harmonics of their instruments’ strings, often creating a ringing sound rich with overtones in the guitars, contrasting with arpeggiated muted plucks.

...Kuntner’s bass provides a deep pulse and throb...Manuel Pasquinelli’s crisp but cavernous drums are played with an unflashy, utilitarian simplicity...a “less is more” approach in which the drums’ counter-rhythms immediately establish another layer of depth without ever getting in the way...

Yet the guitarists most strongly define Sonar’s extraordinary sound... At times the guitars’ timbres might suggest Zimbabwean mbiras; on occasion the music is imbued with a Middle Eastern/Balkan flavor; and you might even imagine an alternate universe in which Byrds-era Roger McGuinn brought his 12-string Rickenbacker to a Steve Reich session. Expect trance-inducing grooves rather than hummable melodies...tension and release akin to modal jazz, and music with a spacious, streamlined complexity...”
- Dave Lynch, *All Music*, 2014

“...True originality...emerges from the rigorous pursuit of a clear artistic agenda founded on genuine insights, be they aesthetic, formal, existential or intellectual. That is the kind of originality that Sonar achieve on *Static Motion*... the uniqueness of this music springs from an extremely clear and specific set of artistic concerns. ...the music is stripped down to bare bones, although those bones articulate a structure of remarkable depth and complexity, built from complex polyrhythms and tense, ambiguous tonalities. ...music either encodes a narrative journey, or delineates a space. ...all music strikes a balance between those poles; but it rarely does so with the self-awareness that is implicit in the title of this album and explicit in the recordings collected on it. ...There is...great tension and power in the music. One of the most remarkable, rigorous, and truly original records I’ve yet heard.”
- *Oliver Ardit*, March 2014

“...The progressive, minimalist Swiss quartet creates polymetrical, developmentally-structured soundscapes, a sort of sonic architecture...performed live-in-the-studio... No effects and only a few post-production edits mean the music is clear, exact and precise. ...conventional soloing and deliberate virtuosity are replaced by unitary interplay. The most notable feature is tritone harmonics...SONAR utilizes the natural harmonics of their instruments. Guitars frequently generate a ringing sound abundant with overtones...the result is gradually evolving, pattern-based music which belies the underlying complexity. Heard at low volume, SONAR’s music is almost ambient, but at louder volume, the technical ability and thorough effort can be more easily discerned.

The nine pieces are symmetrically organized as a triptych. ... The main riff on this first three-tune subdivision has an isorhythm...in 9/8. Thelen states this “evokes the sonic illusion of something that moves forward and stands still at the same time.” ...The second triptych...has a tightly controlled focus: more resounding and fluid. This portion acts as the conceptual centerpiece.

...The final triptych is more forceful. The rock-inclined “Tranceportion” ...would not be out of place on a King Crimson project, and suggests the time Thelen and Wagner spent studying under...Robert Fripp. ...*Static Motion* concludes with...the 12-minute “Vertical Time”... The title has a literary origin, from German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s description of music as “time that stands vertical to the direction of fading hearts.” Here, SONAR is at their most trance-like, with music which proceeds in a practically ritualistic mode. The sound on *Static Motion* has an exceptional translucency... music with aural presence and essence.”
- Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, April 2014

“...5 Great Albums Released in 2014 You Should Hear... Sonar – *Static Motion*... This record really surprised me. ... It’s stripped down all the way, but it still keeps the complexity. ...tag this one...as progressive krautrock.”
- Nikola Savic, *Prog-sphere*, April 2014

“...*Static Motion*,” is a revolutionary shot across the bow for what we might consider to be the possibilities of modern day guitar music. ...an anti-hero’s masterpiece...an album that radically reinvents instrumental interplay in the...rock setting. How’d they do it? ...by following a few rules...“oblique strategies.” ...multiple time signatures would be employed simultaneously; no effects would be used in the signal chains of guitarists...the compositions would be drawn solely from the harmonic possibilities offered by the triton.

...The tritone methodology lends an exotic, occasionally ominous and disquieting feel to the pieces that comprise “*Static Motion*,”...Sonar use this methodology to construct organic pieces that ebb, flow and breathe, based on the astute and apparently ego-less playing of the musicians themselves... The result is a collection that worms its way with equal stealth into both brain and heart – intellectual music that also pumps real blood. ...Sonar has defied the norm by crafting something singular and magical.”
- Jeff Miers, *The Buffalo News*, May 25, 2014

“...unique style based on self-imposed limitations, restrictions and intentful pursuit of minimalism. First and foremost are the tritones that both guitarists and bass have tuned their strings to: only C or F# are allowed within Sonar’s world. Second, this is not really rock, not jazz either; in reality it’s deft ensemble work based on crafty instrumental interplay, with little room for any flashy soloing. The two guitarists are continually...growing the sound from sparse interactions on open-string harmonics to more powerful full-on electrified passages, and back again. ...The compositions are very natural and open...Occasionally, one might be reminded of magical moments on the many great albums by Philharmonie. ...another excellent adventure from the first note to the last.”
-Peter Thelen, *Exposé*, January 2014

“...fittingly titled...an ocean of little riffs and rhythmic models that come and go in a repetitive fashion, creating grooves with melodic appeal. ...we are highly appreciative of the its tonal beauty as well as the disciplined performance...”
- Avi, *Maelstromzine*, 2014
“...SONAR use as their formative text the ’72-’74 incarnation of King Crimson...out of which the band’s central doctrinal ethos is founded, expressed by the guitarist as “mystery combined with power.” As mere description a mite simplistic, as a musical mission statement deadly accurate.

...there is an operating manifesto at work here - using the 'devil's intervals,' as tritones are called, as a foundation on which pieces are built, employing numbers systems, certain strict aesthetic principles, technical symmetries and structures... This is a visceral music that ropes in the intellect for an impressionistic day out... The record, everywhere, is exhilarating on a subliminal level.

...It's also nearly unstintingly engaging. ...Textural and in some ways teasing, the accretive nature of these pieces amounts to a surrounding by gradient... Nuances shimmer and peak then glowingly dissipate, the bodies of each track sprawl and coil in mutual co-dependence...

...it's germane to remember that at its heart this is a guitar album... Carefully picked harmonics ping against intricately chorded rhythmic runs, the patterns lively and ginger and fluid and utterly fascinating, especially when built on a throbbing monster bass and a proggy jazzy rock insistence of drum... That bass is key to this project's innate listenability, ploughing chest-rumbling furrows underneath each track and supplying the primal grounding that allows the rest of the structure to take whatever flight it must. The result is balance, which *Static Motion* as a whole more than artfully maintains...and it's that tension that gives at least this band's brand of minimalism an unexpectedly nervous buoyancy, too perpetually on edge to be defined as anything resembling 'relaxation music'. ...personally this year's first truly exciting discovery."

- Dave Cantrell, *Caught in the Carousel*, 2014

"The multinational instrumental quartet Sonar includes a mathematics professor, a software developer and a multimedia artist. In other words, not only can these guys play; they also have brains. ...they rely on symmetry, aesthetics and precision to create as much music with as little material as possible. The result? Repetition without redundancy. ...This is challenging listening for musical purists."

- Michael Popke, *Shepherd Express*, May 2014

"...tracks such as *Continuum* and *Shadowplay* have a deceptive intensity, evincing a zero tolerance policy when it comes to anything approaching flabby soloing. Consisting mostly of twinkling triton harmonics deployed in palindromic clusters and formations that sparkle and beguile, each player maintains an exacting precision... Not a single note is out of place during these nine tunes. Unbelievably taut, and unyielding direct...the excitement resides in rhythmic displacement and resulting tension. ...Had MC Escher made music instead of drawing impossible and perplexing perspectives, it would likely sound like Sonar."

- Sid Smith, *Prog Magazine / Teamrock.com*, February 11, 2014

"...there seems to be a resurgence of Minimalist ideas going on in rock music right now. ...What sets the Swiss four-piece apart is the comparative calm exuded by their music...*Static Motion* sees the band wrestling with an old dilemma...that revolves around the difficulty to represent stasis by musical means. ...the title track can be viewed as a statement of intent.

...Paradoxically, it's the ceaseless activity of what I assume to be micro-intervals that accounts for a sense of stasis here, whereas the slower-moving melody that eventually creeps into the song is at first perceived as an actual forward motion. Once they run parallel to each other, however, the "giant steps" of said melody – which references Mahavishnu's *Meeting of the Spirits* – seem to be not moving forward at all; all of a sudden, this melody is more akin to the image of a mountain as mirrored in a lake, seemingly solid and yet constantly blurred...by ripples in the water.

...the main strength of this record: its evocative power. ...*Static Motion* manages time and again to envelop the listener in a vivid atmosphere. ...listen to how the guitar in "Continuum" seems to tell tales of bygone times, recalling Takoma Records-fingerpickers like John Fahey. ...this Minimalist resurgence may continue as far as I'm concerned – if future contributions are as strong as Sonar's, that is. 4 stars"

- Julian Eidenberger, *The Free Jazz Collective*, June 2, 2014

"Sonar's sound architecture is complex and raw... It strikes with surgical precision and is full of young and vigorous energy. ...*Static Motion* bewitches with unique sonic rituals that beautifully combine mystery and power. ...No sequencers, loops or computers. Everything is done live, with just a bit of reverb and tremolo. Together they explore the possibilities of their own self-created sonic universe, which is heavily infused with the tritone interval, also known as "the devil's interval" or the "devil in music." Each one of these sonic rituals moves like a crafty cyborg serpent which often changes its color and shape. Sometimes the music lurks and twists, sometimes it lures and stings. ...These guys are all about playing together as a crystallized unit that generates deadly wholes by equally combining its members' strengths. ...They operate dynamically within the boundaries which their unique formula sets, and this nurtures electricity and tension. ...captivating music by four skillful guys who think outside of the box and defy classification."

- *Igloo Magazine*, February 2014

"...*Static Motion*...one of the most exhilarating listens of 2014 thus far. Creating progressive rock without the presence of shifting effects and textures, their snake-like harmonizing is a fascinating gift to the spectrum of modern rock music. There's a raw level of energy that resides within the fabric of the groups core... Highly technical and expressive, this is some of the best rock music I have heard in years... Cuneiform Records has been presenting some of the most innovative modern experimental music and this group is one of our favorite finds from anything the label has sent us. The group has released an official music video...Produced by Nordhang Film, the film is a montage of performance clips that flows very well with the albums title track."

- *Sound Colour Vibration*, January 18, 2014

"Rating: 4 Stars. The quartet of Stephen Thelen, Christian Kuntner, Manuel Pasquinelli, and Bernhard Wagner use an interesting strategy in developing their music. ...where this gets very interesting is in how the band members vary the song dynamics. Within their fairly minimal approach lies intriguing variation, mood, dynamics and theme. ...all of this is fairly harmonically advanced; there is a lot going on under the surface. I am impressed. ...I highly recommend this."

- Dana Lawrence, *Sea of Tranquility*, February 10, 2014

"...If ever the old maxim "less is more" applies, then it is to Sonar's taut and economic journeys into lands of high tension and fraught expectation. *Static Motion* was recorded to a set of strict parameters, eschewing virtuosity and soloing for tight ensemble playing, and outlawing conventional harmonies and 4/4 in favour of polyrhythms and tritone tunings...

...The pieces develop along exact lines with a clinical precision...the laser-guided melodies can suck you into a hypnotic vortex it is difficult to escape from. ...the track *Landslide* is built around the simplest of repeated bass lines with the two guitars playing counter melodies and rhythms that serve to slowly ratchet up the tension degree by degree. Hypnotic and mantra-like the tune ends in what seems like the blink of an eye but in reality, five minutes have passed.

...*Shadowplay* takes the minimalism a stage further... Fascinating stuff, and at the same time quite eerie. ...The sound on this album has a wonderful clarity, particularly the bass guitar, which comes through on a track like *Tranceportation*, where its quiet sonorous insistence is an aural wonder to behold. The drummer uses the rim a lot and this adds to his deftness of touch throughout. ...This is most assuredly music as an intellectual exercise, and as such the listener has to be in the right frame of mind to enjoy it."

- Roger Trenwith, *The Progressive Aspect*, April 8, 2014

"10 Best Albums of 2014 So Far. ... what 10 albums **Prog Sphere** extracted as the highlights of the first five months of 2014. ...#1 Sonar: *Static Motion*"....

- Nikola Savic, *Prog-Sphere*, May 15, 2014

Excerpts from Recent Articles On / Interviews With Sonar:

Guitar Player, August 2014: “Minimalist Mavericks: Sonar’s Stephan Thelen and Bernhard Wagner Recast the Rock Groove” by Anil Prasad

“...The Swiss quartet’s minimalist-groove compositions on its second release *Static Motion* were designed to break new ground by invoking a series of carefully architected rules and processes. The band’s system manifests itself in a pattern-based approach that relies on concepts of negative space and iterative rhythmic progressions, and its sound traverses prog-rock, new music, ambient, and funk. ...

What is Sonar’s Mission?

Thelen: To fuse a minimal aesthetic with the visceral power and dynamic range of a progressive rock band. ...I created a new tuning in which the guitar is tuned to tritons – C-F#-C-F#-C-F#. ...We all loved the natural harmonics of the tuning and decided to go one step further and play as much as possible only using these harmonics. That led us to a whole new harmonic system that we call “*tritone harmonics*,” and that has a rather dark, mysterious, and strangely addictive timbre totally unlike anything you could create with conventional major or minor harmonics.

... Describe how your minimalist concept extends to the realm of effects.

Wagner: It’s part of the sound concept of Sonar to only use reverb. ...it reminds and encourages me to experiment with different sound qualities obtainable only by different playing techniques. I’ve started choosing guitar picks specific to the pieces we play. ...

Another aspect involves playing harmonics. ...

What’s your perspective on how pattern-based music affects the perceptions of listeners?

Thelen: Gradually evolving, pattern-based music gives the listener a much more active liberating role in the ritual of performing music. ...It’s about players and the listener being together in the same space at the same moment in time, standing in awe of the seemingly infinite power of music, and working together to gradually create something remarkable.”...

Guitar Moderne, 2014: “Introducing: Sonar” by Michael Ross

“King Crimson and Nik Bärtsch’s Ronin have proved that music can be simultaneously mathematical and emotional. Sonar...create their own style of minimal and experimental groove music. The aim of the guitarists was to create a new sound, not by using effects and technology, but by tuning their guitars to tritones (C F# C F# C F#) and by concentrating on the harmonics of that tuning.

Thelen explains the Sonar concept:

“Historically, Pythagoras is considered to be the first person who had the profound insight that hidden behind the apparent variety and complexity of nature and the cosmos there is a pattern and an order that can be expressed by remarkably simple mathematical ideas. ...

In spirit, Sonar is a very Pythagorean band. Numbers are everywhere in our music—not only in the tuning and in the harmonic material, but also in our approach to odd meters and polyrhythms...

In the wake of Pythagoras, we also believe that a composition is most satisfying if...there is a simple idea that organically generates this complexity.”

This is one way of looking at Sonar’s music... Either way, Sonar’s sound is gorgeous and thoroughly enjoyable.”

Innerviews, 2014: “Sonar: Infinite Power” by Anil Prasad

“...founder and guitarist Stephan Thelen set out some key principles to adhere to during the making of the album. The goal was to encourage the band...to work on a blank canvas. ...the musicians were free to create without the limitations of traditional forms.

The group agreed to avoid conventional major/minor harmonie, but concentrate on tritone harmonics. Routine 4/4 beats were outlawed while polyrhythms and isorhythms were celebrated. ...

The end result is an album of sculpture-like compositions in which every contour serves a purpose. In fact, each piece on the album involves its own organizational construct situated within an overarching hierarchy to communicate the group’s vision, as Thelen explained in detail during this conversation.

Define the mission of Sonar?

...Our main objective was to fuse a minimal aesthetic with the visceral power and dynamic range of a progressive rock band. Minimal music, especially the early music of Steve Reich, is a great influence on all of us... We had also all been listening to Nik Bärtsch’s Ronin... We really liked the way they combined repetitive minimal music with...funk and jazz...and we thought that we could do something similar with...rock... We...wanted a new and unique sound that would set us apart from all other bands. For me, it was important to find a solution to that challenge that didn’t rely on new technology, but on the strength of an idea. ...

Another key point in minimalistic philosophy...is the somewhat paradoxical idea that in order to find new ideas, it is often better to **reduce** your options. Self-imposed limitations can give you a surprisingly strong sense of freedom...there are so many things you don’t really need.

Intentional restrictions also sharpen your focus and force you to think harder, clearer and more creatively. We decided to use this principle not only for the musical material, but also for our equipment. ...

In addition to a new sound and new harmonies, we also wanted to find a new rhythmic language. Western music is incredibly underdeveloped when it comes to rhythmic complexity. ...I always loved odd meters and in Sonar, we...take that a few steps further by simultaneously playing two or more rhythms in different, often odd-metered time signatures to get really complex interlocking patterns and polyrhythms. ...This can be a real challenge...and only really works—and **grooves**—if the musicians listen very closely to each other and the drummer can hold it all together. ...

A further important idea was to place collective group efforts way ahead of any form of individual showboating. We wanted to play more like a chamber orchestra that serves the needs of the music rather than a collection of soloists. ...

How do you know when a piece is complete?

... A piece is finished when there is nothing more that you can take away... a piece is finished when the original concept or idea of the piece has been exposed with a maximum amount of clarity and elegance.

Do you consider the entire group to be a collective rhythm section?

...The rhythmic aspect is certainly the most important and advanced element of our music...a melody tells a story in linear time while a pattern creates an atmosphere in vertical time. ...in Sonar we are more interested in creating atmospheres that give the listeners...their own thoughts...

What rhythm traditions influence Sonar’s output?

Odd-metered music in general is a very important influence, especially traditional music of Hungary and Bulgaria, including the music of Béla Bartók, and of course progressive music from the ‘70s, such as King Crimson and Mahavishnu Orchestra. ...if you combine an odd-metered rhythm with an even backbeat to a polyrhythm...you can get very interesting results because you have a constant shifting of down- and upbeats which keeps the music alive and moving. So, polyrhythmic music in general is the second strong influence, especially the polymetrical groove music that was developed in Switzerland by Don Li and Nik Bärtsch in the first years of the new millennium. ...