

The Beat Fräuleins

by Jens Keller

Why hasn't there been a collection like this before, when most other European female singers of the 60s have already been charted, evaluated and pressed onto a shiny silver disc? It could be argued that Germany's girls are widely regarded musically as Europe's ugly stepsister. Its Fräuleins will always be measured against two much-admired beauties: the UK's Brit girls and the French Yéyé mademoiselles. The Brits were at the forefront of musical ingenuity. This was, after all, the decade of the British musical invasion and the UK was the very epicentre of pop. The French on the other hand, had nonchalantly invented a new type of Lolita singer – provocative, flirtatious and at the same incredible stylish and cool.

And while the Fräuleins might not sing like Dusty or look like Sylvie, we ask you to take a step back, listen and recognise their individual charms. These young Germans were not as insipid as their collective reputation might lead you to believe.

They were part of the first post-war teen generation. For the first time, they were actually allowed to have fun, after the years of austerity that it took to rebuild a war-torn Germany. Rock 'n' roll and beat had swept over the country and couldn't even be stopped by the wall that was dividing it. This wave of new influences merged with the local schlager sound and formed its own hybrid of new German pop music.

What the Germans brought to this mix was the catchiness and straightforwardness of schlager and a severe dedication to fine-tuning. Krautrock and Kraftwerk were still a decade away, but there was a certain playfulness that hinted at things to come.

We have carefully selected 19 slices of German girl pop that should prove that these Fräuleins have no reason to hide bashfully behind their European sisters.

1. Brigitt: ... da beisst ein Goldfisch an

1968, single A-side

Columbia C 23 923

There are many reasons why we open the set with this track. First of all, it's a wonderful exotic pop extravaganza that should refute all notions that German music is dowdy and boring in one swift blow. OK, we admit it's not an entirely homemade product – pop connoisseurs will recognise this as a cover version of "Watch 'n' Chain" by the Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation, but still. Secondly, singer Brigitt Petry represents both Germanys of the 60s. She started as a singer for East Germany's Amiga label and continued her career in the West after she switched borders in 1965. Thirdly – on a much sadder note – most of Brigitt's recordings are largely forgotten due to her untimely demise in a mysterious car accident at the tender age of 28. As far as we know, this is the first time any of her tracks has been re-released on CD. We hope it's not the last.

2. Joy and The Hit Kids: Das Glück dieser Welt

1967, single B-side

Decca D 19 878

Can Germans do soul? Joy Fleming is undoubtedly one of the most soulful voices Germany has to offer and we're proud to have this very early track by her on our collection. Back then Joy was still accompanied by her backing band The Hit Kids. A few years later they would change their name to Joy Unlimited and turn to a more

adult gospel-rock sound. “Das Glück dieser Welt” is a powerful soul track with a breathtaking, soaring vocal arrangement that can keep up with Motown’s finest. The nod to Detroit’s premier record label continues on the other side of this single, which is a German version of The Supremes’ “The Happening”.

3. Marion: Er ist wieder da

1965, single A-side

Hansa 18 516 AT (1965)

This is most likely THE quintessential Beat Fräulein track by THE quintessential Beat Fräulein herself: Marion. Back in 1965 German über-producer Christian Bruhn had just hit the jackpot with Drafi Deutscher’s “Marmor, Stein und Eisen bricht” when he sat down to write a song for his latest protégé, Marion Litterscheid. Keen observers will notice that both songs share a similar structure of alternating louder and softer parts. Bruhn’s vision for Marion’s material was to “keep it simple, keep it sexy, keep it sad”. And no one could deliver simple, sexy and sad like Marion. “Er ist wieder da” would climb all the way to #6 in the German charts and would become Marion’s calling card for years to come. She was also the first German female singer to appear in Radio Bremen’s legendary “Beat Club” TV show. The song proved so successful that it spawned several cover versions: Peggy March’s “He’s Back Again” for the American market, in France it became Katty Line’s “Puisque tu dors, j’ose te le dire” and in Belgium Liliane (Saint-Pierre) cut it as “Il est revenu”.

4. Dominique: Das Schlüsselkind

1966, from the LP “Krieg im Frieden”

Polydor 249 078

At first glance this appears to be a classic example of a 60s protest song, but all is not what it seems. Rumour has it that singer Dominique wasn’t really interested in politics at all when Polydor tried to establish her as the first female German protest singer. And while we cannot validate this information, we can definitely say that things didn’t work out for Polydor, as all of Dominique’s records failed to chart. On her sole LP, however, hidden amongst some very predictable cover versions of “Where Have All The Flowers Gone” and “Blowin’ In The Wind”, lurks this little gem about the proverbial “latchkey kid”. The song’s lyrics find Dominique in court, defending herself against some serious armed robbery charges using the old I-had-a-tough-childhood routine. Hmm, not sure they will fall for that, Dominique, but your song sure rocks.

5. Anita Weibel: Was hab’ ich getan

1966, single B-side

Electrola E 23 539

The sleeve of this 45 tells us that Anita Weibel, a “proficient stenographer from Hockenheim”, got her big break when she finished as the runner-up in the talent show “Der grofle Start”. We presume by ‘big break’ they meant she was allowed to cut this single with producer Hans Blum. Both tracks are actually quite good, but we like the B-side, a bittersweet rendition of Johnny Tillotson’s “Please Don’t Go Away”, slightly more. Anita made two more 45s for another label under the name Anita La Rose, but the flowery nom de plume didn’t take off either. Her real big break came eventually when Anita was asked to join mexican lounge band Cabana for a two week tour, which turned into a 10 year engagement. In the 80s she returned to Germany, but we hear that Anita is still a force to be reckoned with in Hockenheim where she regularly performs at local oldie nights.

6. Patty Pay: Bilder und Briefe

1967, single B-side

Columbia C 23 537

And on the subject of talent shows, this singer, known in her Dutch homeland as Patricia Paay, is a judge on the TV show "Holland's Got Talent" nowadays. Her three German singles for EMI are long forgotten, but we simply love this little musical soap opera. In it, poor Patty finds out that her best friend has stolen her boyfriend and the girl in question decides to inform her about this matter with a catty phone call. "He loves just me, he's staying with me, I'm really sorry, but you can't blame me," she hisses. All this is set to an effervescent soundscape courtesy of Michael Kunze and Mister Eurovision himself, Ralph Siegel.

7. Caterina Valente: Kismet

1965, single A-side

Decca D 19 761

No need to introduce Caterina Valente, one of the most successful and versatile showbiz acts from the 1950s onwards and a truly international star. Equally at home with bossa nova, jazz and schlager, Valente was never afraid to venture into new territory and this captivating song from 1967 proves just that. Her seductive vocals deliver a poignant message that is surprisingly in tune with the women's-lib movement of the day: "Do men know what women dream about? Should we ask them?" she wonders. Only to answer her own question with a disillusioned, "Ah, forget about it! Just keep on dreaming."

8. Ingela Brander: Es ist noch lange nicht zu spät

1967, from the LP "Party mit Ingela"

Philips 843 949 PY

This buxom blonde from Sweden could not only act (she appeared alongside Rex Gildo in the movie *Zwei blaue Vergissmeinnicht*) and sing, she also played the saxophone. Yet somehow her career in Germany never really took off. She released a couple of singles for the Philips label and her sole German LP, "Party mit Ingela", is a hard-to-find rarity nowadays. We think this album is a real treasure trove and present this track, a cover of Wayne Fontana & The Mindbenders' "It's Just A Little Bit Too Late", as a taster.

9. Inga: The Beat Goes On

1967, single A-side

Decca 19 661

Inga Rumpf is a bona-fide rock star and songwriter, who defies all typecasting and conventions. One of her songs has even been recorded by the mighty Tina Turner. Throughout the 60s Inga was part of the influential folk band The City Preachers, but she also released several solo singles for Decca. Here she covers Sonny & Cher's "The Beat Goes On" and while the German lyrics omit the musical history lesson of the original, the groove is still intact.

10. Conny Froboess: Und das Leben geht weiter

1966, single B-Side

EMI Electrola E 23 216

Even though Conny was only 23 when she released this surprisingly introspective track, we could say that this was her coming-of-age record. She had already had spent over 15 years in the media spotlight as a singer, actress and the nation's number one sweetheart. By the time of this song's release in 1966, Conny was desperate to shed her teen image. Musically, this number is as far removed from her saccharine signature tune, "Zwei kleine Italiener", as possible. A year later Conny would become Cornelia and quit music altogether to concentrate on her acting. This proved a smart move, as she snapped up the prestigious Ernst Lubitsch prize for her role in "Rheinsberg" (1968).

11. Monique & The Lions: Er sah mich im Regen

1966, single A-side

CCA 5022

If you are looking for garage sounds on this compilation, this is your track. The now highly collectable CCA label created a uniquely authentic beat sound, quite different to the polished sound of Germany's major studios. The very first CCA single is an instrumental affair credited to Monique & Les Tridents. France's Monique Battenberg, just 14 at the time, was discovered while she was on a camping holiday in Germany. She was playing the organ with a band that just happened to be there, Les Tridents, and the two tracks were recorded right then and there. A year later she would return to CCA as a singer to record this German cover of The Hollies' "Bus Stop" with her own band, The Lions.

12. Dorte: Darauf fall' ich nicht rein (Come On My Boy)

1966, Single B-side

Philips 345 895 PF

Post-war Germany had a great appetite for everything exotic and foreign, probably a subliminal desire to reconnect with the rest of the world. So it's no surprise that some of the bestselling girls on the schlager scene were imported beauties, often from Scandinavia (Gitte, Wencke Myhre, Siw Malmkvist etc). Denmark's Dorte is another example of this phenomenon and even though she is mostly known for her run-of-the-mill novelty tunes ("Wärst Du doch in Düsseldorf geblieben") she gave beat music a go when she recorded this lively number in 1966, written by none other than James Last. Curiously, Brit girl duo The Caravelles released their own version of the song the same year, but neither made it into the charts.

13. Ruth Brandin und die Sputniks: Mich hat noch keiner beim Twist geküsst

1964, single A-side

Amiga 4 50 452

The songs so far have all been West German productions, but on other side of the Iron Curtain, Fräuleins were just as busy making pop music. Ruth Brandin was East Germany's uncrowned queen of twist and this track, which teams her up with local band The Sputniks, is one of her finest moments. Between 1962 and 1970 Ruth was one of the bestselling artists in the Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat, but towards the end of the decade she became increasingly dissatisfied with her role as the eternal teenager. When she refused to collaborate with the infamous Stasi security police, Amiga put the singer into a non-active status and effectively ended her career.

14. Chris Doerk: ...und dann bist Du nicht mehr allein

1968, split single B-side

Amiga 4 50 704

Pixie-haired Chris Doerk is another girl from the GDR and is perhaps best remembered as one half of East Germany's Schlager-Traumpaar Chris & Frank with her real-life partner Frank Schöbel. Together they starred in the 1968 film 'Heisser Sommer', a stylish, beautifully choreographed musical that puts West German Schlager movies of the time to shame. This ballad from the same year finds Chris at her best: a funky/mellow organ track overlaid with some seductive, dream-like vocals by Fräulein Doerk.

15. Simone: Gelegenheit macht Diebe

1967, single B-side

Telefunken U 55 967

Simone was the short-lived (and involuntary) pseudonym of power voice Gitta MacKay, one of Germany's most prolific vocalists. Though few may recognise her name, most of you will know her work. When Gitta came to Telefunken and got a copy of her own single, she was more than surprised that she had now become Simone. Apparently, the execs thought she looked like a Simone and didn't think it was necessary to inform her. After this, Gitta joined 70s vocal group Love Generation and also worked as an in-demand session singer for the likes of Giorgio Moroder and Donna Summer. She was one of the original voices on Silver Convention's "Fly Robin Fly", provided the trademark scream on Penny McLean's hit "Lady Bump" and also made some disco records under the name Jackie Robinson. In the 80s she was part of successful girl group The Hornettes. Gitta recently gave a farewell concert, but is still active in the music business.

16. Jacob Sisters: Was hab ich dir getan?

1965, single A-side

CBS 1850

The German language doesn't have word that directly translates 'camp', but if you had to explain the term, you might use the Jacob Sisters to define it. Love them or hate them, these irrepressible siblings are the closest thing to a proper girl group that Germany could come up with. Eva, Johanna, Rosi and Hannelore (and their four canine friends) can look back on a career that lasted over 50 years and took them from humble Saxony to glittering Las Vegas and back. In a classic case of East meets West, the sisters paid tribute to America's biggest girl group of the day, The Supremes, when they covered "Stop! In The Name Of Love" in their own incomparable manner. Now if only The Supremes had retaliated by stealing one their hits, preferably that one about the garden gnome.

17. Pitty und ihre Beatchicks: Teenage Love

1965, single B-side

Decca 19 678

And the next track also echoes the sound of Motown's biggest girl group. We are not sure who exactly the Beatchicks were, but they deliver some intense, Supremes-inspired backing vocals on this beat-tastic track from 1965. "Teen, teen, teen, age, age, age, love love love love love love!" What we can reveal is that Pitty was a moniker used by Denmark's Jette Ziegler. Jette released a number of singles in English, German and Danish in the 60s, but none of them brought her much success. By the end of the decade she had left showbusiness to pursue another career as... a hairdresser. Hair today, gone tomorrow.

18. Renate Kern: Kiss And Shake

1965, single A-side

Polydor 52 506

Interestingly, it was James Last's brother Werner who discovered the unique, sonorous voice of Renate Kern. Kern's debut single was indeed quite a shaker compared to her later material, which leaned towards a more traditional schlager sound. The song was so successful that London's prestigious Pye records invited her to cut an English version. In spite of the anglophile title, the Brits decided to call their version "Now And Then" and that particular 7" has now become one of the most sought-after collectors' item amongst Renate Kern fans.

19. Wencke Myhre: Einsamer Boy

1967, single B-side

Polydor 52 746

We close the set with a gentle lullaby by another Scandinavian export who became immensely popular in Germany: Wencke Myhre. She was already a star in Norway when she came over to Germany and began recording under the expert supervision of band leader James Last. The combination proved to be gold and resulted in a string of highly successful and often very, very cheerful hits. On "Einsamer Boy" we find Wencke in a more pensive mood. A tale of unrequited teenager love unfolds in front of us, accompanied by some finely tuned strings that could melt a heart of stone.