

KARL BARTOS

Album: "Communication" (Out: 8 September 2003)

www.karlbartos.com

When Karl Bartos produces music, he spends hours filling up his old IBM with digital data so that the speech synthesis system can understand amplitudes, formants and vocal transients and actually speak to him, before watching a little "Sesame Street" – without the sound. Then he might scroll through the writings of media theoretician and critic Neil Postman or cut in a sentence from the works of Bret Easton Ellis, so that the speech synthesis has something to say.

"Let me recreate the world for you"

"Communication", the first solo Karl Bartos album since the Electric Music project ("Esperanto", "Electric Music"), works on something like the same principle of a camera obscura: the light of the outside world beams into a dark room through a tiny hole, projecting an image onto the wall. The image is upside down, but you can see it quite clearly.

Concept album is a terrible term. "Communication" may well be a thematic entity, but it is in no way a hermetic reflection of the surreal, absurd media world, which no longer distinguishes between war and a gameshow, between Noddy and the News. A world where "B. B. King" actually rhymes with "anything"; where we amuse ourselves to death - 'Please, Mr Postman, look and see!'

Karl Bartos, an accomplished and highly trained percussionist until the invention of the MIDI Standard, has an acute self-awareness as an entertainer. The former Kraftwerk mastermind fled from the monsters he inadvertently created, spending two years in England with Bernard Sumner (New Order) and Johnny Marr (formerly of The Smiths), and leaving us to it with techno-overkill and 909 bass drums. In the year of the stay-away Y2K crash, he released just the one single, "15 Minutes of Fame". Now he is coming back.

"Stars ain't what they used to be"

So take off the dataglove and cast the ones and zeros aside. For "Communication", performed live for the first time in July at London's ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art), requires all of the tactile senses. This is music as an emotional experience. Bartos can manipulate the old IBM with just the same mastery as the Logic Audio. But he is as uninterested in the old filter to filter interaction as he is in the bass knob at 350 Hertz. Those kind of things just slow you down. It is not for nothing that Bartos worked for two years before 16 songs were reduced to 10.

And what songs they are! Karl Bartos knows his history and has a unique ability to update it with contemporary methods. 80s soundscapes with modern beats and loops. Catchy melodies re-worked thematically by somebody educated on the counterpoint and the finer points of harmonics. Call it Electro – B. B. King / anything. And everything revolves around one thing – the song.

Karl Bartos' sound unites – transcending the generations. The single "I'm the Message", for which Bartos conceived the computer-animated, pop-art style video, producing it with Weissraum in Hamburg, was remixed by Orbital and Felix Da Housecat.

It's almost like the invention of the Polaroid: Karl Bartos' work reminds you of what it is to be amazed. It is difficult to say where the world ends and "Communication" begins. The music draws the world in effortlessly, giving expression to an inner world. In fact, it is all so natural that the record becomes a part of you. You just press play and suddenly it happens. You become the music and the music becomes you.