

AN ODE TO KRAFTWERK

the original computer geeks

By **CARY DARLING**
STAR-TELEGRAM POP CULTURE CRITIC

Go ahead and ask producer Jeremy Kolosine just how influential a group of reclusive, classically trained, middle-aged German men who record under the name Kraftwerk – and hasn't had a hit in nearly 30 years – has been on young computer nerds and electronic musicians. Some might be surprised by his answer.

"It's the equivalent of saying 'What effect has Star Wars had on science fiction and popular culture?'" he says. "The impact Kraftwerk has had on electronic music, and popular music in general, is second only to the Beatles and James Brown."

To celebrate his love of the Düsseldorf electronic foursome who believe in computers *über alles* – best-known in the U.S. for their odes to technology ranging from *Autobahn* in the '70s to *Pocket Calculator* and *Numbers* in the '80s – and pretty much invented the concept of geek as pop star, Kolosine rounded up a group of fellow electronic musicians for a tribute album. But instead of using traditional synthesizers, they work in "bitpop" or "chip tunes," a decidedly low-tech amalgam of sounds generated on classic video game consoles, old 8-bit home computers and aging hand-held gaming devices.

The result is the endearingly retro and charmingly funky *8-Bit Operators: The Music of Kraftwerk*, whose beeps, blips and glitches recall a

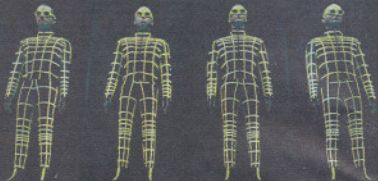
slightly earlier technological golden age. While the disc definitely speaks to everyone's inner geek, the Kraftwerk music at its core has been highly influential on a wide range of performers. From art-rock to hip-hop, synth-pop to techno, the reverberations of Kraftwerk's electro revolution are still being felt today. (Coldplay even lifted the melody of the hit *Talk* from Kraftwerk's 1981 *Computer Love*, and U2 recently covered their 1978 track *Neon Lights*.)

So Kolosine was a little nervous when meeting Kraftwerk's Ralf Hutter after a concert by the group in New York last year. He passed along to him a sample of the compilation. Later, Hutter said he enjoyed it and even offered some editing suggestions.

Kolosine hopes to release a follow-up featuring some of the more well-known Kraftwerk covers (*Trans-Europe Express*) that didn't make the current set. Plus, he wants to organize a series of live *8-Bit* shows which, if previous bitpop concerts are any indication, he admits may not attract the most fashion-forward of crowds.

"I'm trying to add the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll," he jokes. "There is that whole 'beauty and the geek' thing going on. . . . But what you see is mostly geeky guys of different ages, anything from younger kids up to those in their mid-40s."

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Kraftwerk

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