



Above: *Misty Island* single, 1969.

Right: The Petards at home in Schrecksbach, ca. early 1969.

L to R: Arno, Roger, Klaus, Horst.



## Chapter 6: Hitshock

chorus "Misty Island" was their most overtly commercial song to date, and not without its charms. But it's completely overshadowed by the B-side, the dark, doom-laden heavy psychedelic epic "Tartarex." The band brought all of their creative energies to bear on this three-minute multi-sectioned masterpiece: an arresting lead vocal, propulsive fuzz guitar, shuddering bass runs, dramatic, layered vocal harmonies, ghostly Mellotron passages, and an eerie spoken section. The song is about mortality and the passage of time. Tartarex is described in the lyrics as a mythical king who could stop the movement of time with his hand. The spoken section and last chorus:

*"Tartarex was the so called Rex Temporis  
Or, if you prefer, King of Time.  
He lived at my side from 112 AC until 1962.  
Then he left.  
Left me standing in the eager sea of time  
Trying to hold my share  
of sand grains in the hand.  
But I realize I won't be able to save  
even one golden grain.  
I intend to be like Tartarex.  
Just to hold the time like Tartarex."*

For years I wondered about the origins of the almighty time god Tartarex. I could find no mention of him in Greek or Norse mythology, so perhaps something German, derived from the ancient lore of their particular region? Or maybe something from the poetry of Goethe or Schiller? Roger provided the answer: "The title 'Tartarex,' the king of time: Horst got the idea at breakfast: in the morning he ate a vegetarian sausage from the health food store called Tartex, which then became Tartarex."

The king of time is a vegetarian sausage. And people say Germans have no sense of humor. Horst Ebert: we salute you.

By the later summer of 1969, it was time to make another album. In the preceding months the Ebert brothers had written a dozen or more exceptional new songs, which the band had tuned and calibrated to perfection, and with several hundred live performances under their belts they were in peak condition when they reported to Siggie Loch at Trixi Ton Studios.

"In September 1969 we recorded the LP *Hitshock* in Munich," Roger recalls, "one of our best records. After more than two years of professional career you can feel the maturity of the songs and the arrangements, not beat or Krautrock, just the unique style of the Petards. The advanced studio technology also contributed to this: 12 tape tracks were available for the recordings. This is shown in the 'band report,' [studio track log] which was originally shown on the back of the cover. The cover photo and accompanying color poster were taken by noted photographer Will McBride."

As great as their previous album is, *Hitshock* is arguably the Petards' pinnacle, the record where the enormity of their potential was fully realized. Every note, every transition, every nuance and detail is perfectly placed and balanced. Every one of the album's twelve songs is outstanding and distinctively original: they sound like no one else except the Petards. Their versatility is impressive. Hard-driving rockers like "Take Me, Shake Me," "Keep On," "Stone By Now" and the feedback-soaked "Roaver on the Roam" are contrasted by melodic pop-psych groovers like "Sunshine Rainshine" and "Pictures" (reminiscent of the Idle Race), haunting, luminous ballads like "The Dream" and "Mekka" (both with Klaus on piano and flute), the tripped-out, seductively eerie "Special Sunset for a Lady," and—the album's sleeper track—the mystical, percussive, jazz-tinged "Ruins of Tookamoon." "Blue Fire Light" has a ferocious, high-powered rhythmic groove with Klaus

doubling on Hammond organ and lead guitar as well as delivering a soul-scorching lead vocal worthy of Steve Marriott. And "My World" is full of Wagnerian pomp and thunder with its intense vocals, booming bass, dramatically crashing drums, precise, binding rhythm guitar and magnificent volcanic fuzz. A monolithic song about life and death and music: "If you lived forever / And I wouldn't die / No sounds would come together / No lovely tune would fly..." Only death completes the song.

The album was released at the beginning of 1970 in an eye-catching gatefold cover with the band on the front dressed as 1930s gangsters, wielding machine guns and carrying a naked, blood-stained mannequin. "HITSHOCK, a synthesis between commercial sound and psychedelic sound," the liner notes explain. "Get shocked!"

Ahead of the album's release, though, there was another single, "Everybody Knows Matilda" backed with "Blue Fire Light," issued by Liberty in October 1969. "Everybody Knows Matilda" was the first and only time the 'real' Petards released a song under their own name that wasn't written by the Ebert brothers. The original version, by Canadian singer Duke Baxter, had been a minor hit in America earlier that

