

Lake

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Lake – The German Doobie-Beachboy-Steely-Dans

“Commercial songs – presented in a sophisticated manner,” this was already on Alex Conti’s mind during the time when the well reputed Blues Rock guitarist joined the Hamburg outfit LAKE in October 1975 – “on the second day”, in the ancient biblical sense. A stylistic mix giving The Beach Boys, The Doobie Brothers and Steely Dan a run for their money impressed the Rock scene as well as the media: Backing the sound-defining lead singer James Hopkins-Harrison, this quintet was able to present delicate four-part harmonies as well as Jazz Rock grooves - and their soloing was world class also. In 1973, this German-British Rock group had gone out as a horn-assisted Big Band in Chicago and BS&T style, defined by members of the Hamburg Top 40 gang The Tornados: featuring lead singer Ian Cussick, bass player Martin Tiefensee and drummer Dieter Ahrendt. They were joined by musicians from Gary Glitter’s Boston Showband – organ player Geoffrey Peacey and trumpet player Bernard Whelan.

For the band’s future West Coast Sound, this line-up seemed hardly typical. In order to arrive at their desired & definite style, they needed the sharp and sensitive voice of the Hanseatic Scotsman James Hopkins-Harrison. When Alex Conti joined Lake, leaving Germany’s leading rock group Atlantis, the band had found their sonic calling at last. LAKE proceeded to drive the hard slog through the club circuit of the Republic – and soon the songs and arrangements provided by producer Detlef Petersen and singer Hopkins Harrison really worked a treat.



The debut album LAKE, excellently sung and played and commercially oriented as it was, had been engineered “out in the country” by Abbey Road soundman Jerry Boys: the famous knob twiddler had served the Beatles, Pink Floyd and Yehudi Menuhin (!) from the other side of his glass partition – any need for a truly “bad” reputation? Jerry Boys and the Lake boys presented a sound which continues to impress even now, in 2010. Their LAKE collection hit the charts in 1976 the same way as the Gospel power single “Jesus Came Down” – pole position for a band which was able to move faster than even their media hype suggested – proved by a nationwide German tour with The Sutherland Brothers and Wishbone Ash. The harmony sound of those “Sailing” brothers Iain and Gavin Sutherland was topped as easily as the twin lead-guitars of Ash’s axemen Powell & Wisefield.



Results were the national disc award “Deutscher Schallplattenpreis” in April 1977, concert appearances with Genesis and gigantic open airs in Nuremburg and Karlsruhe with their role models Santana and Chicago. As far as their rough road anecdotes are concerned, one of them is a real horror nightmare even for our tough Lake warriors: During a US tour in 1977, it turned out that the band not only had a sixth sense in writing vocal harmonies, but also excelled in choosing air-planes. Lake musicians narrowly escaped the Lynyrd Skynyrd plane crash, because they had been booked for a radio session in Atlanta, Georgia prior to joining a Lynyrd-led festival.

LAKE were able to advance their record-breaking reputation even further in 1978. The second album LAKE II hit the shops with even more exquisite ideas than the debut, but had been created less organically. Alex Conti: “We had a gigantic budget and decided to record everything with separate multi-tracks, and in the process some of our feeling got lost” – >>>

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a fact that still does not distract from our listening pleasure. On festival sites such as Rotterdam and, again, Nuremburg, the band shared the bill with Bob Dylan. By 1979, the third album PARADISE ISLAND was in the can, but the infernal studio & tour grind left its casualties – keyboards, bass & producer gave up!

New friend – new fortunes: With the assistance of Chicago- and Beach Boys producer James Guercio, the long player OUCH! took shape in 1980 – sounding perfect all over again. But by now it was Alex Conti who couldn't face the pressure any more: "During the OUCH! sessions, I wasn't myself anymore because of my drug intake – I could not function as a reliable partner." The band cut their ties with him.



Hopkins-Harrison kept the Lake lot together, thanks to his legendary energy "on stage, off stage and backstage" – with revolving line-ups. CBS Records released a live double album ON THE RUN. During 1983 and 1984, the albums NO TIME FOR HEROES, VOICES and SO WHAT took shape, presenting easy-going commercially designed albums for Polydor with a light Funk touch. Alex Conti re-surfaced in a solo capacity – recording CONTI for the Metronome label in 1982 and CONTINUED for CBS in 1984, using no less than four ex LAKE musicians in the process. Then he started the power trio Rosebud, which – historically significant – featured the current, 2010 LAKE members Mickie Stickdorn and Holger Trull on drums and bass. Conti worked with Atlantis lead singer Inga Rumpf again and subsequently joined the Hamburg Blues Band. The LAKE laboratory finally came to a standstill in 1986. James Hopkins-Harrison suffered so much from the death of his „baby“, that the former engine driver of the band got lost in a fog of drugs and passed away in 1991.



In 2002, Detlef Petersen and Alex Conti faced the fact of their LAKE "addiction" and decided to check out suitable players for an imminent reunion. "Without Detlef, I would not have re-ignited this project", Conti stated in 2003. A further protagonist of those early days was taken on board – Ian Cussick, another Scotsman, who had managed to secure an impressive solo career during the 1980s. With him, the LAKE legend had actually started once. Mickie Stickdorn, an experienced drummer with the Rainer Bauman Band (guitarist with Atlantis predecessors Frumpy), Inga Rumpf, Hamburg's ex-Rattles singer Achim Reichel as well as Rosebud and Elephant, played next to Hamburg Blues Band bassman Bexi Becker, who confirmed: "LAKE were my boyhood heroes!" They were joined by keyboarder and soundtrack specialist George Kochbeck, who had done numerous projects with Conti.

Initial rehearsals and demo recordings sounded promising, until a stressful session allowed old demons to raise their ugly heads and showed the band that Cussick was still as excellent as he was excentric. Cut – with the utmost regret! Whatever – LAKE found a more than worthy successor in Scotsman number 3: Mike Starrs. He was as well known in London as he was loved in Hamburg – having been front man and vocalist for Jon Hiseman's Colosseum II as well as hard rockers Lucifer's Friend. Apart from that, British country fans had known him for years as Angel Montgomery.

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This LAKE band has been touring steadily since May 2002, re-constructing their combination of high harmony overkill and high adrenalin riffing and lovingly re-creating unforgotten classics like „Jesus Came Down“ or „Red Lake“ on a never-ending club tour. In February 2004, George Kochbeck decided to leave the LAKE re-incarnation – fully booked with film and TV music projects as he was. He got replaced by the experienced and reliable first rate Atlantis veteran Adrian Askew.

Soon, cries for a LAKE comeback album became louder. The well-oiled new line-up reacted in 2005 with BLAST OF SILENCE – and according to Mickie Stickdorn, “it was recorded in only twelve wonderful session days, with the complete package done and dusted!” LAKE guitarist Alex seemed to have found his ideal line-up, but confirms that the doors remain open for the legendary “Mark II” section of Tiefensee- Ahrendt-Peacey-Petersen.



Certainly, the songs on the new album sound as inspired as those of the “classic” LAKE era – featuring tremendous songs, fleshy riffs and rousing Hammond organ outbursts. Vocal power works in solo renditions courtesy of Mike Starrs and also in the high harmonies of Conti-Becker-Stickdorn-Askew, aided by a precise rhythmic engine room with tons of spare energy – and of course the inimitable guitar courtesy of Alex Conti. „Steely Dan with balls?“ Those veterans can live with that moniker.



The line-up continued to play live until 2008. For one year, Adrian Askew was replaced by Ingo Bischof, a German keyboard legend in bands such as Kraan and Karthago, and – what goes around – Alex was happy to have his old Rosebud mate Holger Trull back on board, playing bass. In 2009, Mike Starrs parted amicably from LAKE, and Ingo Bischof went back to his own attractive projects. The new front man and lead singer is Chris Thornton jr – he has been on tour with T.M. Stevens and was a member of Alex´ former retro rousers Rudolf Rock & Die Schocker. On keyboards there is Jens Skwirblies now, who played with Ian Cussick´s band for years and also backed Toto singer Bobby Kimball. Lloyd Anderson from Scotland is the new singer since November 2010.

The current line-up has already achieved a first major tour with remarkable reviews. At the end of February, the band picked up the unique, one-in-a-million opportunity of supporting the legendary cult band Lynyrd Skynyrd on their German tour. Thus, Alex Conti was able to share the stage with the Southern Rock heroes for an exciting third time in his career. The remainder of 2010 will be spent playing further spectacular gigs – for instance with Foreigner – and of course, the long awaited new CD has now passed the planning stages and is being prepared in earnest!



Alex Conti
lead guitar
backing vocals



Lloyd Anderson
lead vocals



Mickie Stickdorn
drums
backing vocals



Jens Skwirblies
keyboards
backing vocals



Holger Trull
bass
backing vocals