



BOWIE IN BERLIN

A NEW CAREER IN A NEW TOWN

Thomas Jerome Seabrook

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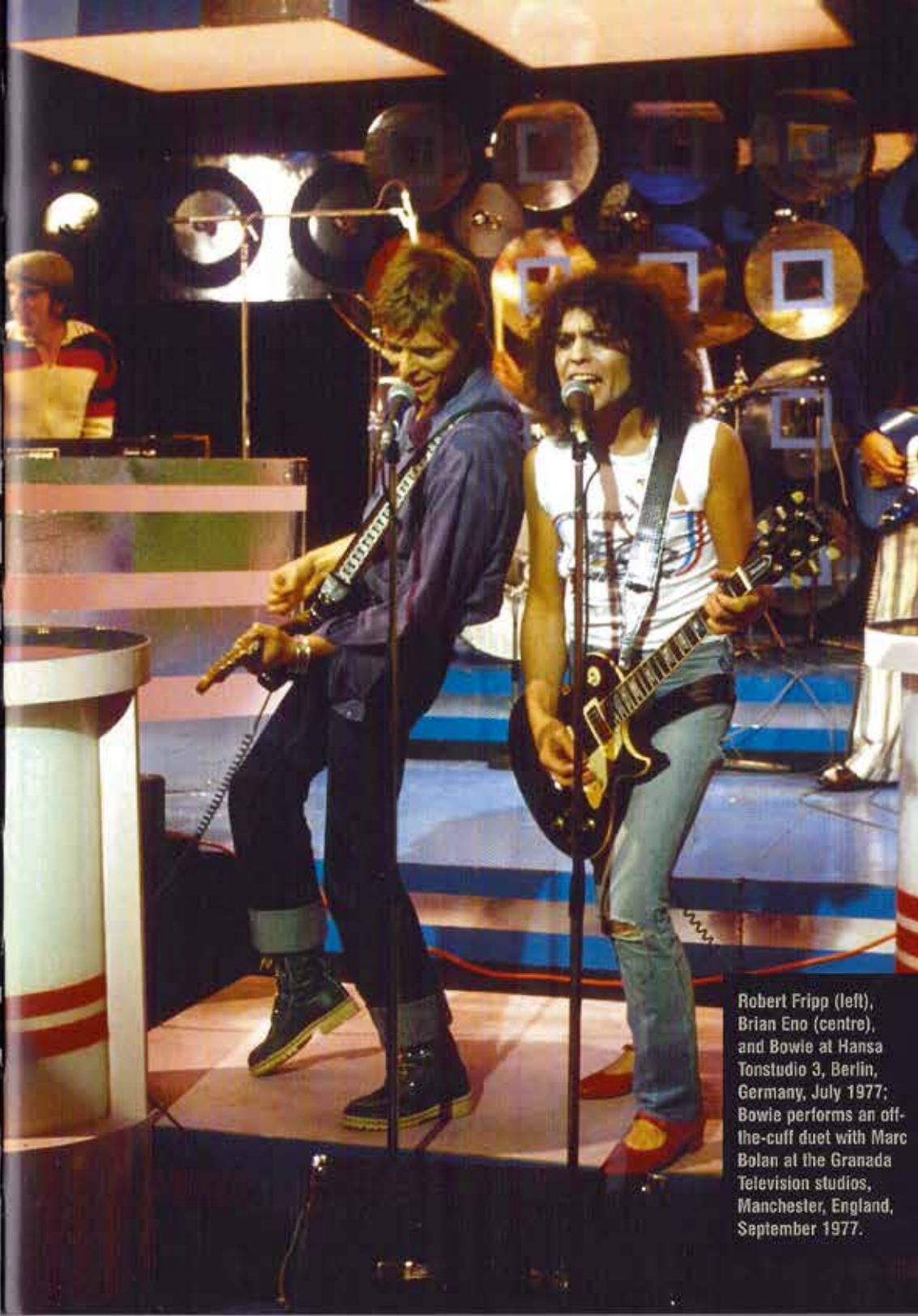
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Robert Fripp (left), Brian Eno (centre), and Bowie at Hansa Tonstudio 3, Berlin, Germany, July 1977; Bowie performs an off-the-cuff duet with Marc Bolan at the Granada Television studios, Manchester, England, September 1977.

included on Bowie's *Tonight* LP is hopelessly ill-judged, and sounds, bafflingly, like the work of somebody with no idea whatsoever of what made the original work.

FALL IN LOVE WITH ME 6:30

(Pop/Bowie/Sales/Sales)

Iggy Pop: vocals; **David Bowie:** organ; **Carlos Alomar:** guitar; **Ricky Gardiner:** drums; **Tony Sales:** guitar; **Hunt Sales:** bass.

■ *Lust For Life* ends with one of its most spontaneous, inspired songs, an epic of lust and yearning in the classic Iggy Pop style. Like so many other great musical moments, it came about almost by accident. During a lull in the recording sessions, Tony Sales picked up a guitar; his brother, Hunt, a bass; and Ricky Gardiner found himself behind the drum kit. Out of nowhere, 'Fall In Love With Me' was born.

Fortunately for all concerned, the tape was still rolling, capturing the original performance of the song in all its ramshackle glory. Bowie added a simple organ part and Alomar a sequence of lithe guitar-lines, to which Iggy responded with one of his finest sets of lyrics. Beginning his tale in "an old saloon" in West Berlin, he manages to make his favourite theme – unrequited love – sound as fresh and vital as ever. He then brings both song and album neatly to a close with the line: "When you're tumbling down / You just look better." He could be singing to himself, about Bowie, about Esther Friedmann, or any of the other characters in his life – or, indeed, to the lot of them, all at once.

FÜR EINEN TAG

By the summer of 1977, David Bowie might not quite have been fighting fit, but he was in much ruder health, mentally and physically, than he had been a year earlier. The past year had been one of gradual recovery tempered by not inconsiderable setbacks – collapsing relationships, both personal and professional, and significant lapses in sobriety – which Bowie, nonetheless, seemed just about able to overcome. He had also, of course, undergone a complete artistic rebirth which, in twelve short months, had resulted in three albums – one of his own, and two for Iggy Pop – that would help shape the musical landscape of the coming years. His *Low*, however, for all its unquestionable artistic merit and pronounced effect on what followed, was a very insular record, reflected not just in its musical and lyrical content but also by the fact that its creator refused to promote it in any way.

Now, bolstered by his work with Iggy, onstage and on record, Bowie was ready to re-engage with the world. Just before serious work began on his new album, he undertook his first solo media engagements in over a year, for which he travelled to Paris. The last time Bowie was in the French capital, it was very much under duress. He had been called away from the *Low* sessions to attend meetings with his lawyers, from which he returned drained, dejected, and barely able to function, let

alone work. This time he made two trips to the city out of choice rather than necessity. On June 21st he shot a promo video for his current single, 'Be My Wife', a simple performance piece directed by Stanley Dorfman, in which an anguished Bowie sings and plays a red Stratocaster in an empty room bathed in white light.

Bowie returned to Paris on June 27th to tape interviews for a pair of relatively high-profile shows on the French TF1 network. He appeared first on *Actualités*, a current-affairs discussion show, and then, later the same day, turned up on *Midi Première*. He also spoke to a pair of journalists from *Rock Et Folk* magazine, Phillip Manoeuvre and Jonathan Farren, to whom he enthused about the positive effect Berlin was having on his writing and music-making. A couple of days later, he attended the French premiere of *The Man Who Fell To Earth* at the tiny Gaumont Theatre on the Champs-Élysées. That evening he was spotted out on the town with Sydne Rome, an American actress based in Italy, with whom he hoped to star in *Wally*, a film about the Austrian expressionist painter Egon Schiele. (*Wally* never made it past the planning stage, but Bowie and Rome would be united on the silver screen a year later for *Schöner Gigolo, Armer Gigolo*, known in English as *Just A Gigolo*.)

Bowie's immediate focus, however, was on making a new album. Almost immediately after completing work on Iggy's *Lust For Life*, Bowie had called Eno to Berlin to begin preparations for their second full-length collaboration. Eno had kept himself as busy as ever in the time since he had worked on *Low*, recording albums with Cluster and Phil Manzanera's 801 project, co-producing *Ultravox*, and overseeing several noteworthy recordings of works by contemporary composers on his Obscure label. He had also devoted a fair amount of time and effort to his own as-yet incomplete *Before And After Science*, which, like "*Heroes*", contains ten songs split between up-tempo art-rock on side one and more pastoral material on side two. Eno spent two years recording dozens of songs for the album with collaborators ranging from Phil Collins to Can's Jaki Liebezeit. Taking a break to work with

Bowie, it seems, helped reinvigorate the project, which Eno finally completed shortly thereafter.

Bowie and Eno spent a couple of weeks together working informally on a series of rough concepts and ideas that would form the basis of the record. This period of 'pre-production' was extended by a week because of the late arrival of Tony Visconti, who had been held up, much to Bowie's irritation, by "last minute hitches" with a Thin Lizzy album he had been producing in Toronto.¹ The album was called *Bad Reputation*, which seems rather fitting, since that's exactly what Bowie thought his producer would end up with if he continued to work with such awful bands.

For "*Heroes*", Bowie booked out Hansa's largest room, the Meistersaal or Studio 2, famed for its close proximity, at the time, to the Berlin Wall. The wall – or Anti-Fascist Protective Rampart, as it was known in East Germany – was several hundred yards from Hansa, but it was possible to see the armed border-guards patrolling it from the studio window. (Some romanticised retellings even have the guards peering in through binoculars, rifles at the ready – unlikely, perhaps, but such a thing, real or imagined, would certainly have had an impact on the mood and intensity of the musicians as they worked.) The studio's other important feature was its vastness. A Weimar-era former ballroom that had, by all accounts, also been used to host Nazi Party soirees, Studio 2 – the 'hall by the wall', as it became known – was big enough for a 100-piece orchestra. This made it something of a producer's dream: the room itself provided cavernous natural reverb, which the producer captured with a lone ambient mic at one end. And with only Bowie, Eno, and the regular trio of Carlos Alomar, Dennis Davis, and George Murray to fill the space, there was little chance of problems with the separation between the instruments.

With a *modus operandi* already established during the previous year's *Low* sessions, the band worked incredibly quickly, completing basic backing tracks for the songs on side one of "*Heroes*" within the first two days. Visconti wisely stuck to the same principles he'd followed

David Bowies legendäre und kreative Jahre in Berlin

5.
AUFLAGE

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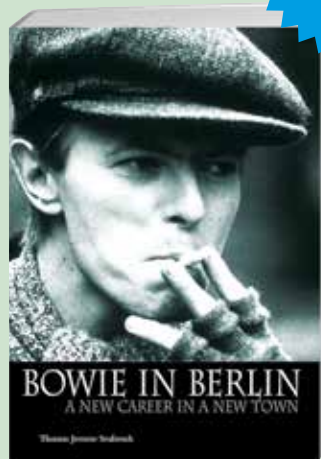
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➔ David Bowie verbrachte Mitte der 70er drei sehr kreative Jahre seiner Karriere in Berlin. 1975 flieht er aus Los Angeles und ist aufgrund der Drogen, Überarbeitung, Ehestreitigkeiten und seiner paranoiden Beschäftigung mit Okkultismus hart an der Grenze zum Zusammenbruch. Edgar Froese von Tangerine Dream nimmt Bowie in seiner Wohnung in Berlin-Schöneberg auf.

➔ Bowie inspirieren die deutschen Bands Kraftwerk, Neu! und Tangerine Dream. Er zieht bald mit seinem Freund Iggy Pop zusammen und beide genießen die Anonymität und das Nachtleben in der geteilten Stadt. In diesen Jahren gelingen Bowie drei herausragende Alben, die heute als Berliner Trilogie bezeichnet werden: *Low*, *Heroes* und *Lodger*, entstanden unter Mitarbeit so prominenter Mitmusiker wie Brian Eno, Robert Fripp und Tony Visconti. Bowie findet außerdem Zeit für Iggy Pop die Alben *The Idiot* und *Lust for Life* zu produzieren.

➔ In dem Film *Just a Gigolo* spielt er eine Hauptrolle. Dieses Buch präsentiert die Hintergrund-Stories vieler Songs und das Entstehen der teils in den legendären Hansa-Studios aufgenommenen Alben. Bowie war von Berlin fasziniert und sein Genie und seine Freunde haben ihn in dieser Zeit aus einer extremen Lebensphase gerettet.

Über den Autor:

➔ **Thomas Jerome Seabrook** ist Autor und Musik-Lektor und lebt in Leigh-on-Sea, England. Dies ist sein erstes Buch. Davor hat er u.a. an dem Werk *Faber Companion To 20th Century Popular Music* (Faber & Faber) mitgearbeitet.



EDITION OLMS ZÜRICH



Edition Olms AG

Willikonerstr. 10a
CH-8618 Oetwil am See/Zürich
Switzerland

Tel. +41(0)43/8449777
Fax +41(0)43/8449778
info@edition-olms.com
www.edition-olms.com