

## [#9 Unter Dem Rhein- FSK Part 1: Why are the Americans Yodeling?](#)



FSK or Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle is an Experimental/Rock/Folk ensemble from Munich. They started as an art-rock/ punk band slowly drifted into what can only be described as germericana, and out of that to a kind of ambient acoustic trance.

In 1990 they contacted me about producing their next album. In early 1991 in the midst of songwriting and demoing for the first Cracker album, John Morand and I produced *Son of Kraut*. It was to be the beginning of a long collaboration with the band that also involved Johnny Hickman. Sometime later that Year Johnny Hickman and I traveled to Germany and toured with FSK for a full month. It was an interesting tour not just because of the collaboration between FSK and Cracker, but because we did quite a few shows in the recently re-united east. The party after the fall of the communist government was over, and many of the cultural touches unique to the East remained. It remained a rather surly collectivist place (but not without a fatalistic sense of humor). For instance There weren't many hotels yet. So one night we all slept together in one room upstairs above the bar. The wall was lined with bunks three high. It was like sleeping in an Oscar-I class Soviet submarine. Another night we stayed in a "hotel" that was more like a workers dormitory. At 8 AM martial music began blaring from a speaker in the ceiling. It couldn't be turned off. The tour had been sponsored by Phillip Morris, they gave us sample packs of cigarettes to give away at shows. At the end of the tour we went to a kabob stand at 2 AM in East Berlin and sold some of the leftover cartons to shady Russians in track suits. It was like *The Third Man*. There were some other rather edgy moments. FSK was in the habit of playing the DDR (east german) anthem in the West Germany. But it produced some confused and oddly enthusiastic responses in the East.

When I was working with FSK they were in their *germericana* phase. Thomas Meinecke had some ideas about taking the German folk music that had made it's way to America, and re-interpreting and folding it back into modern German rock culture. For instance in the 1840's many Germans and Bohemians moved to Texas. Their music mixed with the local Mexican music and produced what is known as Texas Bohemian style.\* We took several of these songs and put them back into FSK *germericana* formula. We re-exported them to Germany. FSK called this grand concept "The Transatlantic feedback". There were three collaborations with FSK. *Son of Kraut*, *The Sound of Music*, and *International*. Each album was a little different in it's own way but all of them were part of the transatlantic feedback concept. Most people understood the whole concept, I mean Germans are a cerebral bunch. Not always of course one night a drunk woman started asking very loudly during the show "Why are the Americans yodeling?"

*Unter Dem Rhein* or literally Under the Rhine is a sly reference to the former German neighborhood in Cincinnati "Over the Rhine". The song melodies are taken from two different Pennsylvania Dutch\* folk songs. The words to the second half are either 1) nonsensical words intended for children 2) from a very old and obscure dialect of german or 3) a Thomas Meinecke (lyricist for FSK ) absurdist touch in the vein of Monty Pythons' ["Wenn ist das Nunstruck git und Slotermeyer? Ja! Beiherhund das Oder die Flipperwaldt gersput!"](#)

### [Unter Dem Rhein by FSK. mit David Lowery](#)

This next song is a track from the third collaboration *International*. I enjoy saying collaboration in regards to working with Germans. I hope you've noted it by now. This tells the story of a Baader-Meinhof terrorist who has been in hiding in the US for many years. She has teamed up with urban drug dealers. She is arrested on narcotics charges but later her true identity is discovered. I wrote half the song in english and handed it off to Thomas Meinecke who finishes the story in German (Michaela sings it).

(Gudrun and Holger are members of the Baader-Meinhof gang. Tasha and Booker are her new partners in america).

### [Red Sonja- FSk with David Lowery](#)

Even Mark Linkous (Sparklehorse) get's into the act. I was working with Mark on *vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot* at the same time we were working on *International*. Here Mark plays the UN interpreter translating the song from German to English.

### [Flagge Verbrennen \(Regierung Ertranken\)- FSK with Mark Linkous](#)

Finally here is a performance from that tour in 1991

[Dr. Bernice-David Lowery and Johnny Hickman with FSK](#)

Stay tuned for part II (shiner song, Dr Bernice, and Eurotrash girl)

\*Pennsylvania Dutch is not Dutch but a dialect of German.