

XTC IN GERMANY

"PARTRIDGE HAS bought a fort."

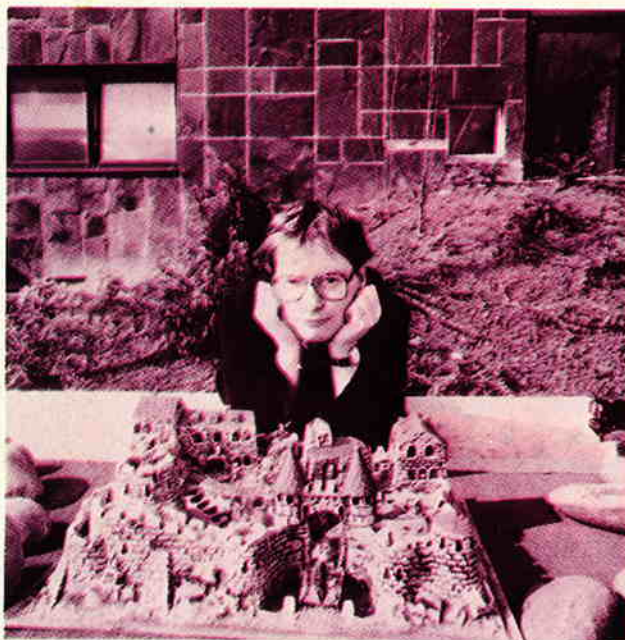
The well-rounded Wiltshire tones of XTC drummer Terry Chambers relay the news of his colleague's shopping expedition with the customary mixture of affectionate amusement and uncomprehending bemusement. The fort, incidentally, is of the moulded plastic variety rather than stone and cement; the latest manifestation of Andy's rediscovery of the joys of toy soldiers.

"I bought two scaling ladders so little men can climb the walls," he says happily, "a catapult so I can fling rocks at it, two shields for archers to hide behind — shields on wheels: sounds like a medieval mobile armoureders! — and a selection of Prince Valiant looking characters to populate the castle."

We're in Munich on the second day of XTC's brief German jaunt, the warm-up stages of their latest assault on the world's collective consciousness. The tour got off to a flying start in Berlin the previous night — a good beginning marred only by the unfortunate Chambers being fined for dodgy driving on the journey to Munich. The fact that Terry was only a front seat passenger didn't seem to bother the East German police, who insisted on relieving the aggrieved drummer of 20 marks regardless.

A fine start all round, you might say.

Tonight's gig — the Alabamahalle — is a weird one and no mistake. In contrast to the rest of elegant Munich, it's what looks like an old army barracks, badly shot up and then left virtually untouched since the war. Now it's been bought up by the city council for renovation as a kind of youth centre complete with gig hall and rehearsal and recording facilities. (If only



(OR IT'S THE FORT THAT COUNTS)

BY IAN CRANNA

British town councils were so enlightened!) But it's not just the bullet holes and barbed wire that make it so odd. As Andy points out, the place is covered with posters for bands of whom nothing has been heard since. I mean, whatever did happen to The United Balls Band or Satin Whale?

Despite XTC's not having played in Germany for three years, the gig is a sell-out and the band reward the faithful with another fine set — a mixture of established favourites and a strong selection from their excellent new double album "English Settlement".

Something almost magical has happened to XTC between

"Sergeant Rock" and this new album, transforming them from perennially hopeful outsiders to accomplished, confident front-runners. As with Squeeze — another fine but image-less band — in this time of absent trends and dumb poses, people have suddenly latched onto the fact that XTC make very good music; music with power and depth as well as the accepted cleverness and humour.

"Aah," observes Chambers with satisfaction as the band arrive back at the hotel from a record company-funded meal in the early hours of the morning, "just time to cruise into that bar for a quick nightcap and that's it."

"You don't want a nightcap," chides Partridge. "You'll have a small sea of lager, that's what you'll have."

"Where is tomorrow night's gig?" asks Terry, choosing to ignore this. "The Wartburg?"

"The Wartburg in Wiesbaden," confirms patient tour manager Frank.

"Is Wiesbaden in the mountains?" asks photographer Eric hopefully.

"I'm sorry mate," says Chambers, departing for the bar, "you're not getting us on skis."

Andy Partridge is not one of the world's snappier early morning risers. Resembling a cross between a newly born puppy and a gale-damaged haystack, he's too late for breakfast yet again.

But Wiesbaden is five hours drive away and deadlines have to be met. With Terry, perfectionist/guitarist Dave Gregory (already locked into Elvis Costello's "Trust" on his Walkman) and even the sleepy-headed Colin Moulding already aboard, the band's genial genius is bundled in and we set off through what he instantly dubs "der knee-schlappende country — der leather wearing und der shaving brush in der hat country."

With an imagination that he himself aptly describes as "an explosion in a surrealist supermarket", Andy Partridge is an observant individual who clearly relishes all the openings for fun that language has to offer.

"They do have a nice selection of trees in Germany," he muses.

You approve of Germany then, Andy?

"I like Germany actually," he decides. "I think we're pretty close to the Germans in character, except they're more hard working than the English and more together as well.

Except they do eat a lot of awful



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