



Subterfuge:

Daniel Kligen (Drums), Kai Blankenberg (Bass), Lars Schmidt (Guitar, Vocals), Lorenz Naumann (Keys, Guitar, Bass), Thomas Baumhoff (Guitar, Vocals), Tom Blankenberg (Keys)

The Full Story:

When Thomas Baumhoff and Lars Schmidt first meet on the 781 bus in their teenage years it takes exactly one session to agree on how to play the guitar riff of *In Your House* and Lars joins Tommy's New Wave band **Charming Crime**. This group, dominted by a pair of lost brothers, fill two tape demos with suicide phantasies and play a handful of shows at school dances. Realizing they prefer writing their own songs about the good things in life over playing sad guitar riffs both leave the band to team up with school mate Mark Specht on drums to form **Subterfuge**, a band with a name that looks great when printed on paper, but that no non-native speaker can remember, let alone pronounce or spell correctly.

So here they are in 1991, soaked up with *Lovey* and *Bug*, impressed by seeing **Superchunk** on their first European tour for *No Pocky For Kitty* and heavily influenced by the growing UK Indie music scene around **Mega City Four**, **Senseless Things** and **Ride** with their albums *Who Cares Wins*, *The First of Too Many* and *Nowhere*. When then *Bandwagonesque* comes out it flushes away any remaining doubt about where the band should be heading musically: Noisy guitars, sweet melodies and harmonic vocals.

Right on time for the finalization of their first album *Fabulous* in 1993 Kai Blankenberg completes the band on bass, relieving the two guitarists from the constant instrument interchange on every other song during their live shows. Despite the slight misfit of being a powerpop outfit on a classic punk label responses to the debut are pretty good, resulting in regional interest and local support shows for **Sebadoh**, **Polvo** and **Superchunk**.

Three years and occasional live shows later comes the album *Marc*, recorded mostly at night on ADAT in the basement of their hometown Düsseldorf's famous Skyline studios, where Kai works. The title and artwork of the record are a farewell present to Mark (again the graphic department gets its will: Marc with a "c" appears to just look nicer), who preferes decent career opportunities over badly paid weekends in far remote youth clubs. Daniel Kligen replaces him on drums and things become serious with intense national touring as well as connecting to likely-minded bands and other members of the small, but growing German indie pop scene.

To help the live appearance reflect more what is going on in the studio with pianos and synthesizers Kai's twin brother Tom starts helping out playing keys during their shows, soon becoming a permanent member of the band. Subterfuge become friends with the Cologne four-piece **Soap**, who later sell their name to a Danish one-hit-wonder dance project and become **Soccer**. Sharing the same booking agent the two bands intensively explore the (then) wild East of the country in the years around the making of Subterfuge's third album *I Do Birds* (2001) and Soccer's *Supreme*. A split single with four cover songs is the testament of this long-term symbiosis, which lasts until Soccer break up in 2002.

I Do Birds is released by Blickpunkt Pop, the label of **Marc Liebscher**, manager of Germany's well-known indierock darlings **Sportfreunde Stiller**, which brings the band to the attention of a broader audience. The videosingle *Silly Girl* runs on a higher rotation on VIVA2 music television (R.I.P.) and the band comes to support **Readymade** on their national tour and play bigger festivals, such as Bizarre and Immergut.



In 2003 twenty-eight bands (28!) record a cover version of their favorite song from Subterfuge's debut album *Fabulous* for the anniversary compilation *Fabulous Friends* (Label: Supermodern Music). Among them most of the German indie music scene, such as **Miles, Slut, Pale, Gary, Samba, Virginia Jetzt!, Nova International, Liquido, Oiro, Paula**, and Readymade - just to name a few. This record very well documents the collaborative spirit at the time and marks a true highlight on Subterfuge's "horizontal job ladder" (**Linus Volkmann**).

The band plays another nice DACH tour supporting Virginia Jetzt! with Lorenz, who helped out on bass and keys before, backing up for Tommy on guitar and vocals, and latest by now becoming a fully qualified member. The six-piece has a magic moment when writing and arranging songs for the next album at Daniel's family hide-away holiday house in the rural low mountain range area Eifel. With the involvement of producer **O.L.A.F. Opal** the recording process of these songs becomes more sophisticated than ever before and final mixes from **Mario Thaler** at Uphon Studios Weilheim (**The Notwist**) perfectly add to this. On the resulting *The Legendary Eifel Tapes* album (2005, Supermodern Music) the group moves away from their typical three-minute-popsongs about girls, becoming darker, more complex and less accommodating. A hard sell in times of a music market in decay and on the verge of digitalization, yet still their most experienced musical output to date.

After some intense touring (with their friends **Soul's Off Fire** as well as with **Ken Stringfellow** of **The Posies**) and another 7" single (*The Good Good*) the band members regroup (of course it's the Eifel again!) to record demos of some new songs. During the subsequent process to write and record an album it becomes clear that with their growing families to be nurtured and other life events taking place, the intense process to further develop their musical identity needs to be shouldered at some later time.

And here is where the story would have ended for most bands.

Not here, the boys stay closest friends while raising their eleven kids, all living in the same suburb (well, except for Daniel who decides to move to Cologne where the lights are brighter and the nights longer), supporting each other with their solo projects: Tommy hooks up with Subterfuge's long-term live technician **Thomas Hannes** to record a folk pop album as **Ponyboy & Loveley Jeanny**. Lars collaborates as **Quent** on music best described as indie-electronic with Cologne-based **Veit König** and writes an uptown-slacker-goes-space-hero story with illustrator **Lomp** to be released as a graphic novel and 70's style concept album (still to come) by **The Modern Air & Space Society**. Kai starts recording as **Mont Blanc** (also still in the final making) and his brother starts a successful journey as a modern classic piano artist under his own name **Tom Blankenberg**. Lorenz builds a career as a producer and live musician (**Pale, Peter Licht, Eric Pfeil** etc.).

When Tom releases his first solo album *Atermus* the idea arises among the band members to form their own label, the perfect paranthesis around all their solo projects: **Less Records** is born.

Around 2017 the two main songwriters Tommy and Lars start joint work on new material, which brings the complete band back together in the practice room. Apparently those songs from the late Eifel sessions together with quite a number of new songs add up nicely to form an entire album, which the group starts recording under supervision of Lorenz as producer in his very own Hedgehog Studios.

Nostalgia and the own label at hand as well as a bucket full of unreleased tracks (outtakes, sampler contributions, radio sessions, remixes, stuff only released on vinyl to date) bear the idea of the compilation *etc...*, which comes out in 2020 as a first digital sign of life. But quickly the focus shifts back to their new music: Singles from that new material are to be released over the second half of 2021 before the fifth regular Subterfuge album *Dots* is seeing the light of day in early 2022. Subterfuge are back for more, who dares to predict how the story continues ... long live pop music!