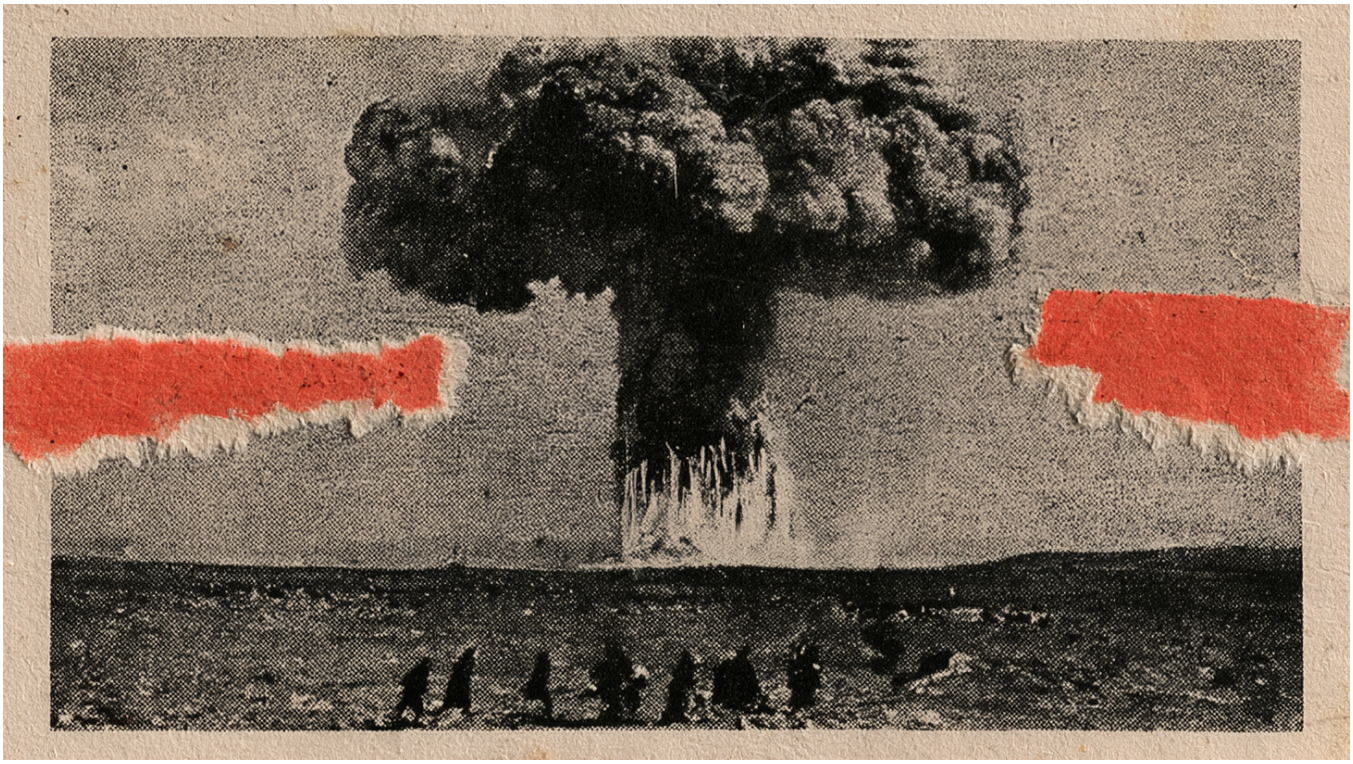

FRIEDENSNOTE NR. 80

The Nuclear Catastrophe

Peter Maffay's „Eiszeit" turns the fear of nuclear catastrophe into music and recalls the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets against the madness of the arms race.

In 2011, Peter Maffay and his band performed an extended, longer live version of the song „Eiszeit" from 2001. Before the artist begins to sing, he speaks about that era of rearmament in the old Bonn Republic, when „hundreds of thousands took to the streets to demonstrate against this madness".

But what does Maffay say today? In a critical tone, he asks Boris Pistorius in a Facebook post whether we will soon have to „reckon with the announcement of mobilization".

PUBLISHED	31. July 2026
AUTHOR	Marcus Klöckner
SONG	Eiszeit
PERFORMER	Peter Maffay
ALBUM	Ich will leben, 1982

> *There we sat in a half-finished house, in Tutzing, on Lake Starnberg, two musicians up under the roof in a small room – and we wrote a few songs. In that time of armament and disarmament, when hundreds of thousands took to the streets to demonstrate against this madness, we tried to express the feeling, our fear, in a song. This song that came out of it is called:* Eiszeit.

While Peter Maffay speaks these lines to his fans in a calm, narrative voice at a live concert in Hamburg in February 2001, the band is already playing the opening of one of Maffay's best-known songs. Keyboards and synthesizers create a softly reverberating carpet of sound, long, floating chords can be heard, gentle guitar tones reach the ear, calm, shimmering sounds fill the room, a restrained drumming prepares itself, a deep bass resounds cautiously. The space opens up for a melancholy look back at a time of great danger, but also of human courage and democratic responsibility; slowly Maffay and his band build tension. The interplay of the instruments grows faster, and after an intro lasting more than two minutes, Maffay begins to sing:

> *„Berge spucken Lava aus in den silberklaren Mond*
> *Aschenregen fällt auf uns, die Erde hat Milliarden Volt*
> *Und aus den Quellen schießt Glut so hoch bis zum Saturn*
> *Atlantis kommt jetzt hoch*
> *Doch wo bleibt der Mensch der sich daran freut?“*

And the chorus begins with full intensity:

> *„Eiszeit, Eiszeit*
> *Wenn die Meere untergehen und die Erde bricht“*

In highly vivid, artistically shaped language, Maffay describes the nuclear catastrophe.

The era that Maffay alluded to with his words before the song began reached its peak when, in the Bonn Hofgarten, between 300,000 and 500,000 people demonstrated for peace, against the policy of rearmament and the stationing of Pershing II missiles.

In a smoky, rocky voice, Maffay sings on:

> *„Kontinente rasen dann in Sekunden auf sich zu*
>
> *Wer sieht noch den letzten Blitz dann vor dieser Explosion?*
>
> *Die Wolken sind so rot und wo einst die Wüste war*
>
> *Gähnt nur ein schwarzes Loch*
>
> *Und der letzte Mensch bittet um den Tod*
>
> *Eiszeit, Eiszeit*
>
> *Wenn die Meere untergehen und die Erde bricht*
>
> *Dann hat kein Sprengkopf mehr irgendwo ein letztes Ziel*
>
> *Bleibt dies nur Utopie? Rotes Telefon*
>
> *Wenn du versagst*
>
> *Eiszeit, Eiszeit*
>
> *Wenn die Meere untergehen*
>
> *Und die Erde bricht (wenn die Erde bricht)“*

The apocalyptic imagery and artistic estrangement are followed by an unmistakable reference to political responsibility: „Rotes Telefon, wenn Du versagst“.

Maffay, with his experienced band, knows how to fully exploit the live energy in this song; the audience „goes along“, a dynamic of its own emerges. Over the verses the intensity of the instruments rises, and then comes the climax: a solo guitar performance by one of the finest German guitarists: Frank Dietz.

With great feeling and even more skill and artistry, the blues rocker begins a guitar performance that will last more than two minutes and is regarded by fans as „epic“ or „divine“.

What Dietz delivers here is not merely a guitar solo. With his instrument he practically tells the story of the song; he bends the strings, lets the notes speak and conveys on an emotional level grief, hopelessness, anger, but also resistance. The emotional threat is followed, from minute 5:50, by the explosion of his slowly built-up performance, flanked by the band. With astonishment and awe the band watches Dietz’s performance, while the audience breaks into special applause. Dietz’s guitar solo that evening has surely become one of the most emotional in German rock history.

The song – and this version in particular – is a work of art that holds a firm place in the long line of peace-movement songs.

The unimaginable – the destruction of the planet and, as a consequence, of humanity as well – was a serious prospect back then. At a time when the great powers rearmed again and again and built up a gigantic nuclear arsenal, the sword of Damocles of nuclear war hung over humanity.

What would have happened in Germany if the worst had come to the worst is attested by the simulation of a nuclear war between NATO and the Soviet Union, held as late as 1989 and reported on by the Spiegel.

Nothing would have been left of Germany.

Maffay, unlike many other artists who spoke up back then, still voices criticism today. In a Facebook post from September 2025, the artist writes to Defense Minister Boris Pistorius:

> *„„Wir leben nicht mehr im Frieden“*
>
> *Nach „Deutschland muss kriegstüchtig werden“ jetzt die nächste verbale Eskalation. Wann, Herr Pistorius, Herr Merz, müssen wir mit der Bekanntmachung der „Mobilmachung“ rechnen? Sind Sie sich eigentlich im Klaren, welches Öl Sie da ins Feuer gießen? Ist den „starken Mann“ zu geben die einzige Option, die Ihnen einfällt angesichts der sich rasant verschärfenden Konfrontation mit Russland? Bekämpfen Sie und Ihre Kollegen die Ursachen, nicht die Symptome der Problematik, und hören Sie endlich auf mit dieser euphorischen Kriegsrhetorik und der damit verbundenen Propaganda. Verteidigungsfähig angesichts der seit drei Jahren stattfindenden, sich immer mehr ausweitenden Auseinandersetzung zwischen der Ukraine und Russland: ja. Unabhängigkeit von den USA – in diesem Zusammenhang – ja, und konzertiertes europäisches Vorgehen ebenfalls.*
>
> *Aber mit Verstand und Übersicht (...).“*

And indeed: the confrontational politics between NATO and Russia are becoming ever more threatening. The impression has long since arisen that a single spark is enough to ignite a hot war, or, to put it in Maffay's words: Dann spucken Berge Lava aus.

In view of this situation, from a musical perspective the question presses itself: when will a new „Eiszeit“ song come?

LISTEN & WATCH

THE SONG IN ITS ORIGINAL · YOUTUBE

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBlQRDEld9g

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcus Klöckner

Marcus Klöckner studierte Soziologie, Medienwissenschaften und Amerikanistik. Sein Weg in die Medien führte ihn über den Lokaljournalismus zum politischen Journalismus. Der herrschafts- und medienkritische Blick ist Markenzeichen seiner Arbeit. Im Sinne der Soziologie von Pierre Bourdieu und Charles Wright Mills lüftet er den Schleier von Macht- und Herrschaftsverhältnissen in unserer Gesellschaft.

Er ist Mitherausgeber des Klassikers der Soziologie „Die Machtelite“, einer Studie über die Verwerfungen in der US-Demokratie. Zuletzt erschienen von ihm „Sabotierte Wirklichkeit: Wenn Journalismus zur Glaubenslehre wird“ und „Zombie-Journalismus: Was kommt nach dem Tod der Meinungsfreiheit?“.

Weitere Informationen unter x.com/KlocknerMarcus

Source: https://friedensnoten.de/en/articles/the-nuclear-catastrophe/