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Harry & Helen Gray  
Humanities Program Series  
Volume 8

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A SOUND LEGACY?  
MUSIC AND POLITICS IN  
EAST GERMANY

■

Edited by  
Edward Larkey  
University of Maryland

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American Institute for Contemporary German Studies  
The Johns Hopkins University

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# FOREWORD

Seen from Europe, no other aesthetic genre has attracted the label “Americanization” more consistently than popular music. As jazz and swing provoked middle-class sensitivities as products of American mass culture between the 1920s and 1950s, so did rock and roll, and pop in the decades afterwards. When the East German regime proclaimed its fight against Americanization with its often brutal maneuvers to bring a lively popular music scene under control, it could count on the power of long-established antipathies among the population that resonated with those in West Germany during the rock and roll era. On the other side of the musical fence, the association with America was a badge of distinction for musicians and *afficionados* in the jazz and rock scenes in East and West Germany. America’s impact in the cultural realm was indeed nowhere more direct than in popular music.

This volume on music and politics in East Germany reverses the perspective—it examines these topics as seen from America. As part of the ongoing assessment of the cultural legacy of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, experts from both the United States and eastern Germany present and review the “inside story” of the remarkably lively musical life in this state that existed behind the Iron Curtain. On the basis of his groundbreaking work on popular music in Germany and Austria, Edward Larkey organized a one-day workshop under the title, “A Sound Legacy? Music and Politics in East Germany,” at AICGS on December 3, 1999. Under Professor Larkey’s guidance, the discussion moved from the original party agenda for the restructuring of musical life after 1945 to the confrontations between party supervision and musicians, a topic that accompanied the developments of GDR music until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Two insiders of the musical scene, Günter “Baby” Sommer from Dresden and Susanne Binas from Berlin, made sure that the critical assessment kept track of mood, mentalities, and the everyday experiences of practicing musicians and their audiences.

Larkey’s own paper demonstrates that the transatlantic view can help situate individual and collective experiences in a framework of larger

questions about aesthetic quality, audience, markets and marketability that reach beyond the established discussion about party control. His framework incorporates the constant exposure of a restricted artistic scene to a flood of western musical productions that at the same time both inspired and stymied East German musicians, audiences, functionaries and broadcasting stations. Larkey's presentation and Kai Fikentscher's comments help define the ubiquitous East German conflict between a kept audience for home-grown artistic productions and the state's desire to become internationally recognized as a cultural power, presupposing adjustments to international markets.

It seems that music, with its particular ease in crossing borders, classes, and generations, is the most conspicuous paradigm among artistic genres for the hopes and failures of a non-capitalist state which, in the second part of the twentieth century, tried to create a cultural infrastructure against market forces. Certainly, the paradigm usually chosen in order to demonstrate the confrontation between party control and individual creativity is literature; as a result, GDR cultural history as a whole is customarily seen through the fate of writers. This correlates with the Marxist valorizing of the word over image and sound. Yet for a large segment of the population, especially the younger generation, the battles over western or non-western, American, socialist or German tunes appear to have had a much wider resonance than those about writers. Music—though not classical music—distributed through radio, television, records, CDs, tapes, videos and, last but not least, through live performances, reaches into many areas of society that remain untouched by literature. Consequently, party authorities and the state had to compromise more with western market principles in music than in literature. It is, as shown by Jost Hermand, particularly revealing what the leadership originally planned for the creation of a new socialist culture. These plans are not just a reformulation of Stalinist regulations about socialist realism. They carry a long heritage of hopes for the elevating and educational powers of art and culture which German social democrats and communists had developed in the decades before Hitler's ascent to power.

Like the preceding volumes on East German literature, edited by Marc Silberman, and art, edited by Marion Deshmukh—and a following volume on film—this small volume on music will open a few windows to a legacy

whose political shadows should not obliterate the creativity of many groups and individuals. Besides familiarizing American readers with the odd dynamics of a state-controlled culture, it presents information and arguments for a more thorough review of jazz, rock, classical and popular music before 1989, with important reflections on the transition period to the market-based music production of the 1990s. Certain sound-bites from this legacy, from the songs of Wolf Biermann to the metal-techno acoustic attack band *RAMMSTEIN* have even made it into the college classroom, acquainting American students with the more unusual aspects of contemporary German culture. This volume, by attesting to the liveliness of this legacy, might help to expand interest in the well-preserved music and one of the most challenging topics in twentieth-century cultural history: music and politics. The Institute is grateful to Edward Larkey and the contributors for their intriguing and penetrating review.

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## INTRODUCTION

Edward Larkey

Music has always been one of the pillars of German culture. When the Berlin Wall fell more than ten years ago, the East German musical scene expected freedom of expression and freedom from heavy-handed interference. Preunification East German governments, in an effort to keep musical expression under tight political control, had originally attempted to develop a distinctly socialist, yet German music culture, in both popular styles as well as in the “high” arts. They tried to control the way older German music traditions were appropriated, which influences from abroad would be incorporated, and to whom resources and privileges would be distributed. This volume brings together practitioners as well as music historians in an effort to reflect upon the development of music culture in preunification East Germany, and to provide a background perspective for aspects of music culture in the postunification period. The five workshop speakers in “A Sound Legacy?” include Jost Hermand, Professor of German at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a scholar of German culture who has often analyzed nineteenth and twentieth century music and culture in Germany. He details the futile attempts of the cultural bureaucracy to instrumentalize serious composers for educating the broad masses of the population, and achieve a viable, socialist alternative to the music of the West. Günter “Baby” Sommer is an active jazz drummer and a professor at the *Musikhochschule Carl Maria von Weber* in Dresden. He offers insights into his experiences with a state and party bureaucracy in the preunification period that saw a music culture whose communitarian and free thinking ideals and individualistic impulses stood in opposition to their attempts at control the people and all forms of cultural expression. Edward Larkey, German Studies scholar with a focus on popular music of the German-speaking countries, summarizes the move of official cultural policies away from attempts at developing an alternative, non commercial popular music to that of the West into a more commercial and less political popular music in order to maintain the credibility of party domination and control, a

move which ultimately served, however, to undermine its control. Susanne Binas, a former member of the reunification experimental pop group *EXPANDER DES FORTSCHRITTS* and currently a researcher at the Center on Popular Music Research (*Forschungszentrum Populäre Musik*) at the *Humboldt-Universität*, Berlin, highlights the fate of several bands and projects initiated during the reunification period known as independent, “weird” (*schräg*), or the “others.” She analyzes their evolution in the postunification period and concludes that pre-unification categorizations are unsuitable for analyzing postunification repositionings underway in a globalized marketplace. Finally, ethnomusicologist, jazz musician and DJ Kai Fikentscher delineates areas of further research for historians and ethnomusicologists interested in German music of the post-unification period.

The contributions reveal several common threads:

- 1) There were continuous attempts by various groups of people to oppose party control of both music production as well as music consumption in all spheres of music culture. Party dictates for a new socialist classical music remained unfulfilled because they were unable to bridge the divide between elite and entertainment culture and thus did not find favor with the people. Jazz musicians used the unpolitical aura of jazz to uphold the utopian promises of its particular manner of musical expression as a counterweight to the demand for clarity and commitment (Jost Hermand) underlying party music policies. Official popular music attempted to address both the real problems of youths in society and sought all means—legal and non legal—to pursue these goals. The independent scene saw itself excluded from the official sphere and utilized alternative means of production and distribution to communicate with new audiences dissatisfied with socialist reality. This experience helped these bands cope with the period after unification.
- 2) The capitalist music industry presents itself in the post unification period as a globally dominant force capable of undermining even the most radical attempts at constructing an alternative based on Marxist theories of state ownership of the means of (musical) production. Not only the official popular music of the so-called “*Staats-Rocker*,” but also the attempt to cultivate a serious modern music based on,

but diverging from the “bourgeois” classical tradition to reflect supposedly new political and social relations emerging in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) testify to the failure of rigidly prescriptive and undemocratic music aesthetics and policies. The niches of the GDR independent scene and jazz music illustrate that creativity can be a positive (albeit locally and historically limited) point of departure for a globally competent cultural opposition under a variety of circumstances.

- 3) Erecting political boundaries around countries to propagate a particular music ideal may impede open communication by monopolizing a particular metadiscourse through music, but it will engender a variety of oppositional, alternative and subaltern responses in a variety of genres reflecting the marginalized position of cultural minorities vis-à-vis the majority culture. It is conspicuous that each of the separate areas of music under consideration by the speakers represents particular constituencies with separate, and, at times, opposing outlooks. It would be worth further investigation of identity politics in East Germany before unification to find out the reason why, for instance, there seems to be little interaction between jazz and rock musicians, or serious musicians and rock and/or jazz musicians in the GDR, particularly since these types of interactions find more hospitable cultivation from among the so-called “independent” scene.

We hope to make a contribution with this volume to the discussion about the relationship between music and society, particularly in politically restrictive or totalitarian societies such as that in the former German Democratic Republic. By illustrating a particularly drastic example of governmental attempts to manage culture in society, we hope to also contribute to ongoing discussions in the United States and other European and non-European countries about the role of politics in helping to achieve cultural democracy and equal access to the cultural and artistic achievements all over the world.

I would like to thank the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, and Frank Trommler in particular as Chair of the Humanities Program for his guidance and support of the workshop. I would also like to thank Ms. Masha Tsyapkina for her help in organizing and coordinating the workshop.

**ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH A SOCIALIST MUSICAL  
CULTURE IN THE SOVIET OCCUPATION ZONE AND THE  
EARLY GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, 1945-1965**

Jost Hermand

*“Auf andere Art so große Hoffnung”* (Johannes R. Becher)

Without a doubt, it can be stated that the main representatives of East German literature became relatively well known beyond the borders of the GDR. This applies both to older authors who returned from exile, such as Johannes R. Becher, Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, Friedrich Wolf, and Arnold Zweig, as well as to authors who grew up in the GDR, such as Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Jurek Becker, and Ulrich Plenzdorf. There were even some painters and sculptors such as Fritz Cremer, Willi Sitte, and Werner Tübke who were likewise well known beyond the GDR itself. The musical life of this state, however, generally remained a *terra incognita* to most western cultural observers. To be sure, famous performers and ensembles such as Peter Schreyer, Theo Adam, Franz Konwitschny, Kurt Masur, the *Dresden Kreuzkirche* Choir, the St. Thomas Boys' Choir, and the *Leipzig Gewandhaus* Orchestra were known in the West, but mainly as interpreters of baroque, classical, and romantic music and not as interpreters of music composed in the GDR. Accordingly, aside from exceptions such as Hanns Eisler, the works of most east German composers are still almost totally unknown today.

This situation is not just due to the general disinterest in so-called avant-garde or modern music, which in recent decades has been increasingly overshadowed by pop and film music in all highly industrialized countries. Other important factors restricting the awareness of GDR composers in the west included the limited possibilities for cultural exchange, difficult performance conditions, and the complications of currency exchange. East German books could be readily reprinted in the West and paintings from the GDR were relatively accessible to those west Germans interested in culture through the art books published by the *Dresden Verlag der Kunst* and the *Seemann Verlag*. But serious

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musical scores? Considering how small the audience was and still is for any kind of modern music, who in the West would have undertaken the expensive risk of performing GDR oratorios, operas, or symphonies? For this reason, westerners either left this music alone or, as early as the 1950s, condemned it as—to quote Theodor W. Adorno—“music on a leash,”<sup>1</sup> in short, as unfree, conforming to the demands of the state, and riddled with totalitarian intentions, ergo: as Stalinist. Or, they condemned it as old-fashioned and pedestrian because of its lack of modernistic formal elements, ergo: as boring. These remained the typical verdicts in the following years. Only the West German “sixty-eighters” developed a short-lived interest in Hanns Eisler, but they focused mainly on the works that he composed before 1933 or in exile and not on those written in the GDR. The development of this fateful divergence can be explained only by looking back briefly at the immediate postwar period, when the Cold War brought about the division of Germany into East and West. In the summer and fall of 1945, all four occupation zones found themselves in a similar situation in terms of music. All over Germany, many opera and concert halls had been destroyed by bombing, and there was also a general shortage of musical scores. However, just a few months later, musical performances began everywhere, concentrating not only on baroque, classical, and romantic music, but also on works not heard in Germany during the Nazi period by composers such as Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, Paul Hindemith, and Dimitri Shostakovich. Indeed, many people—Germans and occupiers alike—had the feeling that it was precisely the older German music from Bach to Brahms that expressed most directly what was best in the German spirit. Therefore, with the exception of Hans Pfitzner, Wilhelm Furtwängler, and Richard Strauss, there was little “denazification” that had to be carried out in this area. Accordingly, Bach’s Saint Matthew’s Passion, Mozart’s Magic Flute, and Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony were played over and over again in all four occupation zones as expressions of a humanism that sought to create a general cultural regeneration sorely needed after the atrocities of fascism.

In the four sectors of Berlin, it was primarily the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany), which advocated the performance both of works from the “classical heritage” as well as the foreign and

modern music prohibited during the Third Reich. Due to the activities of the *Kulturbund*, Berlin audiences were able to hear works by Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Eisler, in addition to those of Britten, Copland, Honegger, Messiaen, Bartók, Berg, Weill, Schönberg, and Webern as early as the winter of 1946/47.<sup>2</sup> However, the eclectic breadth of these concert programs remained a brief episode within East Berlin and the Soviet Occupation Zone. By the fall of 1947, after Andrei Zhdanov had condemned much of western music and its harmful influence on the socialist countries, the first maneuvers were made in the Soviet Occupation Zone to reject western trends, thus setting the tone for the rapidly escalating Cold War. Simultaneously, in accordance with Soviet musical policy, the first guidelines on how contemporary musical life should shed its dichotomous character as either trivial or elitist and be transformed into an all-encompassing socialist musical culture were formulated. In this connection, along with predictable criticisms of western music, some cultural functionaries and composers also developed various idealistic, high-flown, even utopian concepts that envisioned the broad masses quickly embracing this process of transformation.

Let us begin with the criticisms of western forms of contemporary music. These criticisms were voiced in many Party declarations,<sup>3</sup> in the first volumes of newly founded periodicals such as *Musik und Gesellschaft* (Music and Society), *Musikforum*, and *Musik in der Schule* (Music in the School), in the programs of the Association of German Composers and Musicologists (founded in East Berlin in 1952), and in the book *Musik im Zeitgeschehen* (Music in Our Times, 1952) by Ernst Hermann Meyer. All of these documents have entered cultural history as part of the broader “formalism debate.” These pronouncements most sharply attacked western popular music, which they viewed as ruled by the “profit motive” and therefore as sentimentally trashy, erotically suggestive, and chauvinistic, contributing with its mindless hits to the “artistic impoverishment of the broad masses.”<sup>4</sup> In the realm of music, they claimed, the “American amusement industry” was trying as hard as it could to undermine the “cultural independence” of other countries with “boogie-woogie cosmopolitanism.”<sup>5</sup> The GDR critics were only a bit less heavy-handed in their approach to the so-called serious music of the West. They accused western composers of having no “mission,” of

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“isolating” their art from society, and thus of creating music as *l’art pour moi* which was “over-developed, affected,” and alienated from all “humanistic” goals.<sup>6</sup> Their prime examples were the works of Schönberg and his pupils, which they viewed as formalistic, cosmopolitan, and as “disavowing all national roots”—that is, based on the same kind of “imperialism” as American pop music.<sup>7</sup> They condemned just as sharply the works of Stravinsky, along with many other representatives of modernistic concepts of music, for being supposedly “devoid of content.” For example, Carl Orff’s opera *Antigonae*, which utilizes mainly a percussion ensemble, was performed in Dresden in 1950. On this occasion, the functionaries of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) attacked the producers, stating that because of its “monotonous, unmelodic” music this work was simply another example of rampant western “formalism.”<sup>8</sup> Ernst Hermann Meyer used the same words in his book *Musik im Zeitgeschehen* in 1952, where he was willing to exclude only Leo Janáček, Béla Bartók, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Zoltan Kodály from his critique of western modernist composers because of their tendency to use folk motifs. He classified the rest as “formalistic hypermodernists,” especially Schönberg, whom Adorno idolized for his purely hermetic and negativistic compositions.<sup>9</sup>

From these criticisms, it is already possible to deduce indirectly the positive goals of early GDR musical policy and the hopes that were invested in it. Many cultural functionaries hoped to overcome the division of musical life into trivial and elitist genres, which continued to exist not only in the West, but also in their own country. They imagined that important music which spoke to everyone could be created if all composers were encouraged to place themselves as artists fully in the service of constructing a peace-loving, humanistic, antifascist society, rather than merely following their own inclinations. From now on, they no longer wanted separate musical spheres, that is, elitist music for the older, cultured bourgeoisie and trivial music for the broad masses. Rather, they wanted only **one** music, which was to be understood as the artistic expression of a non-antagonistic society. In this connection, they often quoted Lenin’s maxim: “Art belongs to the people. It must have its deepest roots in the broad working masses; it must be understood and loved by them.”



These cultural functionaries set their sights on encouraging the composition of vocal music as the first step towards a truly socialist musical culture. They envisioned this, as they did all of the other arts, as providing the aesthetic impetus to creating what Johannes R. Becher termed the “one great, cultured nation.” In its texts, this vocal music was to express “heroic pathos, revolutionary struggle, patriotism and optimism, happiness, and joy in life.” Here, the goal was to evoke in this music’s listeners all the feelings which “arise from the splendid prospect of a future communist society characterized by prosperity, happiness, and peace, with no misery, poverty, or war,” as the cultural functionary Eberhard Rebling stated in 1952.<sup>10</sup> This same Rebling went on to call for music which “speaks directly to the masses of the working people through a connection to the word, simple and captivating melodies, German intonations, and links to earlier progressive traditions which are still alive among the people.”<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, a number of guidelines were already sketched out at this point which later on continued to be held up as postulates. With respect to the content of music, the SED demanded an optimistically expressed goal of a socialist transformation of the entire society. The point of this was to prevent the perpetuation of modernistic music’s frequently melancholy, supposedly tragic mood that had long served as an aesthetic veil for the bourgeoisie’s ruthless exploitation and rapaciousness. Above all, the new goals were to be oriented towards peace, solidarity, partisanship, and productivity. The SED functionaries believed that the best mode of expressing such programmatic content was vocal music, in the forms of songs, choral works, or even oratorios. The texts of these pieces were to be as understandable and melodically captivating as possible, in order to arouse the listeners’ emotions and also to set forth guidelines for their political convictions and their work ethic. As models, they pointed above all to Soviet music and the party-based *agit-prop* music of the late 1920s. They also pointed to older German folk songs that had not yet been corrupted by fascism, in order to bring an indigenous component into these guidelines.

Party theoreticians faced a far greater challenge when they moved on to developing guidelines for a socialist culture of instrumental music, in which the “content” does not appear as directly as in the texts of vocal

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music. The content of instrumental music can be perceived only indirectly—as feelings, moods, flashes of thought, or programmatically composed passages.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in order to support their policy, these theoreticians generally followed the approach of Franz Mehring and Georg Lukács by taking the art of the progressive bourgeoisie as a model. By doing this, they sought to include in their discussions the principle of “dialectical appropriation,” indispensable to the Marxist view of history and culture. Furthermore, they wanted to win over working people to this kind of music, since most of them had previously been excluded from access to higher forms of culture. In this vein, Ernst Hermann Meyer stated as early as 1952 in his *Musik im Zeitgeschehen* that Beethoven was the most important German “Jacobin.” He explained this by arguing that Beethoven’s music drew its life entirely from a progressive spirit that was deeply connected to the so-called common people.<sup>13</sup> Others wrote that with its “overwhelming optimism,” Schubert’s great C Major Symphony could only be understood as a “protest against the prevailing lethargy and passivity of his compatriots” and as a call to rebel against the “reactionary regime of Metternich.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, even Brahms’ First Symphony was interpreted as a musical expression of “struggle and victory” which would never have been composed if not for the “historic struggle of the German people for unity and freedom.”<sup>15</sup>

But the new socialist musical policy dealt not only with forms of symphonic and chamber music. The same approach was also taken to earlier church music, above all to that of Bach. Socialist theoreticians claimed that he was a representative of “national self-determination who paved the way for progress” and who never renounced the ideals of “humanism and peace.”<sup>16</sup> The thesis here was that a kind of progressive partisanship had early evolved within those sectors of the German middle classes whose best artistic accomplishments were always connected to national tradition and filled with humanistic content. Thus, in the final analysis, these GDR theoreticians developed a concept of music which—recasting Johannes R. Becher’s slogan “Forward to Goethe!”—can perhaps be captured in the motto “Forward to Beethoven!” In any event, this concept excluded from the outset any possibility of appropriating models from bourgeois-modernistic or even avant-garde socialist art. Accordingly, the goal of this music theory was not a new *agitprop* music

in the style of the late 1920s. Rather, the goal was a “popular classicism” that was to keep its distance from all formalistic, anti-humanistic experimentation, expressing its progressive impetus more through content than through form. In other words, as the most important GDR music encyclopedia still stated in the mid-1960s, socialist music should prove itself worthy of the “historical tradition of that German music which has repeatedly played an important role in mobilizing progressive movements.”<sup>17</sup>

In this connection, the East German cultural functionaries of the 1950s generally took the Soviet version of socialist realism as their theoretical foundation. While this approach could be applied relatively easily to literature and painting because of its emphasis on thematic clarity and commitment, it was more problematic for composers and musicologists. To be sure, the new optimism could also be expressed in music. But in the instrumental musical genres without vocal texts, the type of optimism being expressed remained ambivalent. Accordingly, in this area, the GDR theoreticians had to content themselves with applying relatively vague criteria such as emotional clarity, intelligibility, conceptual substance, or closeness to the people. By developing these characteristics, they hoped that the new music would manifest a “historical striding forward”<sup>18</sup> which would express an impetus towards the socialist transformation of society as a whole.

In order to advance from theory to practice, music pedagogy was strongly emphasized from the birth in the GDR. The first step in this regard was the tens if not hundreds of thousands of new songbooks that were distributed in all GDR schools and groups of the Free German Youth (FDJ). Along with older folk songs, these collections also contained the national anthem of the GDR and a group of songs for socialist activists, children, and world youth, as can be seen in the first volumes of the journal *Musik in der Schule* (founded in 1949).<sup>19</sup> Similar kinds of records were produced by the company “*Lied der Zeit*” (Song of the Times), which Ernst Busch had launched shortly after the war. Furthermore, music was always a part of festivals and celebrations—whether national holidays, secularized Christmas celebrations, or the *Jugendweihen* (socialist initiation ceremonies for fourteen-year-olds). The first impulse in this direction was given by the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen*

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*Erneuerung Deutschlands*, which published its *Material zur Ausgestaltung von Feierstunden für Kinder* (Material to Accompany Children's Celebrations) in 1951 in an anthology entitled *Lernt und schafft wie nie zuvor* (Learn and Produce as Never Before). But these efforts in music pedagogy were not limited to school children and the Young Pioneers of the FDJ as the representatives of the first generation to grow up in the GDR. They also extended to adults whose formative years had fallen in the Weimar Republic and in the Third Reich. This task was taken over above all by the four music academies in Halle, Berlin, Weimar, and Dresden, as well as by the large number of evening schools where adults interested in singing and playing instruments could practice their skills. In addition, factory workers—as the most important representatives of the people—were by no means overlooked. They were called upon to found workers' choirs or symphony orchestras with high standards and to dedicate themselves to playing great classical works rather than being satisfied with instruments such as the accordion or guitar. In the context of these endeavors, the music group of the VEB Buna Combine was even awarded the Händel Prize of the city of Halle for its outstanding accomplishments. As was the case with the music festivals organized throughout the GDR during the 1950s, all of these efforts aimed to consolidate the “alliance of the workers” with the “artistic intellectuals” and thus to pave the way towards creating “one great, cultured nation.”<sup>20</sup> Let us now finally turn to those composers who actually attempted to place their works in the service of these socialist goals, postulates, and theories. Simply put, it is possible to distinguish four groups: 1) the official representatives of the SED, many of whom had already advocated a communist approach to music in the late 1920s; 2) the left avant-gardists of the mid-to-late Weimar Republic, who had belonged initially to the bourgeois-modernistic camp; 3) those composers who had remained in Germany during the Third Reich and chose not to emigrate to the West after 1945, but instead stayed in the Soviet Occupation Zone and then in the GDR; and 4) the representatives of the younger generation, who received their musical training in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the Soviet Occupation Zone and then in the GDR.

The main representative of the first group was Ernst Hermann Meyer, who—like Nathan Notowicz, Harry Goldschmidt, Georg Knepler,

Eberhard Rebling, and Kurt Schwaen—had already supported the goals of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) as a student before 1933. After finishing his studies, he taught with Hanns Eisler at the *Marxistische Berliner Arbeiterschule* (Marxist Berlin School for Workers, MASCH), directed choirs and composed works for the *Kampfgemeinschaft der Arbeitersänger* (Singing Workers United in Struggle), wrote contributions for the *Rote Fahne* (Red Flag), and edited the journal *Kampfmusik* (Music of Struggle).<sup>21</sup> In 1933, since he was both a Communist and a Jew, he went into exile in England, where he wrote several works of music theory. The Humboldt University in East Berlin appointed him Professor of the Sociology of Music in 1948. Shortly thereafter, he founded the journal *Musik und Gesellschaft*, and for many years he played a leadership role in the GDR Composers' Union. He wrote the influential book *Musik im Zeitgeschehen* as well as other works on music theory and history in which he held up Beethoven as the greatest German composer, an “activist and a revolutionary” whose “musical language had always been expressed in the idiom of the people.”<sup>22</sup> In 1950, 1952, and 1963, he received the National Prize of the GDR, and he even became a candidate for the Central Committee of the SED at the beginning of the 1960s. Along with songs based on poems of the German “classicist” Goethe, he also composed during these years a countless number of songs, choral works, and oratorios based on texts by Johannes R. Becher, Erich Weinert, Kuba (i.e., Kurt Barthel), Stephan Hermlin, Louis FURNBERG, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and other communists. These songs often had titles such as *Die Partei* (The Party), *Des Sieges Gewissheit* (The Certainty of Victor), *Lied an Stalin* (Song to Stalin), *Der tausendjährige Lenin* (Lenin Will Last a Thousand Years), *Dank an die Sowjetarmee* (Thanks to the Soviet Army), *Lied vom Bau des Sozialismus* (Song for the Construction of Socialism), and *Lied der Deutsch-Sowjetischen Freundschaft* (Song of German-Soviet Friendship). He even went so far as to compose the music for the film *Walter Ulbricht* (1953), which was conceived in the spirit of the prevailing personality cult. In all of these works, as he himself asserted,<sup>23</sup> he always proceeded from the “content” and not from “formal considerations and abstract stylistic problems.” Consequently, he tried to compose music that was situated “between tradition and immediate relevance” that was as accessible as possible and which was oriented

towards goals such as “peace, productivity, fulfilling the economic plan, and progressiveness.” He intended his music to be addressed primarily to the “producing people” rather than to the “non-producing class that made up the audience for the elitist composers of the West.”<sup>24</sup>

By contrast, the group of left avant-gardists was significantly smaller, consisting, to be precise, only of Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau. Eisler, who had begun his career with dodecaphonic works as the personal pupil of Arnold Schönberg, switched over to the Red *Agitprop* Music movement at the end of the 1920s. In 1931 he wrote the music for Bertolt Brecht’s *Die Maßnahme* (The Measures Taken) and then had to go into exile in 1933 as a Communist and a Jew. During the 1930s, on the one hand, he wrote relatively accessible music for the antifascist struggle. On the other hand, he also composed works that made use of complicated, modernistic techniques, that is, works that were based on twelve-tone rows à la Schönberg. Among these latter works is his *Deutsche Symphonie* (German Symphony, 1936-38) which incorporates texts by Brecht. Here, Eisler sought to ally himself with the Popular Front movement which encompassed **everyone** expelled from the Third Reich—that is, Schönberg as well as Brecht.<sup>25</sup> But with such compositions, he encountered resistance from the strict representatives of Socialist Realism. For this reason, he preferred to go into exile in the U.S. rather than in the USSR. During his first years in the GDR, he allied himself closely with the SED by setting Johannes R. Becher’s text for the national anthem to music, for which both men received the National Prize in 1950. He also set other texts by Becher to music in his *Neue deutsche Volkslieder* (New German Folk Songs), which openly advocated communism. Tensions constantly arose, however, between Eisler and the Party. These were caused, on the one hand, by Eisler’s clear partiality for Schönberg, whose music he wanted to “rework” in a socialist manner. On the other hand, tensions were also provoked by Eisler’s critique of Goethe’s Faust character, who he depicted with unmistakably negative features in an opera libretto of 1953. With this depiction, Eisler ran up against the massive resistance of all those advocates of the so-called “executor theory” (*Vollstreckertheorie*) such as Becher and Ulbricht, who viewed the GDR as putting into practice the Faustian humanism of the Age of Goethe.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, the relationship between Eisler and the SED remained a

rather tense one characterized by shared political goals, but not by agreement on questions of artistic form and technique. It would remain so until Eisler's death in 1962.

A similar tension developed between Paul Dessau and the SED in the 1950s. Dessau, who had not been a Communist prior to the Third Reich, but went into exile because he was Jewish, only became interested in communism in the U.S. after beginning to collaborate with Brecht in 1942. Like Meyer and Eisler, he returned to Berlin in 1948. He continued to compose music for Brecht's plays and also wrote music for plays by Friedrich Wolf and Gustav von Wangenheim, as well as for DEFA films such as *Du und mancher Kamerad* (You and Many a Comrade). For these works, the SED awarded him the National Prize twice during the 1950s. However, the SED took Dessau severely to task in 1951 for the music he composed for Brecht's *Verhör des Lukullus* (The Interrogation of Lucullus). In *Neues Deutschland*, the SED party newspaper, the SED attacked Dessau's music for its "formalistic, modernistic" elements which "overwhelmed listeners with discordances and intellectualistic sophistries," which "affirmed the ideas of the regressive part of the audience while antagonizing progressive listeners."<sup>27</sup> Dessau's *Deutsches Miserere* (German Miserere, 1945), which was also based on texts by Brecht, provoked similar objections. Because of its "gloomy" mood, it did not express the optimism demanded by the SED, and its premiere was ultimately delayed until 1966.<sup>28</sup>

By contrast, there was a substantially larger group of composers in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR who had been neither Jews nor communists in 1933, who had chosen to remain in the Third Reich, and who claimed after the war to have been "misused or deceived by the National Socialist regime."<sup>29</sup> During the 1950s, the best-known representatives of this group were Ottmar Gerster, Max Butting, Rudolf Wagner-Régeny, Leo Spies, Fidelio F. Finke, Heinz Vogt, Wolfgang Zeller, Kurt Barth, and Kurt Beilschmidt, as well as many others who between 1933 and 1945 had composed, among other things, Hitler Youth songs, Nazi oratorios, or volkish cantatas.<sup>30</sup> In the postwar period, whether out of conviction or opportunism, these composers supported SED cultural policies by writing songs for the Free German Youth, for peace, for German-Soviet friendship, or for the victorious rise of the working class.

An especially typical representative of this group was Ottmar Gerster, who held a position at the Folkwang School in Essen from 1927 until 1945, celebrated Hermann Göring's air force with his piece for men's choir entitled *Deutsche Flieger voraus* (German Pilots Lead On) in 1936, and also enjoyed considerable success during the Third Reich with his operas *Enoch Arden* (1936) and *Die Hexe von Passau* (The Witch of Passau, 1941). Gerster was appointed to a professorship at the Weimar Academy of Music in 1947. In the GDR, he was known primarily for his *Lieder der Nationalen Front* (Songs of the National Front, 1951), his cantata *Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost* (Ironworks Combine East, 1952), his *Bauernballade* (Farmers' Ballad, 1953), and his *Ballade vom Manne Karl Marx* (Ballad of the Man Karl Marx, 1961), which utilized texts by Johannes R. Becher, Hans Marchwitza, Paul Wiens, and Stephan Hermlin, among others. Because of these activities he became the Chairman of the GDR Composers' Union in 1951, and he was awarded two National Prizes in the following years.

In turn, the group of GDR composers who did not begin to write until the 1950s was just as small as that of the earlier exiles. Of these, the two who enjoyed the highest esteem of the SED were Günter Kochan and Siegfried Matthus. It was Kochan whose career probably went furthest. Between 1950 and 1965, the awards he received for his compositions included the Prize of the Free German Youth, the Ernst Zinna Prize, and two National Prizes. In 1965 he was named a member of the Academy of the Arts in East Berlin. Among his vocal works, the numerous songs for youth and massed choirs stand out, bearing titles such as *Signale der Jugend* (The Calls of Youth), *Wir lieben unsere Heimat* (We Love Our Homeland), *Genosse General* (Comrade General), *Der Sozialismus lebt* (Socialism Lives), *Laßt euch grüßen, Pioniere* (We Greet You, Pioneers), and *Her mit dem Friedensvertrag* (Give Us the Peace Treaty). These were all lauded in the SED press, as were many of his orchestral works. For example, Eberhard Rebling praised Kochan's First Violin Concerto for its "utilization of classical models, especially of Brahms."<sup>31</sup> Matthus also created works that made use of texts by Stephan Hermlin, Paul Wiens, and Kuba. However, in contrast to Kochan, he attempted to avoid both direct political partisanship as well as "classical" influences in favor of developing his own musical language, which may



be characterized as semi-modern.

Let us now draw some conclusions. Did the SED actually succeed with its music policies between 1950 and 1965 in promoting a new vocal music filled with socialist content? Did it succeed in gradually overcoming the extreme contrast between trivial music meant to entertain the broad masses of workers and classical music meant for the so-called cultivated groups in society? Was the course now that would lead to that “one great, cultured nation” dreamt of by idealists like Johannes R. Becher set? Although many SED theoreticians tried to maintain an optimistic outlook, the statistics tended to speak against their efforts. Dance music, hit tunes, and operettas continued to be the music that the broad masses most wanted to hear. On the other hand, well-educated groups still preferred operas and concerts featuring baroque, classical, and romantic music. In contrast, the music situated between these two extremes—namely, the socialist music of the four groups of composers described above—played a role which was as marginal in the GDR as that of modernistic music in the western Federal Republic between 1950 and 1965.<sup>32</sup> To be sure, there were always idealists who enthusiastically advocated the creation of a socialist type of music. They held on to the hope of overcoming the older, class-based distinction between two musical sectors, a high and a low musical culture. However, they always found themselves confronted with the fact that the broad masses, for whom the new socialist music was being composed and performed, had little or no interest in it.

There were reasons for this. One of the most important was the fact that the GDR was created not as the result of a socialist revolution but as a result of the defeat of the Third Reich and the subsequent occupation by the Red Army. Consequently, following contemporary theories of totalitarianism, many people in the GDR simply equated the new regime with the Nazi regime and believed the politics of the SED to be just as dictatorial or at least as prescriptive as the politics of the National Socialists. Therefore, if we talk about a “socialist musical culture” in the GDR, we can apply this term only to a small segment of musical life in this state—since in reality, most composers tried to avoid being influenced by the party. To put it bluntly, in the realm of musical life, as in other domains, Walter Ulbricht was doomed to “rule like a tragic Shakespearean king over a nation of enemies,” as Heiner Müller later

stated.<sup>33</sup>

So, in the course of the 1960s, the SED gradually renounced its dream of an unalienated “high-quality music for everyone” and largely returned to the very status quo that it had formerly condemned. To be sure, socialist initiatives continued to be raised sporadically, but they played an ever-smaller role. In contrast, the musical classics of the older bourgeoisie enjoyed growing prestige as exemplars of the “cultural heritage.” Even western works previously rejected as “formalistic,” such as those by Schönberg and his pupils, could eventually be performed in the GDR as well. Parallel to this development, GDR composers moved away from creating vocal music filled with “content” in favor of writing instrumental works which they claimed to be “realistic” but which were, in the final analysis, devoid of any explicit political content. This development was characteristic even for so-called trivial dance music, which socialist composers had tried to make more dignified by creating the “*Lipsi*” dance in 1958. After this, dance music generally conformed to older models or to influences from the West, and even incorporated certain elements of rock music after 1964. To be sure, all of this meant that a greater “freedom” spread through the music scene. However, it was a freedom that was based largely on setting aside the hope for a socialist transformation of musical life.

Translated by Carol Poore

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 46-61.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fred K. Prieberg, *Musik im anderen Deutschland* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1968), 154 and 106; and also Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds., *Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. 1945-1976* (Berlin: Verlag für Neue Musik, 1979), 5ff.

<sup>3</sup> “Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur: Entschließung des ZK der SED vom 17. März 1951,” in: *Einheit*, 6(1951): 591.<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen* (Berlin: Henschel, 1952), 149-69.

- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 162-64.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 140 ff.
- <sup>7</sup> Helmut Holtzhauer, "Gegen den Formalismus in der Kunst," in: *Sächsische Zeitung*, April 25, 1950.
- <sup>8</sup> "Kampf gegen den Formalismus," 584.
- <sup>9</sup> Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 157, 163.
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted in Prieberg, *Musik im anderen Deutschland*, 56.
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. my book *Konkretes Hören: Zum Inhalt der Instrumentalmusik* (Berlin: Argument, 1981), 113-30.
- <sup>13</sup> Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 61.
- <sup>14</sup> Quoted in Prieberg, *Musik im anderen Deutschland*, 293.
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 293.
- <sup>16</sup> On this topic, see, among other references Frank Schneider, *Das Streichquartettsschaffen in der DDR bis 1970* (Leipzig: Verlag für Neue Musik, 1980); and Wilhelm Gonnermann, "Klaviermusik in der DDR. 1945-1972," in: Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds., *Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* Vol. IV. (Berlin: Verlag für Neue Musik, 1977)
- <sup>17</sup> H.L., "Die Jugend eröffnet das Bachjahr," in: *Neues Deutschland*, March 19, 1950.
- <sup>18</sup> Horst Seeger, *Musiklexikon* Vol. II. (Leipzig: Verlag für Neue Musik, 1966) 328. Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 191.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Prieberg, *Musik im anderen Deutschland*, 260 ff.
- <sup>20</sup> Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 96.
- <sup>21</sup> On this see Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Das kompositorische und theoretische Werk*, ed. Mathias Hansen (Leipzig: biographische Studie), in: Brockhaus and Niemann, eds., *Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte* (Berlin: Verlag für Neue Musik, 1976); and Konrad Niemann and Frank Schneider, "Ernst Hermann Meyer. Eine für Neue Musik, 1973), Vol. III, 19-80.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. Ernst Hermann Meyer, "Ludwig van Beethoven. Ein Genius der deutschen Nation" (1952), and "Beethoven und die Volksmusik" (1952), in: E.H.M., *Aufsätze über Musik* (Berlin: Henschel, 1957), 86, 101.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>24</sup> Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 182.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. my article: "Der Aufmarsch der Dissonanzen: Hanns Eislers 'Deutsche Symphonie,'" in: Jost Hermand, *Sieben Arten an Deutschland zu leiden* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1979), 94-110.
- <sup>26</sup> Cf. Alexander Abusch, "Faust—Held oder Renegat in der deutschen Nationalliteratur?" in: *Sinn und Form* 5 (1953): 189.
- <sup>27</sup> H. L., "Das Verhör des Lukullus: Ein mißlungenes Experiment in der Deutschen Staatsoper," in: *Neues Deutschland*, March 22, 1951. See also Joachim Lucchesi, ed., *Das Verhör in der Oper: Die Debatte um die Aufführung von Bertolt Brecht und Paul Dessau* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 1993).
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Prieberg, *Musik im anderen Deutschland*, 302.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 136 f., 138.

<sup>31</sup> On this see my article: “Die restaurierte ‘Moderne’ im Umkreis der musikalischen Teilkulturen der Nachkriegszeit,” in: Werner Klüppelholz, ed., *Musikpädagogische Forschung*. Vol. IV, *Musikalische Teilkulturen* (Laaber: Laaber, 1983), 172-193.

<sup>32</sup> Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992), 83.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Prieberg, *Musik im anderen Deutschland*, 92.

## **JAZZ IN A SOCIALIST STATE? LIVING WITH A PARADOX**

Günter “Baby” Sommer

In my paper on the development of jazz, I would like to focus on the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), although one should not ignore the fact that the development of jazz had similar philosophical beginnings and suffered similar socio-political oppression in other central and eastern European countries like Poland, Hungary, the former USSR and the Czech Republic. Jazz music in these countries sounded different due to the fact that it was either closely allied to the tradition of folk music, as in the Balkans, or strongly influenced by American sources, as was the case in Poland.

The state and party directives towards cultural policy were similar in all countries within the socialist block. In this way, the state stipulated which forms of art and culture should be accepted and promoted and which forms—including music—belonged in the enemy camp and therefore had to be eradicated. Ideologically, jazz has always been put under suspicion in eastern Europe, as jazz musicians were alleged to be “conspiring with the class enemy.” Communist leaders knew that they could only assert their doctrine of “Socialist Realism” through a rigorous policy of isolation. They called jazz a “channel through which the barbarous poison of Americanism penetrates and threatens to overpower the minds of workers.” In the East, jazz was more defined, since in the countries under communist rule it was both an officially restricted alien element and an idealized exotica which for many people encompassed the hopes for increased freedom. Different from the West, jazz in the East was always “abnormal” in cultural life and therefore, when one reflects on its character and origin, authentic.

A common framework can be observed in the differing national variations of jazz music. The prohibitions and reprisals of the Stalin era and the Cold War created communities and kinship based on common need. Jazz in the East was always an attempt to break out of normality as well as the tentative search for a new experience of life. For many, the end of the Second World War meant the beginning of a new epoch. Twelve years of Nazi rule in Germany resulted in the destruction of cities, wrecked

families, ruined careers, and left cultural needs unfulfilled. In Germany, jazz had been known since the 1920s as the exotic music of African-Americans and was copied in the European countries in many variations. Under the Nazi regime, the music was banned, except when it served the purposes of propaganda.

After the war, jazz music was spread by GIs in the clubs in the American Sector of Germany and was played by both American and German musicians. In the Soviet Sector, German musicians could play jazz unhindered until approximately 1950. They played mainly the Swing music of the 1930s and 1940s in larger and smaller bands, such as one led by the saxophonist Heinz Kretschmar. He was forced to end his career in 1951 on the grounds that his music was hostile to culture, would endanger public order, moral values, and young people.

With the birth of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, industrial, commercial and cultural life began to be oriented toward and organized according to the ideals of Stalinist politics. Initially, the objective was to rebuild a ruined economy and produce the basic necessities of life. In the West, this was achieved with American help in the form of the Marshall Plan. In the East, however, the Soviets demanded reparations and dismantled the last few remaining industrial plants. The initial years of reconstruction were marked by debt payments to the Soviet Union. Because of the urgent economic and industrial problems, the few remaining jazz musicians in the East could continue to play their swing-based jazz music unmolested in the years immediately following the war.

At the beginning of the 1950s this changed. In the years before the national uprising on June 17, 1953, those who favored the development of a market economy and democracy and the advocates of a planned economy and socialism became increasingly polarized. Walter Ulbricht, the head of the first GDR government, adopted a number of cultural political directives. At the first Bitterfeld conference in 1958, the doctrine of “Socialist Realism” was revitalized. This conference determined that only such art would be permitted and promoted which served the interests and needs of the working class as defined by the party. In the field of entertainment, which included jazz and popular music, strict directives were drafted concerning what was forbidden and what was allowed. In the sphere of music, quotas were established for eastern and western

writers and composers, i.e., 60 percent East and 40 percent West. These directives introduced a new age of total state control over the arts and cultural life. Statements like those of Field Marshall Montgomery (“We will conquer the East with the jazz trumpet”) were considered imperialist declarations of war. Musicians and music connoisseurs were forced to meet clandestinely in cellars and apartments to play and listen to their music. The concept of unlimited freedom was transmitted by radio from the West. Willis Conover’s program “Jazzhour” became the focal point for the nightly rendezvous of all jazz fans: it was broadcast on the “Voice of America” from midnight until 1:00 am on short-wave (49 meterband), and on long-wave. In spite of unfavorable atmospheric conditions and reception, these broadcasts were listened to and recorded on a daily basis. This was the longing for the “American way of life.” Gradually, the musical dependence on America was replaced by the autonomous European scene.

This independent European movement, through encounters with West German, British, Dutch and Swiss musicians, finally reached the isolated GDR musicians. Principally in East Berlin jazz musicians met and performed together in the club “*Große Melodie*”—a bar which (it was later discovered) was under the complete control of the East German state security service (*Stasi*).

With the Free Jazz Movement of the 1960s, the idea emerged of developing an independent European style of jazz. Both musicians and audiences in East Germany regarded the revolutionary principle of the Free Jazz Movement in America as a general protest against state authority. For communist functionaries who had preached for years about the national features of a socialist culture, the idea of freedom was of great concern. Free jazz concerts became meeting and collecting points for critical listeners caught between resignation and rebellion. The audiences were comprised of young people, workers, apprentices, and students. They were united by a common discontent against a state-controlled cultural policy. The state promoted a classic cultural heritage, which offered little room for interpretation and reduced pop music to weekend relaxation for the working classes. Young people, who either had no access to the former or had an aversion to the latter, were driven into the arms of musicians who from the way they handled their

instruments conveyed a feeling of freedom. They were unable to find this feeling at their place of work or study in the real world of daily repression and restrictions. The eruptive energy of free improvisation brought an explosive conflict with the ruling cultural bureaucracy. This resulted in deep suspicion against the indefinable expressive form of jazz. There was no law which could specify that an “f-tone” was socialistic whereas an “f-sharp-tone” was capitalistic. This led to an undermining of censorship. While cultural bureaucrats were busy organizing authors, songwriters, and artists into state-controlled organizations, jazz musicians, on the periphery of cultural life, were able to develop their music. The period from 1968-1978 was the most fruitful, as musicians from the Free Musical Production (FMP) in West Berlin came East to play together with GDR musicians. They went on concert tours of the GDR which were in part arranged by the state-owned artistic agency. Since a strictly German/German encounter was not permitted, such concerts required the neutralizing presence of an international artist from a western country. This meant exercising a unity with no basis in the political systems. Free jazz represented also the destruction of normative aesthetics and a liberal attitude towards jazz tradition. In the shadow of GDR censorship oriented to word and image, a network of performance initiatives was successfully established in the 1970s. The same decade saw the dialectical acceptance of jazz. (In dialectic fashion, in the 1970s jazz was suddenly accepted as the music of a progressive American proletariat, which, apart from the problem of the masses, was also considered oppressed by a white bourgeoisie.) Actually none of the cultural functionaries was aware that saxophones, trumpets, and drums were tools to undermine the party’s position.

In the search for personal musical roots, musicians like Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky, Conrad Bauer, Ulrich Gumpert and Günter “Baby” Sommer discovered medieval German ballads that they worked into their own improvisations. This soon brought the concept of an independent GDR jazz into the discussion, which resonated with the obsessive drive for cultural and diplomatic recognition on the part of the GDR leadership. In a dialectical reversal, ideology was suddenly subservient to the economy. The chronic shortage of foreign currency in the GDR treasury in the 1980s set the signal for exports—even musical ones. In a tightrope act between



export and prohibition, the Ministry of Culture and the touring musicians established a phony truce. Apart from two minor exceptions, musicians never used a concert tour to escape to the West. Jazz in the GDR was therefore considered worthy of state support in the 1980s. The international respect that GDR musicians earned abroad, together with foreign currencies, strengthened the chronically deficient self-confidence of the GDR leadership.

The history of jazz in the GDR can be divided into three different periods. The first period comprises the years immediately after the war, from 1945 to 1950, in which musicians tried to make up for lost time due to the prohibitions of the Nazi period. In contrast to these positive beginnings, the second period, during the 1950s and 1960s was overshadowed by the dogma of an intensifying class struggle during the build-up of socialism. The control of science and culture, the suppression of creativity, promotion of intolerance and a strict distancing from the outside western world were the basis for cultural concepts and strategies of state and party leadership. Jazz and rock'n'roll were condemned as vehicles of imperialistic ideology. By the end of the 1960s, when the grand social designs of the beginning years were overtaken by reality and the build-up of Socialism turned out to be more complicated than expected, musicians were not only concerned with the search for musical progress, but also with the search for self-fulfillment.

The contradictory symbolic assessment of jazz by the state leadership (as an imperialist sub-culture on the one hand, and a cultural expression of suppressed minorities on the other), yielded to a reappraisal in the 1970s, followed by a liberalization and surge of creativity. The chief party ideologue, Kurt Hager, formulated the reappraisal in 1972 as follows:

Our cultural policy is aimed at the promotion of a vital and varied art, in which not a color, not a tone, nor a part of life is left out. The purpose of a social realistic art, is to encompass artistically all that is needed in the development of the socialistic character.

The last decade of jazz development in the GDR marked the logical

continuation of the path begun in the 1980s: I call it individualizing without the loss of a collective sense of solidarity. These social features of jazz shaped its development in the 1980s in the GDR. The most positive feature of this period was a further increase in jazz events together with an improvement in performance opportunities, state support by the Ministry of Culture, and travel opportunities to the West, which brought about increased exchange with western musicians. This preferential treatment did not go without attempts to solicit information and public support for the regime. For example, the East German state sought support for the expulsion of songwriter Wolf Biermann in November 1976 among the ranks of jazz musicians.

With the fall of the Wall in November 1989, living and working conditions of jazz musicians in East Germany changed. Nearly everyone welcomed the changes, although they also brought a feeling of great uncertainty. The feeling of security under the former system had concealed the danger of promoting passivity instead of creativity. Judging from their achievements, East German jazz musicians have long played an integral part in international developments and are like jazz musicians everywhere: outsiders playing music for minorities.

## **EAST-WEST BREAKTHROUGHS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GDR POP UNDERGROUND TODAY**

Susanne Binás

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *BMG Berlin Musik* group officially inherited East German pop music by acquiring the former GDR pop music label *Amiga*. Its back catalogue contains over 30,000 titles that are usually sold at dumping prices in the discount bins of the media markets, sometimes even in cross-promotions with McDonalds. *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East) is the marketing concept designed to generate a target audience for this music from among those socialized within the territory of the GDR. In many cases, it is successful: fathers make the pilgrimage to the *Rotes Rathaus* in Berlin's traditional city center with their sons. Records of the GDR band *SILLY* are purchased by the dozens by retailers after the premature death of their renowned female lead vocalist, Tamara Danz. All of this illustrates a culturally motivated demand persisting even ten years after the fall of the Wall. The German-based entertainment conglomerate Bertelsmann (the parent company of *BMG Berlin Musik*) was able to achieve more than 300,000,000 DM in sales with this kind of rock and pop music from the GDR.<sup>1</sup> Internationally (beyond the German-speaking market), this music has no significance or impact, and thus no market.

The following remarks will concern bands, persons, and projects that formed the periphery and the non-official sector of state-organized and controlled culture in the GDR. Some of these have developed—sometimes extremely successfully—internationally recognized projects since the opening of the Wall. In spite of certain references to their heritage and origins in information material or reviews, their recent contributions are in no way merely a result of the so-called *Ostalgie* or the myth of the “new,” “other,” or “weird” (*schräg*) bands of suspicious GDR authorities. I have followed these processes with great interest from my perspective as an insider: as an actively participating musician at the time, and in the more recent present as an academic observer and analyst of cultural policies.

Since the 1980s, most of the projects—usually attributed to an

amorphous so-called underground comprised of “weird” or “oblique” (*schräg*) bands<sup>2</sup>—concentrated on giving live concerts and producing cassettes as self-organized forms of culture alongside centrally administered, planned and produced ones. With the collapse of the official structures, the informal cultural networks and structures ceased to exist as well.

In addition to generating aesthetic experiments, creativity and a locally limited exercise of cultural and social empowerment, the East German government’s increasingly futile attempts to control musical culture entailed both a broad range of myths and misunderstandings. Scholars like Michael Rauhut<sup>3</sup> and others have done research on GDR popular music, but most have concentrated on the pre-unification period, usually focusing on the “official” activities within the institutionalized system of centrally administered popular music. This research has concentrated on the interrelationship between official political documents, the media, and popular music, along with the role and the influence of the State Security service (*Stasi*) on these processes. Therefore, I will first discuss some general interconnections, and will then turn to three examples of “East-West breakthroughs.” In particular, I will examine how and why these bands, projects, or, in one case, a label, exist today, which concepts they represent, how they became successful, which experiences and strategies from the past have continued, and what changes they have carried out in order to survive and evolve.

## GENERAL ISSUES

Centrally organized economic and political power in general—thus also in the GDR— attempt to attain total control over all conditions of its existence. Culture in the GDR was over-politicized and conceptually controlled by the state. In addition, the concentration of political power went hand in hand with its apparent opposite, the dissolution and atomization of political power. Self-organized forms of cultural production by musicians and informal groupings seemed to compensate for a lack of diversity in the official sphere, avoiding political dogmatism, and breaking down aesthetic limitations imposed by state bureaucrats, for instance in the radio and television sectors.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the pop underground had almost no links to the official cultural sector. At this time, punk-inspired music, clothes, and behavior were adopted by those in the more intellectual and art oriented circles. Concerts took place in churches and private apartments, often closely observed by *Stasi* agents. Pop music projects and bands accompanied the openings of underground art exhibits, performances, and readings. Musicians were also a part of these informal groups that were usually established by visual artists. Besides live concerts, musicians sought to document their music and communicate with their audiences through audiocassettes. Just as some writers created unique (underground) periodicals in the face of the rigidly-controlled state publishing sector, the younger generation of musicians began emptying out their desk drawers in the early 1980s and releasing their works in underground productions distributed by word of mouth. Some periodicals contained extensive lists of cassette productions, which, like a clandestine communication, encompassed previously unheard-of topics. These activities continued until the end of the GDR and persisted even afterward.

In addition to the art-oriented but pop-influenced concepts, which included participation, learning and playing by doing, and producing physically oriented sounds and rhythms, many young people went into their parents' garages to establish punk, new wave, or guitar-based bands. One reason that they preferred to play for friends and classmates was that there was no opportunity for them to play for public audiences due to rigid licensing restrictions, as Edward Larkey emphasizes in his paper in this volume. Their lyrics, instrumentation, and sounds were at odds with the aesthetic ideas of cultural officials, and with those officially licensed musicians the younger generation pejoratively called "*Staats-Rocker*" (state rockers—the officially recognized and licensed bands). They were organized in a special musicians' association, the "General Directorate of the Committee for Entertainment Arts" (*Generaldirektion beim Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst*).<sup>4</sup> This group resembled a closed society, and helped the select few gain access to concert venues and recording facilities, obtain travel privileges, and other material benefits (like passports, cars, studio equipment, etc.). This constellation resulted in at least two dimensions of conflict: 1) a generational conflict manifested

in certain cultural and musical attitudes and styles, 2) an economic conflict based on access to the instruments of production, studios, concerts, media, information, know-how, and authorization by decisions of senior staff at various agencies or the single monopoly record company, the Amiga sub-label of the *VEB Deutsche Schallplatten* concern, which could only produce fifteen rock and pop albums per year.

The people I am concerned with in this paper were not interested in relations with the official sphere. They wanted merely to “do their own thing” and retain their political and aesthetic independence. Some detested alliances with the centrally administered official institutions and considered themselves part of an opposition, accepting all inherent consequences. However, spaces for expressing their own specific experiences became scarce for those of the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s, who consciously turned their backs on the official media—television more than radio. Many began to turn away from the centrally organized cultural institutions and events like *Rock für den Frieden*<sup>5</sup> and the like. They were preoccupied with their own productions, or directed their interests towards music scenes from abroad. Many pursued secret investigations of their work, using their own empirical material to document their development.

One factor influencing changes in the media—especially radio broadcasting policies—was the liberalization of licensing procedures for public concerts. It was incomparably easier to obtain a license after the mid-1980s than in earlier years. In order to perform in front of an audience, each band had to present its repertoire to a cultural commission of the district government in a special audition. In earlier years, these posts were largely occupied by political bureaucrats with little or no musical background. In contrast to that, however, our band, *EXPANDER DES FORTSCHRITTS* (Expander of Progress) auditioned in front of a commission composed of jazz musicians, who were amenable to, and familiar with the broad spectrum of our musical innovations like three-chord textures, slap bass, cut ups and samples, tapes, or even quotations by Heiner Müller that were peculiar to our style of music. They deflected demands for high levels of musical proficiency and expertise typical of earlier periods by upholding the principles of artistic freedom and pointing out the existence of an interested audience.

Many bands like *FEELING B.*, *SANDOW*, *DIE ANDEREN*, *AG GEIGE*, *DIE ART*, *DER EXPANDER DES FORTSCHRITTS*, *DIE SKEPTIKER*, *DIVISION*, *TORPEDO MAHLSDORF*, or *TINA NEVER HAD A TEDDYBÄR* got their licenses and started an intensive concert schedule in pubs, stages, large industrial plants, theaters, or open-air venues. With the demise of the GDR, most of them stopped their activities, some tried to stage a comeback, some changed their concepts and names, and some took positions in the media or changed professions altogether. The reasons for the drastic changes were as diverse as the scene itself. There was no homogeneous repertoire or single target group to protect them from the economic changes underway in the music industry. Neither the oppositional attitude toward the official institutions of the GDR, nor their common history, generation or territory was sufficient to shield them from the capitalist music market. The only survivors were those who risked a completely new beginning or started projects with an aesthetic and economic niche between current trends. I will now present three examples of East-West breakthroughs along those lines.

### **FROM FEELING B TO RAMMSTEIN**

I will now discuss the first example, the evolution of *FEELING B* to *RAMMSTEIN* because of the never-ending discussions about the “Germanness” of the band *RAMMSTEIN*, especially in the United States. In Germany as well as in other European countries and the United States the metal-techno band *RAMMSTEIN* became very popular after its first album “*Herzeleid*” (translated as “heartache”) in 1995. The accompanying artist and product information for the “*Herzeleid*” CD explains:

Created from a big bang, an urgency which took hold to the same degree of all six musicians, *RAMMSTEIN* wish to be known as an indivisible unit. All of those involved have already made music which bears no resemblance to the *RAMMSTEIN* sound of today. In the East they ignored the obligation to work and existed in a niche culture. ... The *RAMMSTEIN* musicians are from East Berlin (Paul Landers und Christian “Flake” Lorenz belonged to the

skeleton of the Fun-Punk-Band *FEELING B*) and from Schwerin— “Its in the north” they explain helpfully even today, as if talking about a foreign country. *RAMMSTEIN* came into being with an incredible force which is contained both in the music and lyrics. Simultaneously with the founding of the group all of the musicians’ previous partnerships broke down and life in general was the source of *RAMMSTEIN*’s glowering anger.

From the outset the band worked like a company with a growing professional management and divided responsibilities in the different kinds of management operations necessary for becoming a star or best-selling band. They paid particular attention to their eccentric stage-shows, which are full of fire-illuminated black romanticism, perfect choreography and stage garb suggesting sadomasochism and foolishness.

The artist and product-information made the following statement about the band:

Muscular, shining male bodies, unfeigned. And, as could be expected, the first warnings were heard, “blood and earth,” “fascistic,” “proto-militant,” etc. Nevertheless (and, of course, precisely for that reason), the band was a moderate success in just over eighteen months. It landed in the charts several times, and then the breakthrough came, climbing to number eight (with 400,000 CDs sold) in the German album charts.<sup>6</sup>

*RAMMSTEIN* is still under contract with the *Motor* label, and they have released two new albums; “*Sehnsucht*” (desire, or longing) and “*Live aus Berlin*” (Live from Berlin). They received a German video award and a gold record for their 400,000-seller “*Herzeleid*.” Live concerts are sellouts and fans decorate themselves and even their apartment windows with the name of the band. Obviously, more than a few people have identified with this band, especially in the former East Germany. One particular window I remember belongs to a flat in a large, dull concrete



apartment house built in the 1980s, one of those highly standardized, unfriendly housing complexes on the outskirts of the city, with a high rate of unemployment and social anxiety.

What is it about this ensemble from East Berlin and Schwerin? Is it just a youth phenomenon? Does it represent mere enjoyment of sadomasochism, or a new lust for obscurantism? Is this the sound of social degeneration or the heartbeat of societal crisis?

In my opinion, their aesthetics of shock and provocation using archetypal signs and symbols derived from the darkest side and time in German history mark the lack of clarity and typify the hopelessness for many in the current post-industrial period. At the same time, *RAMMSTEIN* is a postmodern phenomenon, where difference and provocation became the norm. If the use of such signs and images really has become the only way to achieve success at the public, or the only way to conduct processes of social reflection, then we are part of a frightening situation. We are confronted with a genuinely ambivalent and problematic process, playing with cultural and aesthetic symbols without any consideration of the contexts in which they had originally been used.<sup>7</sup>

Apparently it has become commonplace to search for the last signifiers with a definite fixed meaning, something particularly evident in *RAMMSTEIN*'s music video "Stripped," where the band uses film sequences from Leni Riefenstahl films from the late 1930s. However, there are also other kinds of songs in the repertoire of *RAMMSTEIN* full of calls for communication, feelings and longings. The mixture of darkness, sadomasochism and homesickness is probably the recipe for their success, and also a success of the marketing and promotion departments of the *Motor* record company, which was first a sublabel of the Polygram company and is currently a part of Universal after the fusion of the Canadian-based Seagram company with Polygram.

The current concept of *RAMMSTEIN* is a break with the concept of *FEELING B*, the predecessor band in which two of the members were active during the GDR period. *FEELING B* stands for diletantism and fun—terribly organized, oppositional, and anti-intellectual. They traveled throughout the GDR in a remodeled red fire engine. Many funny, often drunken punks and other fans followed the band from one outdoor party to the next, and celebrated this cult-band while simultaneously provoking

the GDR state and party bureaucracy.

The bandleader, Aljoscha Rompe—a Swiss citizen by birth—was able to travel to the West. There, he bought instruments and records for the band to help alleviate the chronic supply shortfalls. He had a lot of friends who embraced his unconventional kind of lifestyle. After unification he founded a pirate radio station and a left-wing party which—as I recall—had at least one deputy in the Berlin district city council of Prenzlauer Berg during recent years.

### **FROM *ORNAMENT & VERBRECHEN* TO *TARWATER***

Critic Christoph Tannert stated that, “because of the short period of time between the production and reception, rock and pop music is much more susceptible to the embrace by ideological and market power than visual arts and literature.”<sup>8</sup> Most of the musicians’ decisions were made on the basis of pragmatic considerations due to their precarious social status as non-institutionalized or coincidental participants in popular music and cultural production. People involved in that field have to be much more flexible to achieve success in filling in the spaces left by both the major labels as well as the publicly funded cultural sector. The project Christoph Tannert is speaking about here is *TARWATER*. Their music is characterized by samples, minimalist structures and cut ups—a music that locates the previously unexplored space between Cabaret Voltaire<sup>9</sup> and latter-day Massive Attack.<sup>10</sup>

*TARWATER*’s latest album, *silur*, refers to a time period (the Silurium Age), where we find the first fishes and plants, 438 million years ago. A useful fact only because of its relevance to the quirky music of Bernd Jestram and Ronald Lippok, also known as the group *TARWATER*. This album is the first *TARWATER* recording officially released in the UK. The British music magazine *New Musical Express* (NME) wrote:

Usually, all that reaches Britain is the happy-clappy trance-techno radiating from Berlin’s annual Love-Parade... But dig a little deeper and there’s a loose movement of bands spanning the country who are making some of the most original new music... between guitar and sample-led music.

It's a realization that the most exciting music often occurs at a point of unlikely fusion, where traditions—like postrock, electronic, jazz, avant-garde- classical whatever—clash and mingle.<sup>11</sup>

Journalists and agencies beyond Germany often try to pigeonhole *TARWATER* into the category of 1970s and 1980s *Krautrock* (made famous by the electronic band *KRAFTWERK*), but Ronald Lippok rejects this categorization. However, he is quite aware that current interest in German new electronic music follows in the footsteps of the clichés of the precise repetitive structure—first developed and presented by the famous Düsseldorf band *KRAFTWERK* in the 1970s. These probably play an important role in *TARWATER*'s success, which, incidentally, means selling around 12,000 CDs. This is quite a lot for a project working in an independent context, organized and distributed by a small dynamic Berlin label named *kitty yo* ([www.kitty-yo.de](http://www.kitty-yo.de)). *TARWATER* does not disappoint the stereotyped ideas about their affinity to *Krautrock*. But the band is not especially interested in conveying a message through a typical song. Instead, they have turned their back on conventional song writing in the interest of creating track patterns devoid of any particular message. The band is interested primarily in the medium of sound in itself. The samples (which include sound material as well as lyrics) are used as sources of aesthetic material and exploited for their sound qualities to express sadness, melancholy, etc.

Ronald Lippok and Bernd Jestram first employed this strategy when they started their musical projects under the confusing title *ORNAMENT & VERBRECHEN* (ornament and crime) in the early 1980s, a name taken from the title of an essay by Adolf Loos, a modernist architect from turn-of-the-century Vienna. Lippok and Jestram (today *TARWATER*), who, during the GDR period, formed the nucleus or skeleton of *ORNAMENT & VERBRECHEN*, were fully aware of the potential misunderstandings construed by this name. As art students they often were confronted with the diverse concepts of pure functionalism as well as its apparent opposite, the ornament, as it was conceptualized in GDR-design-theory. More interested in surreal poetics than direct oppositional propaganda, they always tried to cultivate this contradiction and derived pleasure from

divergences. *ORNAMENT & VERBRECHEN* brought together performance artists and actresses, poets, filmmakers and writers in various projects and bands.

During the GDR period, *ORNAMENT & VERBRECHEN* refused to submit to the licensing procedure mentioned earlier because of the hypocrisy that they perceived in the political leadership in the late 1980s. In 1986, Bernd Jesträm left the GDR. After the fall of the Wall, the two soon resumed cooperating in common projects, releasing records, music documentaries, and theater pieces.

### **FROM AG-GEIGE TO RASTER-NOTON**

My last example refers to a small electronic label: raster-noton, a cooperative venture between the labels *RASTER* (Frank Bretschneider und Olaf Bender from Chemnitz, formerly Karl-Marx-Stadt) and *NOTON* (Carsten Nicolai from Berlin/Chemnitz). The *RASTER* label was founded in 1996 by Frank Bretschneider from the band *AG-GEIGE*—a renowned GDR band in the 1980s. “Minimal to the max!” was the motto of the band. Its promotional material states that “this label combines digital abstractions with love of obscure sound sources” ([www.raster-noton.de](http://www.raster-noton.de)). All releases follow an unobtrusive and minimalist view of electronic music. The principle of presenting a track or sound rather than a person is reminiscent of techno, with scanty information on the vinyl, CD or on their packaging material. “The music sounds like it has been made with a high degree of self-discipline and patient experimentation, but you won’t necessarily need those qualities as a listener to enjoy what they hold” ([www.raster-noton.de](http://www.raster-noton.de)). There is no doubt that the members are involved in serious musical experimentation, something they had already done in the late 1980s, when Frank Bretschneider founded the bizarre project *AG-GEIGE*. It, too, was placed under the umbrella of “*die anderen Bands*” (the other bands), as the independent scene was called in the second half of the 1980s in the GDR. Since all members of the project were graphic artists, the visual aspect was often the starting point of their strikingly surreal songs and live performances. *AG-GEIGE* reminds me a lot of the North American band *RESIDENTS*.

Frank Bretschneider and his colleagues were very interested in

hometaping and cassette-production. During the GDR period they already had their own studio and started extensive cassette-production, recording tapes, mixing, mastering, and releasing cassettes. Under the title *KlangFarBe* (Sound Color) they illegally published the songs of the *AG-GEIGE* band and other friends. Home-recording and cassettes had to replace or substitute the production of records or CDs because of the difficulties connected with producing recordings by the monopoly recording company mentioned above with its total contingent of fifteen records a year for producing all types of popular music: singer songwriters, jazz, rock and pop, chanson.

It is quite evident that there were not only political but also economic problems which did not exist in the West. For this reason, a lot of cassettes were produced—unofficially—in the GDR, and even their appearance was modeled along the lines of an LP. They became something like cult objects. Artistically elaborate and valuable booklets and covers were meticulously created with the help of phototechnical and graphic design procedures. This, in itself, was remarkable. Attempting to create and legally distribute a sheet of paper with any information about the music or the band became a problem, i.e., getting official permission to print anything was a large hurdle. Many resorted to illegal self-publishing to avoid the official channels and to undermine the aesthetic prejudices, rancor and political instrumentalization of the authorities. That was the reason why certain lyrics and music never turned up in public. Intensive cassette-production had at least led to the informal founding of labels in fifteen cases (home labels of certain bands and continuous editions). One of them was the *KlangFarBe* Label that used the medium of the cassette for aesthetic reasons and not just for their convenience of production and distribution. They were musicians and projects in sort of a musical no-mans-land between the so-called avant-garde rock, improvised jazz, New Music and performance art. Frank Bretschneider, one of the protagonists, explained this concept in the face of newly accessible international electronic music market after the fall the Wall:

We will continue to produce cassettes. Their advantage and attractiveness consists in the convenience and economics of the medium, the easy manipulation of this medium (low

costs of production, immediate availability), and total control over all levels of production accomplished by one person. The product thus cannot be influenced by anyone else. There is no minimum number of economically feasible recordings like with vinyl and it is possible to achieve a professional sound quality with today's technology.<sup>12</sup>

Frank Bretschneider has not completely kept his word. Ever since the mid-1990s, he has been producing CDs and distributing his label *RASTERMUSIK* (later *RASTER-NOTON*) through the *INDIGO* and *EFA*-distributorship. Since he has always been interested in technical and aesthetic innovations, nowadays he and his friends are aggressively using computer-generated music, graphics, information and distribution ([www.raster-noton.de](http://www.raster-noton.de)). Most of the tracks consist of minimalist sound productions that evoke graphic associations and appear to be based on visual rather than on musical principles. Multi-media networks would be the right term to describe both these kinds of production as well as distribution processes.

These people are involved with permanently developing mobile and flexible networks for presenting their label, exhibitions in unknown spaces, label nights as club events, an Internet presentation just as all labels do today, etc. Together they also founded a new musical project: *Signal*, which was already invited to *Sonar*, one of the world-famous electronic pop art festivals in Barcelona. The CD series entitled 20' to 2000 (a collection of 12 CD releases by various artists) was acquired as one of the first digital recordings by the New York Museum of Art.<sup>13</sup> Of course, this type of museum, which represents a more traditional concept of art, has never completely understood the techno phenomenon, in spite of its professed support for "Club Art."

## CONCLUSION

*RAMMSTEIN*, *TARWATER*, *RASTER-NOTON*—these bands represent perhaps very subjective choices for investigating East-West breakthroughs. Ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, these protagonists are confronted with completely transformed musical contexts. Their common or shared music history is not an adequate paradigm for explaining their development in the post-unification period.

That fact indicates the following: The categorization a “underground,” “other,” or “weird” (*schräg*) bands used to characterize their positions at the time was a tentatively constructed and provisional concept. Even during the GDR period, bands that did not actually belong there were given that label. The concept was too broad for making distinctions and identifying the actual diversity of the bands. But that weakness can be traced back to the bipolar categories and valorizations in cultural policy-making during the GDR period: black and white, good and bad, etc. Various music concepts and practices within and between official and unofficially delineated positions illustrate that real life was much more multifaceted and colorful than these categories reflect.

The fragile cultural system of the GDR was severely shaken by the fall of the Wall. Many musicians, bands, composers, and vocalists not only lost their audiences to the international stars and media, but also their infrastructure and support systems, their organizations and the internal structures of their local music markets. The state-organized music sector collapsed like a house of cards in a very short time. Studios were privatized, concert venues and agencies were forced to operate according to market principles. The media landscape was transformed into the dual broadcasting model of West Germany consisting of both regional public and private broadcasting facilities. Record labels and retailers went bankrupt. Responsibility for the seeming inability of the so-called underground to respond to the new situation lay less with the conceptual approaches of the bands and other participants themselves than with the drastic transformation of the infrastructure for music-making. The loss of oppositional status—itself a difficult situation—was accompanied by a loss of opportunities for articulation.

Only in the few large centers of the former East (Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden) was it possible for the changes to evolve relatively quickly into viable structures. The previous informally-organized sector (the so-called “underground”) could play its cards well in terms of long-term development because of its prior experiences in self-organization, networking, and distribution. Spaces have opened up for expanding the infrastructure of the local music process including small labels, clubs, companies, studios, local media, multimedia outlets and other creative industries.

With this background, we might conclude that the provisional labels applied to the GDR bands as “underground,” “the others,” or “weird” lost their relevance after the fall of the Wall. This generation of bands who were previously structurally excluded from the official music sector and engaged in symbolic acts of refusal during the GDR period could only break out of their hopelessly isolated position by emigrating to the West. In a newly-unified Germany, they are able to find a cultural home within the context of a postmodern pluralism. Contrary to those of the official sphere of GDR pop musicians, they can dispense with the tedium of working through the cultural, aesthetic, political and territorial contexts of their childhood and youth, and thus are able to enter new musical realms whose activities extend far beyond the borders of present-day Germany.

Economically successful artistic concepts were drawn up using professional commercial formulas, which, in the case of *RAMMSTEIN*, syncretized the modernizing anxieties of the (East) German fans with the symbolic currents of global images and sounds. The combination of rock idiom and technoid sound and stage presentation is an apparent success. The reservoir of signifiers is consciously selected and follows the well-worn categories of international pop culture between event, empowerment and desire. Political statements, declarations, and messages are not prominently foregrounded. They articulate a rather diffuse dissatisfaction with current conditions of reality, which is presented neither as a political appeal nor as a moralizing sermon.

Groups like *TARWATER* and *RASTER-NOTON* have turned to producing elementary signifiers—beyond any type of meaning and structure. After they have used materials once employed as signs, after these have seemingly been liberated from their property as signs, they have become mere material with much more intense, sensuously direct physio-psychological power. Many people are interested in the exploratory and self-confident use of possibilities of the most modern technologies and techniques for music production (sound, promotion, distribution). This is the reason that these kinds of projects have been able to compete and even, at times, set trends in the international pop sector.

The three cases presented here illustrate clearly delineated concepts using the corresponding infrastructure of music-making processes both



internationally and locally, in alliances with globally-operating record companies and locally organized networks of certain scenes, their recordings and media.

In the context of increased “individualization of the mass markets,” of the “diversification of the management structures” and the “digit(al)ization as general challenge,”<sup>14</sup> each of the projects shown here have found a specific space, either in the MTV-charts, the reviews of Melody Maker, the clubs, or the Museum of Modern Art. Any kind of critique which makes accusatory remarks about these groups for becoming a part of the music economy and neo-liberal establishment refuses to acknowledge the recent developments in the arts today. Insisting on artistic essence and cultural purity (in looking at the GDR) long ago yielded to more convincing arguments for transculturation and cultural openness.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Birgit and Michael Rauhut, *AMIGA: Die Diskographie aller Rock- und Popproduktionen 1984-1990* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> During this period, I studied musicology at the Humboldt-University in Berlin and started to research popular music. I finished by thesis in 1991 and have worked since then in cultural management and politics. The band in which I played the saxophone, flute and used the sampler in the 1980s does not exist any longer because of diverging cultural interests, ideas and personal inclinations inherent in a capitalist system. We made our professional farewell with a recording called “ad acta”, recorded and produced between the fall of the Wall in November 1989 and formal unification in October 1990, using the equipment of the state record company *Amiga* label. *Amiga* was split up into different labels and sold to Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG), one of the biggest transnational conglomerates in that sector. But one year prior to that it was still impossible to produce a record with the GDR state-controlled *Amiga* label because of rigid publishing restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Michael Rauhut, *Beat in der Grauzone: DDR-Rock 1964 bis 1972 – Politik und Alltag* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> This is an “agency subordinate to the Ministry for Culture and coordinated with the Committee for Entertainment Art. (*Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst*) Its task consisted of planning, directing, and coordinating the development of ‘socialist entertainment art.’ It was created as a coordinating agency since 1973 with a universal and yet diffuse jurisdiction, even though it was hardly equipped with enforcement and decision-making power. The *Generaldirektion* organized festivals and competitions inside the country, and was responsible for selecting the personnel for festivals and competitions abroad, in addition to developing and promoting artistic talent in the area of entertainment arts.” See Peter Wicke and Lothar Müller, eds. *Rockmusik und Politik: Analysen, Interviews*

*und Dokumente.* (Berlin: Chr. Links Verlag, 1966), 255.

<sup>5</sup> “An annual event between 1982 and 1987 in the Palace of the Republic jointly organized by the *Generaldirektion beim Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst*, (the Central Council of the Free German Youth—the youth organization of the SED youth organization FDJ, E.L.), and the management of the Palace of the Republic. It was designed to manifest the desire for peace in the face of the NATO decision to station cruise missiles in the West German Federal Republic, and entailed a series of concerts by GDR rock bands, until 1984 with international participation, and after 1988 with a de-politicized concept. See M. Rauhut, *Schalmei und Lederjacke* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Excerpted from promotional materials for “*Sehnsucht*,” Motor Musik GmbH Berlin 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Wicke, Interview with Jürgen Balitzki: “Die Abweichung ist die Norm” (Deviation is the Norm) in: *Berliner Zeitung*, March 11, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Christoph Tannert, “Von Renft bis AG.Geige,” in: Ronald Galenza und Hans Havemeister, eds., *Wir wollen immer artig sein.: Punk, New Wave, HipHop, Independent Szene in der DDR 1980-1990* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999), 15.

<sup>9</sup> One of many British pop bands along which many GDR pop bands of the underground or independent scenes modelled their music, both commercially viable as well as musically unique.

<sup>10</sup> This is a British pop band from the independent scene in Birmingham with a chart hit, “karacoma” in mid-1994. They were known for their melancholically dark and gloomy sound, and employed dance tracks using uniquely strange sounds.

<sup>11</sup> “Tarwater,” by John Mulvey in *New Musical Express*, October 10, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Kai Manazon, “Die DDR-Kassettenzene (2),” in: *nmi* 6/1990, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Each CD is twenty minutes long. The project represents a kind of manifesto on Millenium design and New Technology. The Museum of Modern Art acquired the works—shaped in the form of a modular object designed by a Berlin designer group—one of its first digital recordings to be included in its collections.

<sup>14</sup> See “Essentials: Unternehmensidentität zeitgemäß fortschreiben,” in *bertelsmann/ansichten*, No. 6, Winter 1998/99, 10-11.

**CONTESTED SPACES:  
GDR ROCK BETWEEN WESTERN INFLUENCE  
AND PARTY CONTROL**

Edward Larkey

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**INTRODUCTION**

GDR government reactions to popular music emanating from the West, particularly from the U.S., were originally governed by moves in the wake of NATO expansion and the founding of the Warsaw Pact towards not only economic and political, but also cultural autarchy from the West. Efforts to limit the impact of popular jazz—swing and boogie-woogie—had already been mounted in the late 1940s and continued into the 1950s. Prejudice against Afro-American influenced music from the West that predated and continued through the Nazi-period could be implicitly remobilized in GDR government campaigns without explicit reference to their origin or heritage. East German composers, lyric authors and arrangers also could be counted on as allies in the government effort to limit the reception of western music, since the competition threatened their economic situation. Resistance to American popular music could also be generated among a broad alliance of intellectual advocates of the Frankfurt School cultural critique in both the East as well as the West against Americanization and commercialization. These catchwords

included a broad repertoire of cultural “crimes” perpetrated against “civilized” European music culture summed up in the now famous lectures of Theodor W. Adorno’s “Introduction to Music Sociology,” or in the treatise by Adorno and Horkheimer on the Cultural Industries: standardization, homogenization, its rhythmic, physical manner of appropriation, the seeming lack of melody, the lack of contemplative reflection, its engulfing totality, etc. For the GDR government’s objectives of edifying the newly liberated masses with the treasures of bourgeois culture and luring them away from the superficial and politically threatening temptations posed by western music, the constant penetration of its borders by media-based popular music from the United States, Great Britain and West Germany both before and after August 13, 1961 proved to be a source of constant delegitimization until the demise of the GDR in 1989.

GDR popular music was plagued by a major conceptual weakness since the founding of the state. While the theory of Marxism-Leninism—at least the versions propagated by “real existing” socialist governments in eastern Europe—postulates the planability and projectability of cultural development concurrent to the economic base and the increasing participation of the working class majority in the political system, the GDR leadership was incapable of implementing a plan for cultural development based on the concept of **culture as an industry** in need of an industrial base, with intricate cooperation between production and distribution permitting a flexible and wide range of choices in lifestyles, forms of expression, communication and interaction with the West. Instead, the retention of artistic forms of production and inefficient and inconsistent linkages in the distributive sphere narrowed the focus of cultural policies to the political-ideological behavior of rock bands, lyrics, and audience activities. This shifted the responsibility for the rejuvenation of the popular music sphere onto those cooperating musicians, studio producers, editorial boards and the mass media equipped with insufficient resources and unnecessary political and ideological impediments to successfully compete with industrially-produced popular music of the West.

This conceptual weakness meant that cultural policies were only able to **react** to the competition and the changes penetrating the borders from

the West through the electronic mass media. Any steps undertaken by musicians, lyric writers, arrangers and other participants in the industry were therefore spontaneous **reactions** to challenges in innovations to musical sound, cultural movements and lyric topics increasingly popular among GDR audiences. This had an impact not only in the establishment of the symbolic hierarchy of music vis-à-vis the West, subordinating the eastern productions apriori as obsolete, derivative and qualitatively inferior. In addition, structures, practices, relationships and behaviors evolved in “gray areas,” spaces not totally under the complete control of the SED leadership, where the demands, desires and wishes of the GDR audiences were negotiated by musicians at a material, symbolic, and ideological disadvantage. The cultural-artistic ideologies of Socialist Realism, folk art and socialist entertainment art served as focal points in the discussions about the role and function of popular music in the GDR and as foundation for negotiations between the party and state, audience communities and the musicians.

In order to maintain its monopolistic, or at least hegemonic control over cultural development, the GDR government was caught in a paradoxical situation. To legitimize itself discursively as the hegemonic agent of cultural development, it had to legalize or accommodate practices which it originally sought to deflect, undermine or exclude, but whose ultimate social acceptance into GDR society had undermined its authority. On the other hand, the very accommodation of these practices, which were meant to secure anew its diminished authority and legitimacy, represented concessions to the continued erosion of its authority. Furthermore, the evolution of market structures counterposed to its hegemony meant a further loss of legitimacy and power. For instance, difficulty in obtaining new musical equipment necessary to achieve the sound parameters produced by western bands meant that these instruments had to be imported illegally, yet the government appealed to the bands to keep up with the latest sounds from the West and attain a higher level of popularity, and thus had to permit the illegal imports. In addition, bands were unable to experiment with musical sounds in studios overbooked with bands rotating on four-hour recording shifts and restricted by outdated views of what constitutes popular music by producers and lyric censors adhering to party precepts.

## POPULAR MUSIC AS OBJECT OF CULTURAL POLICY

The GDR government pursued a three-fold strategy to counteract the popularity and impact of western popular music and compete with alternative models:

First, it attempted to implement legal and political barriers to the incorporation of popular music from the West into GDR popular music productions and their displacement of domestic traditions. In this manner, it sought to maximize the socio-cultural distance between western music culture as an expression of innovations in the socio-cultural communication of youths in the West on the one hand, and audiences in the GDR on the other. These included the famous 60:40 rule for repertoires of music groups, radio programming and recordings stipulating that at least 60 percent of the repertoire must originate in socialist countries. Also, both amateur and professional musicians were subject to yearly reviews of performance licenses after their initial approval before a government cultural commission that determined musical competence and political-ideological conformity. Furthermore, amateur musicians were obligated to attend music schools and conservatories as a precondition for license renewal. After the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the SED in 1965, in which the music of Wolf Biermann was prohibited because of its pessimism, nihilism and opposition to state ideology, the English language was prohibited both in lyrics as well as in band names.

A further aspect of the distancing strategy was the use of a distinct vocabulary by official state institutions—the Party, the State Security Service (*Stasi*), civil authorities, and the youth organization FDJ—when talking about the music which diverged from that of the West. Instead of talking about Beatles-influenced “beat” or “rock” music, the term “guitar” music was employed in the mid-1960s. Groups of musicians were called “Ensembles,” “Combos,” or “Youth Dance Orchestras,” but not bands. Generic rock-based popular music itself was referred to until the 1980s as “Dance Music,” or “Youth Dance Music,” and included the *Schlager* music of the older generations. This represented a discursive attempt at upholding the hegemony of *Schlager*-based, rather than rock-oriented music. A discjockey was called a “*Schallplattenunterhalter*,” and music

was not “popular.” Instead it was “*jugendwirksam*,” denoting not a voluntary popularity from below, but a successful strategy to control the youth from above by the party leadership. For many years, a further barrier to the influx of western popular songs into the GDR was the exclusion of culturally and musically unacceptable groups and performers like the Rolling Stones for many years. The music of the New German Wave (*Neue Deutsche Welle*), officially known as the *Neue Deutsche Tanzmusik* in GDR record and radio programming, was generally excluded from radio and television programming, while GDR adherents were dependent on western outlets for their reception. The GDR media was highly selective or abstained altogether from playing music of West German rock entertainer Udo Lindenberg, particularly after his notorious song “*Sonderzug nach Pankow*.” To the tune of the “Chattanooga Choo Choo,” it belittled Party Secretary Erich Honecker as a secret admirer of Lindenberg who was only able to secretly listen to his music while sitting on the toilet.

The continuing emigration to the West of prominent GDR musicians and bands like Uve Schickora, Klaus Lenz, Manfred Krug, Wolf Biermann, Klaus Renft, Dietrich Kessler (from the band *MAGDEBURG*), Hans-Joachim Neumann (*NEUMIS ROCK CIRCUS*), Stefan Diestelmann und Hansi Biebl (both prominent blues musicians), vocalists Veronika Fischer, Holger Biege and Nina Hagen, and including lyric writers like Burkhard Lasch, composer Franz Bartsch and others, meant that an increasing body of their music was banned from the airwaves, the record stores and even movies, becoming a part of the increasingly invisible heritage of GDR rock music until unification.

The second path to maintain party control over popular music production was the institutional aesthetic propagated by radio stations and record companies and furthered by the cultural commissions on the local level until the beginning of the 1980s as an alternative to music produced in the west. This institutional aesthetic was directed at incorporating aspects of the German *Schlager* tradition with selective musical innovations from the west. Until the beginning of the 1980s, one of the main goals of *Schlager* and vocal competitions was to produce a “melodious,” yet “danceable” music capable of maintaining its presence on the dance floors of GDR discotheques proliferating throughout the

1970s in competition with rock bands. A “rhythmically-oriented” (*rhythmisch-betonte*) dance music became the catchword for molding the “melodic,” traditional *Schlager* music popular with the older generations with the newer musical sounds and rhythms from the west and popular with youths. Paradoxically, the call for “danceable” dance music during the mid-1970s was trumpeted as the popularity of GDR rock bands was peaking with the Klaus Renft band and the Puhdys. But the so-called Philadelphia sound from the U.S. was becoming more and more popular in the discos, a cheaper and politically less problematical alternative to the rebellious and volatile rock scene. Unfortunately, efforts at incubating a disco-based GDR “dance music” were hindered by prejudices against not only the capitalist entertainment industry and its music in the West, but also by musical alternative strategies of youths with roots in the political folklore movement and rock scenes. Instead of allowing for market-generated popularity on the dance floors or the rock concerts, the cultivation of a typical GDR popular or rock music style was over-supervised by cultural authorities in the *Lektorate*, agencies and offices, radio, television and record company recording studios.

One of the primary instruments for realizing the edification mission and pursuing the ideological aims for improving GDR popular music were the so-called *Lektorate*, the editorial boards of the radio, television, and record company recording studios. A major portion of their work consisted of censoring and/or approving song lyrics, which were to adhere to successively propagated ideological guidelines in notions of “Socialist Realism,” “folk art,” and “Socialist Entertainment Art.” While these concepts reflected ever wider, and more flexible opportunities for socio-cultural communication between audiences and artists, they nonetheless upheld the primacy of party control over cultural and ideological issues reflected in song lyrics, musical sound, and audience behavior. The *Lektorate* assumed responsibility for both the musical as well as the lyric components of the songs. The musical components were largely the result of an implicit consensus on a particular sound, the balance of rhythm, melody and harmonies, and were supported by the technical parameters for broadcasting determined ultimately by the postal authorities, who maintained the equipment and could therefore make seemingly “objective” decisions about how much bass volume, how prominent the



guitar or saxophone solos, or how distinct drum lines would be produced by the sound engineers. The *Lektorate* also urged rock bands to strive for musical originality and refrain from imitating western models.

The primary task of the *Lektorate*, however, was the censorship of the lyrics. The rock bands were concerned, above all, with playing their music and were usually willing to relinquish responsibility for lyric writing to special lyric writers like Kurt Demmler, Werner Karma, Burkhard Lasch, Katharina Koch or Ingeburg Branoner, who would author the songs for a variety of bands. The rock bands would submit their songs to the authors with a so-called *Schimmeltext*, which could be characterized as quasi-English, with American-sounding vowels and nonsense vocalizations set to music which would capture the mood of a song and provide the foundation for similar-sounding German lyrics. Since the rock bands were generally more interested in playing music than making a political statement, they were usually easily persuaded by the official editors to make the required changes to their lyrics so that their music could be broadcast on the radio, released on a record, or featured in a television show or movie. Since radio stations were not only the main outlet for the broadcast of the music, but also the most important producer of the music in the GDR in their own recording studios, they exerted an inordinate influence on the acoustic image and sound of the music publicly available.

The *Lektorate* oversaw the story lines to ensure that optimistic and ideologically conformistic viewpoints and topics were maintained. They would suggest changes to lyrics if, for instance, certain problems like alcoholism, lack of freedom to travel, life decisions of youths, the party leadership and other officials were portrayed too negatively. This happened in the case of the *PANKOW* production “*Paule Panke, Ein Tag im Leben eines Lehrlings,*” (Paule Panke, One Day in the Life of an Apprentice) in 1982. The *Lektorate* attempted to uphold “artistic” criteria in the lyrics by insisting on the consistent use of metaphor, a logical story line and poetic language, requirements that sometimes conflicted with the necessity to provide an outlet for youthful rebelliousness and cultivate an audience base. The *Lektorat* officials objected, for instance, to the use of the word “*Aufgeilerei*” in the New Wave-influenced song “*Ich muss darüber quatschen*” sung by the *ROCKHAUS* rock band, and the word

was replaced by the more innocuous “*Herumeierei*.” The same lyric text was the object of discussion in the *Lektorat* because of its use of the word “*quatschen*.” *Lektorat* officials urged the group to explain in the song (!) that it is a term taken from youth slang meaning to talk about something. This was supposed to make the song more comprehensible and thus accessible to older generations of listeners and broaden the appeal of the music beyond the younger core audience of New Wave music.

The unwillingness of the *Lektorate* and other officials to permit rock bands to openly communicate about political, personal and ideological problems such as the lack of freedom to travel, the lack of democracy in East German society, environmental deterioration, economic stagnation and militarization resulted in a popular music aesthetic in which social problems were couched in metaphors of personal relationships or allegorized in images of nature, such as in the song popularized by *KARAT* “*Über sieben Brücken mußt du gehn*,” or the *LIFT* tune “*Im Süden*,” which carefully broached the topic of travel restrictions by singing of the desire to go not to the West, but to the “South,” where the weather was warmer and life was thus more agreeable. A song like that of “*Die Gräfin*” by the rock band *SILLY*, which happened to offend the eye of the Central Committee, could lead to letters of reprimand to the members of the *Lektorate* or the State Committee for Radio to refrain from playing songs which detract from a positive outlook on GDR society, in spite of the fact that these were available on the LP recordings of the *Amiga* label produced by the state record company *VEB Deutsche Schallplatten*.

The third policy option for counteracting the influence of western music and cultivating a popular alternative, or at least competing with the influence of western music in the GDR was what I have called a “catch-up” strategy, directed to improving infrastructural and technological preconditions for producing and distributing popular music and popularizing GDR productions. The catch-up strategy encompassed the musical equipment required for performing on stage and in the studios. For instance, with tacit approval of the customs authorities, the Ministry of Culture and the Committee for Entertainment Arts, a continuous—albeit illegal—influx of new electronic equipment and instruments was maintained in order to permit rock bands like the *PUHDYS*, *KARAT*,

*CITY*, *SILLY* and *PANKOW*, to compete successfully both on the domestic market as well as in the West. Their relatively privileged position, until 1984, as only one of five “*reisefähige*,” or “travel-capable” bands also meant that they could gradually assemble the necessary equipment for recording studios by buying it during its tours in the West and illegally importing it into the country. Throughout the 1980s, more than twelve private recording studios in various cities in the GDR were established by first-generation rock bands. They were contracted by the radio stations, television and other outlets to produce songs for public use, especially after the radio programming of youth music was extended exponentially in the mid-1980s. This was achieved by transforming the two hour radio program DT64, operated originally by the *Berliner Rundfunk* from 4 to 7 pm daily on weekdays, into its own twenty hour radio network every day of the week, combining it with the youth programs of the other networks *Radio DDR* and *Voice of the GDR*. Party strategists were unable to prevent creeping privatization of popular music production and assume ultimate control of these studios because of the prohibitive costs connected to the continuous need to upgrade recording equipment and drastically increase the quantity of music for broadcast. The State Security Service (*Stasi*) was also concerned that the productions of these studios, which could not be directly controlled by the *Lektorate* and allowed greater musical and lyric experimentation, would be illegally exported and broadcast in the West, representing a potential political-ideological threat to the government’s discursive monopoly on socio-cultural and political events.

A further problem was the technological development of the recording studios of the radio and television stations, as well as that of the *Amiga* label of the *VEB Deutsche Schallplatten*. Without the constant increases in financial support, it proved extremely difficult to maintain the necessary technological level and corresponding artistic expertise required to reproduce and compete with the musical sounds engineered in the west and being broadcast into the country. A further problem involved the manner of cooperation between the music-producing branches of the industry and the distribution of the music through wholesale and retail outlets. Coordinating the manufacturing of the vinyl LP with the inside cover proved difficult to achieve, particularly if the GDR bands wanted to print the lyrics of their songs on them, a practice typical among western

bands. The early days of the GDR popular music industry in the late 1950s witnessed an erratic distribution of recordings while the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry for Commerce and Supply (*Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung*) struggled over the issue of whether a recording was a cultural commodity or an ideological object. Up until 1989, the GDR recording industry was not equipped to produce videos, and production of CD-ROMs proved to be similarly impossible. In addition, many of the radio cassette recorders from GDR production facilities like *Stern Radio Berlin* were of notoriously poor quality. When the decision was reached to expand the radio programming of DT64 to 20 hours by utilizing the frequencies in the newly authorized 100-104 MHz range, only a handful of radios were equipped to receive broadcasts in that range.

### **ART CONCEPTS AS NEGOTIATING PLATFORMS**

In the absence of an industrially-based concept for cultural development, conflicts over art, culture and ideology became the battlegrounds on which encounters with western music were negotiated, spaces for reception, adaptation and accommodation of the music were opened up, and resistance to party dictates was solidified. The concepts were successively applied throughout the history of the GDR: Socialist Realism served to reject rock and roll in the 1950s for reflecting bourgeois decadence, Americanization, commercialism, and nihilism. Cultural authorities objected to not only the musical components, like the “howling” saxophone and guitar solos, the “whipped-up” (*aufpeitschend*) rhythms, but also the audience behavior generated by the music like the ecstatically physical dancing, so-called St. Vitus-type dancing (*Veitstänze*) and acrobatic dance style of rock and roll dancing, which apparently exceeded accepted behavior on the civilized European ballroom dancefloors. West German imitations of U.S. rock favorites from the 1950s were denounced as efforts to seduce German youths in East and West to support NATO rollback strategies against the Warsaw Pact countries, particularly after Elvis Presley was inducted into the U.S. Army and stationed near Bad Nauheim. The rock and roll riots in West Germany and West Berlin provided the East German press the opportunity to extensively quote from conservative western newspapers about the evils

of rock and roll seduction. Songs like “Tom Dooley,” which were available both in English and German versions on West German radio stations and hit parades, were banned in the East for endangering the morals of youths. The use of American words, and use of German language lyrics with strong American accents by U.S. singers like Gus Backus and Bill Ramsey were considered evidence of perfidious U.S. efforts to subvert European culture and civilization and prepare the way for the emotional seduction of otherwise politically stalwart youths constructing socialism in the East.

Creating an alternative, socialist *Schlager* music was one goal of cultural bureaucrats in the 1950s who were bent on realizing the newly declared cultural autarchy. Culture—even mass culture—should become as “*störfrei*”—i.e., free from West German interference—as the economic sphere was supposed to become. To do this entailed not only the establishment of a GDR record industry, created in 1955 with the *VEB Deutsche Schallplatten* monopoly, the introduction of innovations like the 45 rpm single, the 331/3 inch Hifi-Stereo LP, but also the requisite retail outlets, pricing arrangements, and record players capable of accommodating the new vinyl recordings that replaced the old 78 rpm records. The *Lipsi*, a complicated dance step dreamed up by dance instructors in the city of Leipzig in 1959, was one of the more absurd efforts at creating an alternative popular music culture to that of the West. Prescriptions for creating a new *Schlager* music called not only for the participation of lyric poets and authors of genuine “Literature,” to accompany the Bitterfeld conference in 1958. Party cultural zealots appealed to *Schlager* composers and lyric writers to portray optimistic and positive images of the working class in its productions, a call that went largely unheeded.

The wholesale rejection of rock and roll because it violated principles of socialist realism was followed by a phase that was characterized by the reluctant accommodation of the music of the Beatles and other bands of the beat era as manifestations of an urban folk culture merely “deformed” by the commercial popular music industry, but which still contained a core of folk authenticity and progressivity. This attempt to trace the lineage of rock music through progressive folk roots past the more rebellious rock and roll of the 1950s reflected the acknowledgement of Bob Dylan’s transition from folk to rock, as well as the Beatle’s

collective songwriting and composition on successively more sophisticated levels, at least until the Abbey Road LP in 1969. Spontaneous music-making by East German youths on a mass level was partly responsible for the grudging accommodation by the SED and the government to the Beatles in the mid-1960s, but was insufficient to dispel prejudices sufficiently to allow free access to audiences, airwaves, dance floors and concerts. In 1965, the Eleventh Plenary Session of the SED curtailed earlier liberalized policies in favor of restricting rock bands, their English lyrics and band names, while prohibiting long hair and looking like a so-called “*Gammler*,” a long-haired, hippie-like good-for-nothing.

Within the concept of popular music as folk art, the DT64 radio program, originally intended to accompany the 1964 festival *Deutschlandtreffen der Jugend*, was extended to weekday broadcasts, which represented the beginning of radio station production of rock-based youth popular music, albeit on a limited scale. The folk art discourse provided the basis for the growth of an unofficial amateur music movement officially known as the *Gitarrenbewegung* (guitar movement), derived from enthusiasm for the music of the Beatles, sung largely in English, with English band names. These positive developments in the mid-1960s were stopped by the notorious Eleventh Plenary session of the Central Committee, which was highly suspicious of a western-influenced cultural movement with mass popularity it could not completely control. On the other hand, the folk art concept enabled a fruitful interchange of expertise and creativity by students and youthful adherents of the so-called “Hootenany” movement begun in the U.S. and imitated in the GDR. It gradually evolved into the so-called *FDJ-Singebewegung* after cultural functionaries used it in the manner of the Bitterfeld conference policies as a method of controlling the development of a politically affirmative folk and folk-rock music. Amateur singer-songwriter/musicians were to be groomed by this “movement” for a professional career after being suitably trained in both political and artistic matters under the supervision of the FDJ.

The song group *OKTOBERKLUB*, one of the most prominent of these that originally called itself the “Hootenany-Club,” became one of the primary incubators for popular music in the late 1970s, and several tunes

by Thomas Natschinski and Team 4 such as “*Mokka-Milch-Eisbar*” represented modest steps at portraying the daily life of youths in popular songs with rock and folk influences.

The liberalization of popular music in the early 1970s that accompanied the accession of Erich Honecker to the posts of SED General Secretary and Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers was framed by a discourse about the nature of “Socialist Entertainment Art,” a concept first systematically discussed in Horst Slomma’s book published in the same year with the title “*Sinn und Kunst der Unterhaltung*”<sup>1</sup> (The Meaning and Art of Entertainment). Socialist Entertainment Art differed from Socialist Realism and Socialist Folk Art in that enjoyment, sensual delights and pleasure were postulated to be values in their own right. The previous focus on the edification of the masses through bourgeois arts, Socialist Realism and folk art were not to be neglected. Rather, they were to be complemented by first conceding that the needs and desires of the masses for entertainment, pleasure and fun were to be officially acknowledged as a first step in leading them toward the edification goals postulated for more progressive socialist cultural life. To be sure, social conflicts in GDR society of an antagonistic nature were considered inimical to Socialist Entertainment, just as similar viewpoints in previous concepts were proscribed.

Nonetheless, socialist entertainment art provided the platform upon which the first efforts at productive appropriation and incorporation of foreign, i.e., western popular music were promoted. These highly contested and conflicted attempts were, in the first half of the 1970s, aimed at creating a distinctive GDR style with roots in the western models. The by now famous rivalry between Renft and the *PUHDYS* was one of the results, as was the broader reception of popular music from other European socialist countries like Halina Franzkowiak, SBB and Csielaw Niemen from Poland, and *LOKOMOTIV GT* and *OMEGA* from Hungary. These and other bands sang not only in their native languages, but their songs were given German lyrics and produced in the GDR. With the expulsion of Wolf Biermann and the ban on the Klaus Renft band in 1976, the liberalization phase in the early 1970s came to an end, shifting the focus to less conflictual models of popular music along with the aforementioned melodic-lyric style that became the signature of GDR

popular music into the first half of the 1980s.

## **COMMERCIALIZATION IN RESPONSE TO POLICY FAILURE**

Conventional notions of commercialization are usually based on the level of advertising-supported programming in the mass media of capitalist countries. Commercialization in that context refers to the influence of advertisers on the content of programming and the unidimensionality of programming decisions determined by the amount of advertising revenue attracted by particular programs or program types. It denotes a power relationship of a small minority of oligarchic magnates in the entertainment industry who dominate the global entertainment media through economies of scale and the mass production and marketing of products like popular music, television programs and films.

GDR radio and television stations did not rely on advertising revenue for their programming. However, broadcasts of western electronic media into the GDR had an effect on the popular music industry in the country. The popularity of western products among GDR listeners, coupled with the necessity of the GDR media and popular music producers to accommodate their needs and tastes meant that the GDR media and its products were subordinate to the influence of the West. Furthermore, western discourses in popular music held primacy over the way music was produced in the East. East German music was produced, distributed and consumed not on the basis of “socialist” political or ideological criterion as in earlier years. Instead, it increasingly resulted from decisions based on the commodification and quantification of music underlying music production in the West.

The commercialization of East German popular music production and its incorporation into the popular music industry and discourse of the West is evident in a variety of characteristics exhibited by the GDR industry throughout the 1980s. GDR popular music productions were dependent on their ability to copy and adapt western sound models and engineering expertise for their own popularity. These models were to an ever greater extent reproduced in the GDR by western producers of GDR bands, who not only released recordings for sale in the West, but also



performed for profit in the West for western audiences.

The productions of more than twelve private studios were commissioned by GDR radio stations, who depended on the music of these studios to fill the expanded airtime dedicated to popular music after DT64 became a twenty hour youth radio network. The plummeting popularity of the older generation of GDR rock musicians throughout the 1980s manifested itself in a drastic reduction in the amount of *Amiga* recordings of these bands sold in the GDR and in the West. To counteract the resulting decrease of surplus funds available to the Ministry of Culture, the *Amiga* label undertook greater political risks in its recordings, climaxing in the release of the *CITY* LP *Casablanca* in 1986, in which for the first time in many years the division of Berlin and Germany was openly mentioned (after the Renft song “*Nach der Schlacht*”—After the Battle). Further risks entailed the release of music of the so-called independent scene on the State-run *Amiga* label. This music was previously rejected for being peripheral to the mainstream taste of the public that was desired by cultural bureaucrats. It generated not only controversy with other producers of popular music like the radio stations, who, as cabinet-level propaganda outlets of the SED, were bound by the directives of the Central Committee and were thus at a competitive disadvantage with regard to record companies. It also increased the competition between the record companies and the radio networks for music with topics appealing to narrower and specialized audience segments previously excluded as serious objects of programming. Competition between the radio network DT64 and the record label *Amiga* intensified throughout the 1980s, as the network attempted to enter music publishing and release its own recordings independent of the *Amiga* label.

In addition, English language lyrics in recordings produced by the state media were slowly making inroads, thus undermining the traditional ban on them. The number of bands with English-language band names increased as well, particularly with regards to groups belonging to the so-called independent scene.

A further step towards commercialization was the establishment of an independent popular music scene with its own music cassette productions, along with opportunities for performing in *FDJ* youth clubs featuring specific music profiles. Similar to the independent scene in the

West, the GDR independent scene became the motor for innovations in music culture and style. Not only the *Amiga* label, but also the DT64 radio network helped organize the independent scene by broadcasting concerts, organizing performances and helping to release recordings featuring otherwise marginalized music. This was accomplished by the program *Parocktikum*, which helped mark the boundary between the official music scene and the independent scene.

The GDR music industry was radio-based and focused on the release of music through broadcasting as the primary outlet for introducing new productions. However, many of the bands and their audiences considered vinyl recordings to be the primary medium for their music and strove for a record-based popularity similar to that of the West. This discrepancy precipitated conflicts between the musicians and the recording label *Amiga*. While the most privileged and popular of the official bands were able to release LPs on a fairly regular, even yearly, basis, special policies were established for producing singles, extended-play recordings, and sampler recordings in which newer music was introduced on singles previously produced as tunes in radio station recording studios and featured and popularized in the radio programs. The popularity of the GDR bands was quantified in two major radio hit parades and based on requests and letters from fans carefully registered by program directors and managers. Measureable popularity thus became a yardstick for the release of tunes on vinyl recordings. In this manner, a market mechanism comparable with that of the West arose. It encompassed a way for the introduction of new tunes and musical innovations along with the converse necessity of these mechanisms to produce obsolescence and thus create a history and tradition for popular music in the GDR.

Many of the features of radio programs popular in the West were adopted by radio programmers in the East in an attempt to attract the dwindling number of listeners for GDR radio programming as the credibility of the medium was undermined by the refusal of the party and the government to confront the deteriorating political and economic situation and its portrayal in the media. GDR radio moderators attempted to incorporate the seemingly intimate, improvised, spontaneous and self-deprecating speaking style of their western colleagues in the rival West-Berlin based RIAS broadcasting service. Radio programs like the night-long “Rock over RIAS” featuring favorite songs requested by listeners

were adapted for GDR usage to promote GDR rock music while accommodating requests by listeners focusing on western recording artists. Furthermore, GDR popular music radio programming increasingly reflected a similar generational split in audience listening experiences to that of the West between those influenced by 1950s rock and roll and *Schlager* music on the one hand, and the 1960s-influenced beat and rock music on the other. Finally, radio programming increasingly reflected audience communities segmented according to music styles and sounds, like Heavy Metal, Independent, Blues and Pop. These music styles were first featured prominently in western broadcasting and recording industry categories and were transplanted into the GDR as marketing and identity strategies for domestic groups competing for airplay with western bands and vocal artists.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Horst Slomma, *Sinn und Kunst der Unterhaltung* (Berlin: Henschelverlag 1971).

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**MUSIC IN EAST GERMANY—ON WHOSE TERMS?  
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:  
A COMMENTARY**

Kai Fikentscher

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1999, the Cologne-based public service TV broadcaster *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR) assembled a twelve episode program chronicling the history of German popular music and culture, past and present, mainstream and underground, and of the eastern and western parts of the country. To accompany the program, an eight-CD boxed set entitled “Pop 2000” was released in August of the same year, the result of an unprecedented collaboration among artists, recording companies, and media organizations of both former East and West Germany. Organized around categories such as dance, electronic, kitsch/cult favorites, rock, disco, and the ever-popular *Schlager*, each CD, in the words of the producers, was said to represent a slice of German pop history. In a *Billboard Magazine* write-up, WDR deputy head of entertainment Rolf Bringmann was quoted while commenting on the purpose of the project. “What’s grown together here is something that really belongs together, namely the music of two republics to form the sound of the German postwar period.”<sup>1</sup> Understood literally, this kind of historicizing of German popular culture is reminiscent of the dynamics that had helped shaped the reunification of East and West Germany ten years earlier, privileging in both cases the West German perspective. Conversely, the size and range of including East German popular music in a project of this scope and ambition begs the question of the roles occupied by East German musicians, cultural and political brokers and gatekeepers, as well as by industry and educational institutions, with regard to both the periods preceding and following reunification. If the contributions to the present volume by Edward Larkey, Susanne Binas, Günther Sommer, and Jost Hermand, on rock, underground pop, jazz, and E-Music are any indication, the question has not yet been fully answered. Taken both individually and as a collection and combination of systematic research methods and first-hand accounts, they point to the territory that marks the music of and in East Germany as sufficiently

distinct to deserve more attention than the lip service often rendered by West German culture brokers, as the Bringmann example illustrates. The common history shared up to 1989 by a variety of East German music has resulted in a sound legacy, the soundness of which still remains to be fully heard and understood. In the following, I wish to summarize a few of these shared commonalities that have informed the contributions to this volume, and to suggest a preliminary list of related issues that await further research.

As isolated as music in East Germany has appeared at times, it was always bound into an historical flow of both parallel and divergent national, international, and now global musical developments. The music of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich helped shape musical attitudes and activities in East Germany as much as the mediated images and sounds from West Germany did during the cold-war era. While the current musical scene in the former East Germany reflects a forty-plus-year-long “official” isolation from developments in western (read: capitalist) culture, especially popular culture and music, that isolation has of course never been absolute. Quite to the contrary, in the decades before the Wall dividing the city of Berlin came tumbling down, music in East Germany continuously negotiated the difficult course between the formalist directives of the East German government and the informal, yet undeniable influences from outside the GDR, especially the West. The consequences of this ongoing influence are multiple, and not all are necessarily salutary.

For example, in much musicological and socio-musicological research, analyses of music in both East and West Germany have wrestled and continue to wrestle with the issues of musical categorization (e.g., *U-Musik* versus *E-Musik*, music related to class, vocal versus instrumental music, music as art vs. music as commerce). While the examples discussed by Jost Hermand in this volume speak to the futility of the socialist idea of “one music for all,” the practices of rock, underground pop and free jazz, as detailed by Larkey, Binas, and Sommer, respectively, suggest that much musical life renews itself essentially from below, not from above, through its practitioners and audiences, not through political directives. In this sense, musical practices refuse to be hemmed in by political and ideological boundaries; linguistic and economic limitations,

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on the other hand, play and continue to play significant roles, the closer examination of which has barely begun. The theme of music culture as industry, for example, while discussed by Larkey, deserves more elaboration in this context.

The workshop preceding the publication of this volume provided its participants with fascinating glimpses of local musical practices and scenes, both historical and contemporary in kind, in what is now known as the former East Germany. As such, these glimpses appear to represent the proverbial tip of the iceberg and hint at the amount of work yet to be done. In order to transform the character of musical life in East Germany from *terra incognita* to *terra cognita* and place it in relation to the study of other countries, especially its immediate European neighbors, the following suggestions may serve as a springboard for the work now at hand.

An immediate task is to define and map East Germany's musical *terra incognita*. Much of this work is historical in character, calling for a methodology combining ethnography with historiography and cultural studies. A fortunate circumstance is the fact that many of the gatekeepers and practitioners are still alive and thus able to provide valuable oral histories and other first-hand information to those who might approach them. The range of music that could be studied in this fashion is virtually all encompassing.

A second complex of themes and questions could be summarized more narrowly under the umbrella of comparative popular musicology. Whereas the infrastructure of musical life in East Germany was for some time closely related to that of its neighbors in the former Warsaw Pact, the content of that infrastructure has always had close ties to West Germany (via a shared history, language and culture). In musicological quarters, this complex of tensions and links has barely begun to be exhausted. Below, I would like to highlight a few themes within this general complex.

- 1) We need more research concerning the dynamics affecting German music *since* 1989. What role does the city of Berlin itself play, with its geographic and historical significance? What conclusion might be drawn from a socio-cultural comparison of music in East Berlin

- (< 1989), West Berlin (< 1989) and Berlin (> 1989), using both synchronic and diachronic approaches? How is German music conceived of in contradistinction to other European music scenes? Is language the only and/or dominant factor in this context?
- 2) What insights can be gained from studying the use of language in popular music in particular? This would include the uses of German and English in both East and West German popular music, especially rock music, and raises questions about issues of cultural rivalry, authenticity, and ideological tensions neglected in analyses of popular music in Germany. Has anyone examined, for instance, the roles of West German rocker Udo Lindenberg and *SILLY* (an East German rock band with an English name)?
  - 3) What is the impact of non-German immigrants living in Germany on German musical life? I have in mind the example of Turkish rap in Berlin and other German cities, for example. Does world music made in Germany constitute something different when compared to world music made in the USA or elsewhere?
  - 4) How can the jazz scenes in East and West Germany be most insightfully compared? We need ethnographies of several local jazz scenes, as they have informed the cultural landscape of many German cities for decades. How did and does the processes of repertoire selection work for German jazz musicians? Which American models have been deemed significant, worthy of emulation, which others have been ignored? What did and does Free Jazz mean to those who began embracing it in the 1960s? How does one account for the healthy jazz-rock fusion scene in West Germany in the 1970s, while East German jazz and rock musicians for the most part kept distant of each other, to the extent that jazz-rock made in East Germany was practically nonexistent?
  - 5) Following primarily British models, participants in DiY music culture and DJ culture have made huge inroads in West Germany, especially under the banner of techno music. How have East German ex-*Schallplattenunterhalter* (record entertainers) absorbed the cultural capital of techno (as symbolized annually by the popular Love Parade in Berlin)? What constitutes dance music and dance culture in Germany then and now? How do young and old people in Germany

dance? Has the role of dancing changed since the arrival of the Twist, the *Lipsi*, breakdancing, and the mosh pit?

In general, future research on East German music might very well benefit from a combination of historical analysis and personal accounts. More comparative work that pays attention to the relationships between attempts at systematic political control or interference on one hand, and locally and temporally specific forms of accommodation and resistance on the other is needed. This work might also help balance the rather voluminous literature of music in West Germany and its relation to non-German influences.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dominic Pride, "Set Offers 50 Years of German Music." *Billboard*, August 21, 1999: 1.



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