

Voices of ambiguity – The GDR folk music revival movement (1976-1990): exploring lived musical experience and post-war German folk music discourses

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ABSTRACT

Following the ideological co-option of German folk music by the Nazi regime during the Third Reich (1933-1945), the genre's performative practice was highly marginalized. Revivalists in both German post-war states initially recast German folk music in a recourse to the soundscape and song themes of Irish vernacular music, before reconnecting with a 19th century oppositional German folk song repertoire. In the GDR, songs of the 1848 Revolution were curated as the state's 'democratic' cultural heritage and could not be readily censored. This allowed artists to perform historical folk songs to metaphorically critique circumstances existing in East Germany. Drawing upon fieldwork conducted among former GDR folk musicians, this paper explores their encounters in relation to established post-war German folk music discourses on the relationship between artists and state authorities. Concrete analysis of a 19th century emigration song uncovers how folk musicians could subversively pass comment on state-imposed travel restrictions to the West.

Keywords

GDR, folk music, postwar, revival, socialism, Germany

Following the drastic co-option of German folk music in the ideological service of the Nazi regime during the Third Reich (1933-1945), the genre's performative practice was left highly marginalized. In the mid-1970s, both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic witnessed the emergence of folk music revival movements that awakened an oppositional German folk song heritage from extinction. In the communist GDR, protest songs of the 1848 Revolution were officially curated as part of the state's 'democratic' cultural heritage. This complexity allowed artists to perform folk songs of the past to metaphorically critique social, cultural and political circumstances existing in the present and to elegantly bypass the threat of state censorship. However, the ambiguous quality in the voices of GDR folk musicians is not just confined to the rich metaphorical subtext of their songs. Their relationship with state authorities is equally multifaceted, revealing tendencies of political opposition alongside state-conforming attitudes. This article places my ethnographic encounters with the members of the Leipzig-based GDR folk music scene¹ at the heart of its narrative, giving credit to their lived musical experiences² and the ways in which they shaped the East German folk music revival movement in terms of its topicality in the public consciousness at that time.

After providing the necessary historical background information on the consolidation of the East German folk music scene, I draw upon ethnographic material to nuance existing binary portrayals of the relationship between artists and the GDR administration. I then proceed by

analysing the textual and sonic features of a 19th century emigration song, ‘Auswandererlied,’ which was popular among members of the revival scene. My examination of the GDR folk band *Folkländer*’s stylistic reinterpretation of this piece on their 1982 LP *Wenn man fragt, wer hat’s getan*³ clarifies how textually and sonically subversive features facilitated the interpretation of this historical folk song in relation to the desire of many GDR citizens to leave the state. Furthermore, this shows how GDR audiences developed specific listening habits that allowed them to comprehend the subversive quality of historical folk songs on a highly intellectual level.

Where are our songs? – Post-war escapism and revival

During the Third Reich, the Nazi regime systematically exploited German folk songs to mobilize and control the masses. The appropriation of folk music as part of Nazi propaganda led to a racially motivated underscoring of Germanic national identity and German folk music’s traumatic corruption in this period played out drastically when it was misused to ‘represent the nation to the aggrandizement of self and the denigration of other.’⁴ This problematic claim was later referred to in order to legitimize the horrific crime of genocide during the Holocaust. It is the trauma of the Holocaust that provides a crucial starting point for the examination of a post-war identity crisis during which German folk music was extremely marginalized and had to be actively revived. In 1966, West German *Liedermacher* (‘balladeer’) Franz Josef Degenhardt famously summarized the fragility of German cultural expression by provocatively asking: ‘*Wo sind uns’re alten Lieder?*’ (‘Where are our old songs?’). A widespread marginalization of performance traditions stimulated what German ethnomusicologist Britta Sweers⁵ calls ‘post-war escapism,’ characterized by the public’s need to seek refuge from folk music’s nationalistic connotations in idyllic representations of German culture.

Volkstümliche Musik, a folk-style music genre, projected this image of an idyllic world and was conceived to cleanse German folk songs of their nationalistic connotations. Portraying a nostalgic and overly clichéd image of the German cultural heritage, *volkstümliche Musik* shared no commonalities with the actual pre-World War II performative practice of German folk music and the strands of political and social criticism that had already started to surface in the 1960s West German folk song revival, before spreading to the GDR a few years later.⁶⁷ Responses surfacing in the context of my ethnographic research reflect a shared disdain for ‘folk-style’ music among GDR artists. In an interview, Wolfgang Leyn and Jürgen B. Wolff, members of the band *Folkländer*, emphasized that the artistic identity of East German folk musicians was clearly distinguished from *volkstümliche Musik*:

Jürgen Wolff war der Meinung, deutsche Volkslieder könne man gar nicht mehr singen. Es ist alles irgendwie entweder verkunstet oder verkitscht...Volkslied war äquivalent mit dem romantischen Volkslied...Dann gab es auch die volkstümliche Musik, die sich als Volkslied bezeichnet hat. Das wollten wir nicht und das waren eigentlich unsere ärgsten Feinde...

Jürgen Wolff was convinced that one could not sing German folk songs anymore, because they were either kitsch or too artificial...*Volkslied* is equated with Romantic folk songs...Then there was *volkstümliche Musik*, which was framed as folk song. We did not want that and those were our most vicious enemies...⁸

In terms of the late 20th century folk music revivals that existed as countercultural movements to *volkstümliche Musik* in both German post-war states, it becomes apparent how folk-style music had to give way to music that could address revivalists' real longings for musical and cultural identity. While songs and performance styles associated with the American folk music revival of the 1950s and 60s initially provided suitable expressive alternatives to folk-style music,⁹ the GDR government quickly realized their potential for aligning youth culture with its ideological objectives. The following section provides an overview of the formation of state-conforming and independent folk music revival movements in the GDR.

Hootenanny Klub and the GDR Singebewegung

In 1966, the East Berlin *Hootenanny Klub* was initiated by Canadian folk singer and banjo player Perry Friedman. This institution served as a platform for spontaneous singing sessions that students and other aspiring folk musicians could engage in.¹⁰ Artists reinterpreted workers' songs, usually framed as a 'sacred' repertoire of the socialist state, in an eclectic manner, drawing sonic inspiration from genres such as jazz and popular music. However, in 1967, it was decided that the *Hootenanny Klub* was to be taken over by the GDR youth organization *FDJ* (*Freie Deutsche Jugend* – 'Free German Youth') and renamed *Oktoberklub*. This strategic move asserted the ideological control of the *SED* Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* – 'German Socialist Unity Party') over artistic expression, promoting a *DDR-konkret* ('GDR-concrete') song repertoire as a canon for its youth song movement, the *Singebewegung*. The label *DDR-konkret* signified that artists could only perform song material which served the interests of socialist progression and the proletariat and fostered a strong sense of GDR identity.

Robb¹¹ clarifies that the growing dissatisfaction of folk singers with the youth song movement's objectives was rooted in their realization that the freedom of speech was limited and that the movement represented a vehicle for the indoctrination of Communist Party objectives. Notably, the state-conforming *Singebewegung* itself also provided fertile ground for emerging state-critical singers like Wolf Biermann, who was expatriated from the GDR in 1976 for voicing open regime critique in his songs. As Gert Steinert, member of the Leipzig folk band Lumich, explained, such emerging frictions between artists and state institutions stimulated the formation of an independent GDR folk music scene in the mid-1970s:

Es ist mir gut in Erinnerung geblieben, dass wir uns eigentlich mit diesen Singeklubs überhaupt nicht zusammentun wollten...Das hat mich auch nur noch stückweise interessiert. Wir wollten unser eigenes Ding machen und die Folkszene bot das.

I remember not wanting to be associated with the youth song clubs...I was only partially interested in them. We wanted to do our own thing and the folk music scene facilitated that.¹²

The reception of Irish folk songs in the GDR

In October 1976, when GDR folk musicians first congregated in Leipzig, they primarily drew upon sounds and performance styles associated with Irish vernacular music, a genre that provided a suitable sonic replacement for folk-style music and local German folk music

traditions that had become widely obsolete following the demise of the Nazi regime. Many GDR revivalist bands started as Irish folk bands, adapted related instruments, arrangements and performance styles and reinterpreted German folk songs using this musical model.¹³

At a time when the political divide of the Iron Curtain isolated GDR artists from many musical influences of the non-socialist economic zone, the annual state-sponsored *Festival des politischen Liedes* ('Festival of Political Song') in East Berlin offered unprecedented opportunities for the creative exchange between GDR folk musicians and international protest singers and folk bands, such as Dick Gaughan from Scotland and the Sands Family from Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Jürgen B. Wolff described to me how attending a concert by the Sands Family in 1974 was key in altering his musical worldview:

Da kam dieses Ding mit irischer Folkmusik und ich war im Februar 74' beim Festival des politischen Liedes und habe die Sands Family gesehen. Da bin ich richtig aus allen Wolken gefallen...Die Faszination, die das auf mich ausgeübt hat, kann ich mir im Nachhinein gar nicht mehr begreiflich machen.

Then Irish folk music came along, and I saw the Sands Family at the Festival of Political Song in February 74'. I was completely flabbergasted and cannot even retrospectively comprehend that fascination.¹⁵

Later, Wolff also noted that Irish rebel songs like 'Roddy McCorley' and 'The Foggy Dew,' emigration songs like 'Muirsheen Durkin' and songs celebrating Irish laborers' lives like 'McAlpine's Fusiliers' were topical from a socio-political stance in the East German context. These songs mirrored widespread concerns among GDR artists and audiences, resonating, for example, with a desire to emigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany, and with the encounters of many with the compulsory military service in a state that outlawed the expression of pacifism.¹⁶ Wolfgang Leyn argued that Irish songs, which responded to anti-colonial rhetoric of de-Anglicisation in Ireland, matched GDR folk musicians' longing to express a sentiment of resistance. Interestingly, these thematic affinities appear to be historically documented.

Seeking evidence for a common Irish –German folk song heritage rooted in the mid-19th century, David Robb¹⁷ has unearthed thematic resonances between German and Irish folk songs dating from the time of the 1848 Revolution in Europe. Initially, Robb delineates important differences between German and Irish cultural contexts in this historical period, focusing primarily on Germany's rapid industrialization and emerging working class consciousness, which contrasted with Ireland's rural societal fabric and the experience of colonial rule at that point. On the contrary, Robb clarifies that significant commonalities between the two locations unfold in relation to 19th century songs dealing with widely experienced issues of hunger, emigration, and, most notably, rebellion. The latter refers to a thematic overlap between Irish songs voicing protest against the British coloniser and German 1848 revolutionary songs that deal with the uprisings against rulers in the multiple principalities in German lands.

Robb¹⁸ concludes that this textual affinity between the Irish protest song repertoire and German 1848 revolutionary songs stimulated the reconnection with a democratic, oppositional facet of Germany's own folk song heritage among GDR revivalists and allowed post-war practitioners to recast their Nazi-tarnished cultural self-image with a novel political edge.

Subverting the revolutionary *Erbe*: 1848 songs in the GDR

A rich source for a novel contextual reinterpretation of oppositional German folk songs had been provided by East German ethnologist Wolfgang Steinitz in his 1954 folk song collection (see Figure 1.) *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten*¹⁹ ('German Folk Songs of Democratic Character from Six Centuries'). The labels 'democratic' and 'oppositional' refer to folk songs which were banned during the Nazi Era and evidence the spirit of social upheaval which led to the 1848 Revolution in German lands, a crucial milestone towards the eventual consolidation of German nationhood in 1871. Songs of the 1848 Revolution form a guise of nationalism that differs greatly from an overarching Romantic narrative, in which the political agenda of German nation-state building was frequently imposed on music from the top down. In relation to ambitions of forming a populist nation through the folk's own agency from the bottom up, ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman astutely contends that 'nationalism may build its path into music from just about any angle, as long as there are musicians and audiences willing to mobilize music from those angles'.²⁰

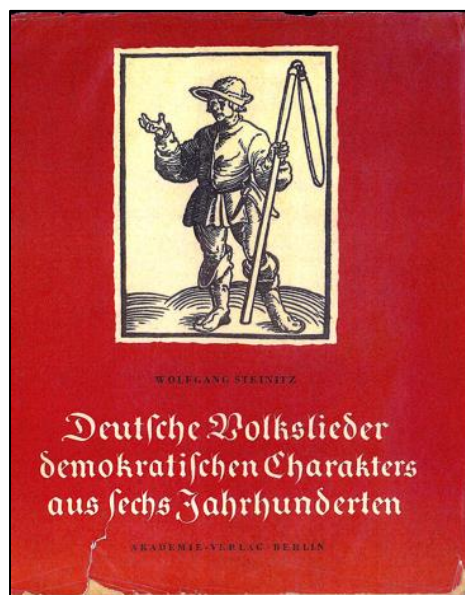


Figure 1. Wolfgang Steinitz's democratic German folk song collection.

Crucially, Steinitz's collected songs not only appealed to East German folk musicians, who aspired to identifying German-language material that matched the rebellious spirit of Irish folk songs. His democratic German folk song canon was equally useful in supporting the Communist Party's rhetoric, celebrating the GDR as the workers' and peasants' state.²¹ A selective interpretation of Steinitz's folk songs as a democratic heritage of the workers' state was exploited in the GDR by Inge Lammel, musicologist at the East Berlin *Arbeiterliedarchiv* ('Workers' Song Archive'). Lammel edited her pamphlet *Lieder der Revolution von 1848*²² ('Songs of the 1848 Revolution') in 1957 and the GDR state resorted to utopian material in her collection to underscore the positive spirit of the *Aufbau* ('construction') years following the foundation of the GDR.²³ On an official level, songs of the 1848 Revolution were curated as a part of the GDR's revolutionary heritage. Songs selectively crediting the positive facets of

everyday working life in East Germany²⁴ were transmitted under this directive and implemented as part of state-controlled educational structures, like the *Singebewegung*. State-critical songs, on the other hand, were prohibited and sometimes even censored. Robb²⁵ clarifies that songs in Steinitz's collection which deviate from the state's propaganda of revolutionary utopia and problematize the harsh reality of the failure of the 1848 Revolution allowed GDR folk musicians to critique the issue of socialist stagnation that increasingly penetrated the public consciousness in the late 1970s. Reinhardt 'Pfeffi' Ständer, who was employed as an event manager by a centralized cultural cabinet in the East German town of Hoyerswerda, referred to the creative agency that the contradictory and potentially subversive concept of the revolutionary heritage afforded East German folk musicians in their performed articulation of life in socialism:

Dort waren Dinge mit dabei, die inhaltlich in vergangenen Jahrhunderten angesiedelt waren und die man auf die DDR Realität beziehen konnte...Die DDR hat natürlich immer auf den Begriff „kulturelles Erbe“ gesetzt. Da konnten sich die Folkies immer schön herausreden...Die meisten DDR-Bürger haben schon verstanden, was mit diesem alten Liedtext ausgedrückt werden sollte, obwohl dieser gar nicht in der DDR geschrieben war.

The material included songs that were originally rooted in earlier centuries and that could be related to the GDR reality...The GDR promoted the notion of its cultural heritage. This allowed folk musicians to escape censorship...Most GDR citizens understood what this old song text referred to, although it was not written in the GDR.²⁶

Ständer's account illustrates that the performance of 1848 revolutionary songs equipped folk musicians in the GDR with the necessary agency to resort to a historical subtext that was shared among artists and could be understood by audiences. This strategy allowed performers to elegantly manoeuvre around the imperatives of state censorship, while maintaining a performative platform. GDR folk musicians managed to sensitize their target audiences to a specific mode of cognition that involved attuned listening to the metaphorical meaning conveyed in their songs. However, when asked about the politically oppositional nature of their song performances, folk musicians provided fragmented, complex, and often contradictory responses that reveal tendencies towards political opposition alongside state-conforming attitudes. Therefore, it is necessary to shed light on the ambiguous relationship between folk musicians and authorities, taking into consideration that the degree of censorship enforced varied greatly. Importantly, government agencies also provided vital infrastructures that supplied artists with performance opportunities.

Nuances in politically oppositional intent

Ja, man muss natürlich sagen, dass die Szene keine politische Opposition gewesen ist...Es gab keine Abnabelung oder „innere Emigration“ in der DDR. Das ist Quatsch! Wir sind in die DDR hineingeboren worden...mit der DDR musste man irgendwie leben...Da gab es Institutionen und wir sind da ziemlich pragmatisch herangegangen.

Well, one has to acknowledge that the scene was everything but politically oppositional...there was no real cord clamping or 'inner emigration' in the GDR. That is nonsense! We were born into the GDR circumstances...one had to adjust to the GDR...Of course, there were institutions, but we

approached that quite pragmatically.²⁷

When asked about the political implications of folk music making in the GDR, Wolfgang Leyn rejected the argument that the GDR folk music scene could inherently be characterized as politically oppositional. He critiqued discourses which foreground a desire to de-couple oneself from the GDR's administrative apparatus and explained that a certain degree of conformity with the state's organizational fabric was necessary. After all, culture was thoroughly subsidized by the GDR government and performance platforms for artists, their categorization as amateurs or professionals and the allocation of a matching fee were centrally regulated by cultural cabinets and thus guaranteed.²⁸ Controversially, Leyn later admitted that certain folk musicians deliberately employed historical song texts in a provocative fashion, to test the boundaries of uncensored expression. Gert Steinert²⁹ indicated that he did not regard the performance of 19th century émigré's songs as a form of critique, aimed at the then current travel restrictions in place. To him, those songs simply accounted for the uncomfortable, yet existing, fact that many GDR citizens applied for exit visas.

This liminal space between subversion and the potential threat of state censorship is situated at the heart of Robb's³⁰ critique of existing discourses that are caught up in the predicament that GDR artists exclusively sacrificed the freedom of their creative expression to the imperative of state-imposed censorship. This proves incompatible with the multiple shades of lived musical experience surfacing in the context of my ethnographic research and confirms Robb's argument that folk musicians had to rather 'conform with a system to attain a public platform from which to criticize it'.³¹ Jürgen B. Wolff articulated how folk musicians' balancing act between subversion and intermittent conformity to East German authorities still provided them with various creative strategies to convey their artistic messages to target audiences. He added that the potential political explosiveness of historical folk songs was judged depending on the individual case at hand, those in charge and folk musicians' own objectives. The following quote, in which Jürgen compared the GDR's cultural policy to an 'elastic band,' underlines this claim:

In der DDR würde man allgemein sagen, es war alles Diktatur und es ging gar nichts. Es war im Prinzip auch so, aber trotzdem wurde es überall anders gehandelt...es gab ja sehr viel Grauzone, wenn man sagt, es sei verboten und es ging nicht...Die sogenannten Verantwortlichen haben ja auch immer gern etwas geeiert...Man muss die DDR immer als eine Gummiband-Politik betrachten. Es konnte mal ganz eng werden und dann war es auch schon wieder vergessen.

In general, one could classify the GDR as a dictatorship where nothing was possible. Indeed, that is how it was, but it was nonetheless handled differently depending on the context... Well, there were many grey areas of censorship... Those in charge were never fully certain... The GDR and its policy were like an elastic band. Sometimes, we could be very restricted, but after that it was all forgotten.³²

Textual and sonic subversion: Folkländer's 'Auswandererlied'

While applied by GDR folk musicians in numerous shades, ranging from protest to intermittent conformity, the performance of ambiguous song texts remained significant to artists in their attempt to subversively critique circumstances in the present. Arguably, 19th century songs dealing with the experience of German mass emigration to America³³ were most striking in allowing GDR artists to pass comment on the state-imposed travel restrictions to the West.

Pfeffi Ständer emphasized this point in reference to emigration songs that had already been made popular in the GDR by West German folk revivalist groups like Zupfgeigenhansel, who frequented the annual state-sponsored political song festival in East Berlin. He described how the subtext communicated in the band's song 'Ein stolzes Schiff'³⁴ ('A Proud Ship') clearly indicated to East Germans that emigration to America was not to be interpreted in its literal sense. Instead, it was understood as addressing the widespread longings for increased freedom of travel:

Ja, das wusste jeder: „Ein stolzes Schiff fährt einsam durch die Wellen und führt uns unsere deutschen Brüder fort nach Amerika“. Es wusste jeder, dass mit Amerika nicht unbedingt Amerika gemeint war, sondern es kann ja auch die Bundesrepublik gemeint sein.

Yes, everyone knew this: 'A proud ship passes through the lonely waves and carries our German brothers forth to America'. Everyone knew that America did not actually refer to America. Instead, it could have been the Federal Republic of Germany.³⁵

Folkländer also interpreted émigré's songs, adapting the lyrics of their 'Auswandererlied' (see Figure 2.) from the mid-19th century folk song 'Hier können wir nicht bleiben' ('We Cannot Stay Here'), which appears in Steinitz's democratic folk song collection.³⁶ The song tells the story of workers from the Alsace-Lorraine border region of Germany and France, who decide to emigrate to America when faced with the predicament that they can no longer pay the extortionate taxes imposed on them by members of the administration. On their hazardous journey across the Atlantic Ocean, the protagonists experience the disaster of shipwreck. Having barely survived, they express their disillusionment and emerging nostalgia when trying to adjust to a new life in America.

Auswandererlied (Émigré's Song)	
<i>Ich verkauf' mein Gut und Häuselein Um ein so geringes Geld Nach Amerika zu ziehen Einen anderen Teil der Welt</i>	I sell my property and house For a mere pittance To emigrate to America A different part of the world
<i>Und als wir nach Straßburg kamen In die wunderschöne Stadt Da gingen wir zum Herrn Präfekten Und legten unsere Schriften ab</i>	And when we arrived in Strasbourg The beautiful city We went to the prefect And handed in our papers
<i>Herr Präfekt, oh Herr Präfekt Wir haben eine Bitt' an Sie Sie solln' den Pass uns unterschreiben Nach Amerika zu ziehn'</i>	Your honour, your honour We ask for a favour Please sign our passports To emigrate to America
<i>Was habt ihr für eine Ursach' Was habt ihr denn für eine Klag' Euer Leben zu riskieren In dem Land Amerika?</i>	What cause do you have What sort of complaint To risk your lives In the American land?
<i>Wir können nimmer länger bleiben Wir können hier nicht länger sein Denn die Herren und Notarien Nehmen uns den größten Teil</i>	We cannot stay here any longer We cannot live here any longer As the rulers and notaries Take most of our possessions
<i>Euch hab' ich schon hier geschrieben Wie's mir auf der Reise ging Oh, wär' ich doch bei euch geblieben Wär' ich nicht, wo ich jetzt bin</i>	I have already written to you About the hardship on my voyage If I had stayed with you I wouldn't be in this predicament
<i>Liebe Freunde, was ich schreibe Nehmet's nun zur Warnung an Besser ist's, zu Haus' zu bleiben, Als sich drüben Machen dran'</i>	Dear companions, what I am writing Take it as a warning It is better to stay at home Than to take a chance over here
<i>Übel geht es mir noch immer Seit ich in den Staaten bin Als ich auf dem Meer tat schwimmen Da war schon fast alles hin</i>	I have been feeling sick Ever since I came to the States As I floated in the sea The end was nigh
<i>Gott im Himmel, schau hernieder Sieh an, unsere große Not Schenk uns deine Hilfe wieder Denn sonst sind wir alle tot.</i>	Lord in heaven, look down on us Look at our misery Send us your help, once again Or else, we are doomed to die.

Figure 2. Folkländer's 'Auswandererlied,' my own translation.

When listening to ‘Auswandererlied,’ GDR audiences were able to interpret the song text as symbolically referencing the desire of many East German citizens to leave the state. This plays out particularly vividly in verse five, where the lines ‘We cannot stay here any longer’ and ‘Rulers and notaries take most of our possessions’ were understood as referring to currently experienced travel restrictions, as imposed by the GDR government. However, this subversive quality of Folkländer’s ‘Auswandererlied’ in the GDR context did not just operate on a textual level, but was also amplified musically. Following the fifth verse of their ‘Auswandererlied,’ in which dissatisfactions with rulers are expressed, Folkländer introduce an interlude, adapted from Eric Burdon’s and The Animals’ hit song ‘San Franciscan Nights’ (see Figure 3.).³⁷ While subtly woven into Folkländer’s contrapuntal accompaniment texture, played on mandolin, hammered dulcimer and zither, this melody also attained iconicity as a sonic shorthand both for the U.S. metropolis of San Francisco and the countercultural flower-power movement which it harboured in the 1960s.³⁸

Interlude (E. Burdon: San Franciscan Nights)

Mandolin

Violin

Dulcimer

Waldzither

Mdn.

Vln.

Dlc.

Wz.

Mdn.

Vln.

Dlc.

Wz.

Figure 3. Interlude adapted from E. Burdon’s ‘San Franciscan Nights.’ My own transcription.

At a first glance, it appears surprising the GDR revivalists synthesized traditional and popular song material in their reinterpretation of ‘Auswandererlied’. In the introductory chapter to their *Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill³⁹ point out that revival activists like Folkländer, who transform a given tradition through such creative artistic recombination of sources, frequently have to defend the authenticity of their music to credit its

legitimacy and its continuity with the past. However, Swedish ethnologist Owe Ronström⁴⁰ argues that the authenticity of revived music does not necessarily have to be defined based on its fidelity to a source domain of the past. Certainly, in the German case, the radical marginalization of vernacular music practices in the aftermath of the Third Reich complicates the invocation of such claims. According to Ronström, authenticity, whatever it may signify, can also be located in the directly affective response that revived music evokes for the listener. In fact, Burdon's interlude became particularly subversive for listeners in the GDR, citizens of a state that strictly imposed travel restrictions, viewed the U.S. as the class enemy and regarded the formation of countercultural movements with suspicion. Thus, in the GDR context, the interlude evoked a raft of conflicting emotions for listeners, indexing the reality that belonging to an American metropolis and countercultural identification could not be openly expressed without being prosecuted by the East German government. This sonic juxtaposition underlines the textual subversion expressed in the lyrics and reverses the song's inherent sense of belonging into an affective longing for travel.

Conclusion: The ambiguous voices of GDR folk musicians

This paper has located aspects of the lived musical experience of former GDR folk musicians in relation to established post-war German folk music discourses. While primarily nuancing existing portrayals of the relationship between practitioners and the East German state, I have also explored various pathways through which individual revivalists conceptualized their practice on concrete textual and sonic levels.

Folk music revivalists in East Germany, following their nostalgic draw to Irish music as a sonic replacement for their own marginalized vernacular music, reconnected with a democratic 19th century German-language folk song heritage that proved strikingly topical in terms of its applicability in the GDR. Clarifying the subversive potential of these songs in critiquing social, cultural and political circumstances in East Germany, I have equally differentiated how artists managed to maintain a performative platform while, at the same time, voicing regime critique.

Fieldwork responses indicate that the revival movement's political intentions are categorized in a complex and multi-layered fashion by artists, ranging from more oppositional characteristics to conformity. This nuancing of ambiguities in lived musical experience is necessary, as GDR folk musicians had to mediate between submission to organizational structures and intermittent critique, to avail of financial support from the state. The relationship between artists and cultural functionaries proves equally ambiguous, as the enforcement of state censorship depended on the personalities involved and their own adherence to Party politics.

The ambiguity inherent in the relationship between GDR folk musicians and centralized authorities is also reflected in the subversive potential of song texts and musical features. Indeed, forging textual and sonic indexical links in their songs equipped GDR folk musicians with substantial creative agency from the bottom up to avoid censorship exerted by the authorities from the top down. For folk musicians' target audiences in the GDR, this emotionally engaging and intellectual process of decoding meaning represented an important part of the listening experience.

The East German folk music scene left a significant imprint on the reinvigoration of German folk music in post-war times. GDR folk musicians mobilized a democratic German folk song

concept, which formed a distinct expressive medium and was intellectually valuable in the context of socialism. Undoubtedly, the folk song repertoire's topicality rendered this music revival meaningful in the public consciousness at the time. On a broader scale, the subversive and affectively engaging capacity of both texts and stylistic features in the GDR is a powerful reminder that music can serve as a conduit to open performative channels for the voicing of protest, even if the overt expression of same is suppressed by political leaders.

Notes

¹ This article draws upon the outcomes of my MA research in ethnomusicology at the University of Limerick, which led to a thesis on the GDR folk music revival movement. See Felix Morgenstern, 'Folk Music in the German Democratic Republic: Exploring Lived Musical Experience and Post-War German Folk Music Discourses,' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Limerick, 2017) in the University of Limerick Institutional Repository [online]; <http://hdl.handle.net/10344/6183> [accessed 05 July 2018]. In April 2017, I travelled to Leipzig, Germany to conduct ethnographic fieldwork with former GDR folk musicians. Selecting Leipzig as a field site was significant, as its vibrant student community provided fertile soil for the consolidation of an independent GDR folk music scene at the city's Graphic Design Academy in 1976. In Leipzig, I interviewed four individuals, who engaged with the scene either as practitioners or as employees of the East German cultural administration and thus provided varying insights, emerging from outside of and from within the state apparatus. To convey the outcomes of my research to an English-speaking audience, I have presented interview quotations in the original German version and have included my own English translation. I occasionally refer to archaic, GDR-idiomatic terminology to account for specific examples. My translation of these terms throughout this article should allow the reader to follow my points more clearly.

² The focus on individual, lived musical experience, which underpins my methodological approach, emerges out of ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice's model of subject-centred musical ethnography, as presented in Timothy Rice, 'Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography,' *Ethnomusicology*, 47 (2003), 151-79. Rice urges ethnographers to move towards atomized studies of individual practitioners to address their active agency in the transformation of music cultures. He applied this model to his own research on music making in socialist states. In *May It Fill Your Soul*, his seminal work on the encounters of two folk musicians with societal, cultural and political shifts during the communist period in Bulgaria, Rice has evidenced the benefits of focusing on the experiences of individual artists to nuance broad generalizations on musical life in socialism. Adapting this approach in the context of my own ethnographic research has led me to carve out contradictions and complexities in existing post-war German folk music discourses on the relationship between musicians and centralized authorities in the GDR. For further details on Rice's approach to ethnographic research in Bulgaria, consult Timothy Rice, *May It Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music* (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³ Folkländer, *Wenn man fragt, wer hat's getan*, AMIGA, 1982.

⁴ Philip V. Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism: Cultural Identity and Modern History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2004), p. 67.

⁵ Britta Sweers, 'The Power to Influence Minds: German Folk Music During the Nazi Era and After,' in *Music, Power, and Politics*, ed. by Annie J. Randall (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 79.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ In *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, German studies scholar David Robb suggests that members of the 1960s West German protest song movement set out to reframe German folk music in terms of its oppositional attributes and emphasized the role of the individual singer, in contrast to the Nazi-tainted collective. Congregating at the annual *Burg Waldeck* Festival in the Hunsrück region from 1964 to 1969, West German revivalists, such as Peter Rohland and Oss and Hein Kröhler reinterpreted historical protest songs associated with the 1848 Revolution in German lands. They primarily drew upon 1848 songs to underscore left-wing rejection of conservative policies pursued

by the Konrad Adenauer government and to critique the apparent Nazi background of many state employees at that time. It is important to note that 1848 songs bore similarly oppositional potential in the GDR performance context, although the political circumstances were quite distinct from West Germany. See David Robb, 'Introduction,' *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), pp. 1-10.

⁸ Wolfgang Leyn, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

⁹ Wolfgang Leyn, *Volkes Lied und Vater Staat: Die DDR-Folkszene (1976-1990)* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2016), p. 279.

¹⁰ Lutz Kirchenwitz, former member of the GDR youth song movement, provides an overview of the various song genres and artists groups that formed in the GDR from the 1960s onwards in *Folk, Chanson und Liedermacher in der DDR: Chronisten, Kritiker, Kaisergeburtstagslieder* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1993).

¹¹ *Protest Song*, pp. 230-33.

¹² Gert Steinert, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

¹³ Sweers, pp. 79-80.

¹⁴ *Protest Song*, p. 233.

¹⁵ Jürgen B. Wolff, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

¹⁶ *Protest Song*, p. 20.

¹⁷ David Robb, 'A Common European Song Heritage in the Nineteenth Century Songs of Ireland and Germany,' *Traditiones*, 38 (2009), pp. 141-60.

¹⁸ 'A Common European Song Heritage,' p. 158.

¹⁹ Wolfgang Steinitz, *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1954).

²⁰ Bohlman, p. 11.

²¹ Bohlman, p. 71.

²² Inge Lammel, *Das Lied im Kampf geboren. Heft 1: Lieder der Revolution von 1848* (Leipzig: VEB Friedrich Hofmeister, 1957).

²³ *Protest Song*, pp. 18-19.

²⁴ David Robb, 'Playing with the "Erbe": Songs of the 1848 Revolution in the GDR,' *German Life and Letters*, 63 (2010), p. 296.

²⁵ *Protest Song*, p. 18.

²⁶ Reinhardt 'Pfeffi' Ständer, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

²⁷ Wolfgang Leyn, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

²⁸ Leyn, pp. 66-7. On the basis of an audition, which assessed the musical capital of bands and the aesthetic value of their song repertoire, centralized cultural cabinets (*Kabinette für Kulturarbeit*) granted GDR artists amateur or professional performance permits. According to their categorization, performers were entitled to a set fee, which was paid by youth clubs and other venues, regardless of the profit generated by an event manager through ticket sales.

²⁹ Gert Steinert, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

³⁰ *Protest Song*, pp. 227-28.

³¹ *Protest Song*, p. 6.

³² Jürgen B. Wolff, personal communication, April 12, 2007, my own translation.

³³ 'Playing with the "Erbe",' p. 305.

³⁴ Zupfgeigenhansel, *Volkslieder 3: Im Krug zum grünen Kranze*, Pläne, 1978.

³⁵ Reinhardt 'Pfeffi' Ständer, personal communication, April 12, 2017, my own translation.

³⁶ Steinitz, p. 120.

³⁷ Eric Burdon and the Animals, *San Franciscan Nights*, MGM, 1967.

³⁸ Geo-musicologist David Keeling refers to the example of 'San Franciscan Nights' to illustrate how songs can become emblematic as sonic icons for cities and their social and cultural dynamics. Referring to Burdon's song, Keeling states: 'Looking eastward over the city...I am reminded of the heady days of the flower-power movement in the 1960s and why this city is so special. Classics like Eric Burdon's and the Animals' *San Franciscan Nights*...are reminders of how San Francisco shaped the national culture during those heady years'. See David J. Keeling, 'Iconic Landscapes: The Lyrical Links of Songs and Cities,' *Focus on Geography*, 54 (2011), pp. 113-125.

³⁹ Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill, 'Chapter 1: An Introduction to Music Revival as Concept, Cultural Process, and Medium of Change,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 19-24.

⁴⁰ Owe Ronström, 'Traditional Music, Heritage Music,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*. ed. by Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 47.

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