

CREATING FOLKSONGS OF THEIR TIME
Song Production and Cultural Performance in the
Early German Democratic Republic

Inaugural-Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades
„Doktorin der Philosophie (doctor philosophiae = Dr. phil.)“
im Fach Musikwissenschaft an der
Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg

vorgelegt von

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Einreichung: 16. September, 2024
Disputation: 13. Januar, 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bringing this dissertation to fruition has been a journey filled with support, guidance, and inspiration from numerous remarkable individuals.

My greatest intellectual debt is to Professors Nina Noeske and Matthias Tischer. While the idea of pursuing a dissertation had always lingered in my mind, it seemed insurmountable. Just when I needed guidance the most, it was they who introduced me to this fascinating topic and selected me to embark on this path. Their unwavering belief in my potential has transformed this unlikely idea into a reality, and I am grateful to them for going out of their way to include me in their research projects and to provide adventures that were both delightful and invaluable learning experiences. Their enthusiasm for cross-disciplinary research has allowed me to develop as a person, an artist, and an academic, enriching my life beyond measure.

Lars Klingberg, with his vast knowledge and generosity, has been an incredible resource throughout this journey. His research forms much of the foundation upon which the insights of this dissertation are built. Likewise, Andreas Lueken deserves special mention as my “Doktorbruder.” While languishing in the confusion of initial research, it was he who handed me the “Liedschaffen” files at the AdK, providing me with a clear direction to follow. I am blessed to have had such a peer with whom I could share moments of confusion, discovery, and success.

My peers in the Writing Workshop and Promovierende Potluck groups have been pillars of community and accountability for me. The camaraderie and support within these groups were indispensable, providing much-needed motivation and a sense of belonging.

Several talented and knowledgeable individuals in the realms of “DDR,” Dessau, and Eisler research have generously shared their time and wisdom with me, especially Fritz Hennenberg, Golan Gur, Stefan Weiss, Petra Garberding, Henrik Rosengren, Diego Alonso, Peter Schweinhardt, and Axel Bauni. Their unfettered willingness to help me explore these fields is deeply appreciated.

The dedicated staff at the Akademie der Künste Archives, especially Daniela Reinhold, helped me extensively while I found my bearings in archival research. With expertise and helpfulness, the staff at the Musiklesesaal at the Staatsbibliothek Unter den Linden and the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (SLUB) Dresden provided invaluable assistance, particularly during the challenging times of the Covid-19 lockdowns. I will also be forever thankful for the Hochschule für Musik und Theater (HfMT) Library staff, especially Maike Arnemann and Mathias Keitel, for their constant, compassionate readiness to enhance the academic life of every student.

The faculty, both past and present, at the Musicology and Theory Departments of the HfMT, have been models of intellectual curiosity and scholastic rigor. I am especially grateful to Verena Mogl, Beatrix Borchard, Silke Wenzel, and Louis Delpech for welcoming me as a colleague while providing me with mentorship. Martina Bick, my wonderful office-mate, welcomed me with openness, kindness, and humor into our shared space. I was incredibly fortunate to have her in close proximity, not only because it made this work more enjoyable but also because her guidance in navigating university structures and funding was invaluable.

Financial support from various sources made this dissertation possible. The DAAD enabled me to attend a transformative conference in Belfast, where I had the privilege of finally meeting David Robb in person, whose research has significantly influenced this dissertation. The “Pro Exzellenzia plus” scholarship through the HfMT allowed me to complete this dissertation. The “Close the Gap” program also funded essential dissertation coaching from Kimberly Crow, whose assistance in organizing and refining the vast array of ideas in this thesis was crucial. In that department, I also could not have done without Kirstin Cameron’s meticulous editing of the first draft. With her patience and humor, she brought the long-sought finish line within reach.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the many individuals who shared their personal stories, enriching my discussions of the past. Regina Werner-Dietrich took the time to share her experiences, providing insights into the Lied repertoire and practical aspects of singing in the GDR. My dear “Schwiegerfamilie,” the Körners, welcomed me into their family, sharing

fascinating life stories and a complex relationship with their Heimat. I owe special thanks to Sabine Trahorsch for spending so much time answering my questions with her first-hand experiences with Kulturhäuser in the GDR.

Many have also been cherished friends and colleagues also deserve my thanks. Brandon Farnsworth and Gina Emerson inspire me with their tireless application of academic insights to artistic creation and social organizing. Chanda VanderHart, a long-time friend and collaborator, has been a source of joy, mentorship, encouragement, and support. I am grateful to Melanie Henley Heyn, my oldest and dearest friend, for our shared love of folk music and community music-making. Emma Rothman, my confidante, offered unending emotional support and a true understanding of my neurodivergent struggles. Without her generous plan to make her home my “writing cave,” I would never have completed this manuscript.

Lastly, my deepest gratitude goes to Christian Körner, my partner in life, my home, and my second brain. His superhuman levels of encouragement, understanding, and acceptance, as well as his tireless efforts to teach me the importance of “Muße,” continue to bring balance, joy, and meaning to my life. I look forward to sharing more adventures with him.

To all these individuals and many more unnamed, thank you. This dissertation would not have been possible without your support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of *Liedschaffen*—the efforts to produce politically and culturally impactful songs—in shaping East German society during the Aufbau period (1949–1965). Central to this study is the *Bitterfelder Weg*, a 1959 cultural-political initiative aimed at bridging the gap between intellectuals and the working class through the promotion of amateur artistic creation. By analyzing primary sources such as committee records, song texts, and archival documents, the dissertation reveals how cultural policymakers sought to legitimize these songs within East German musical culture through a process of “folksongization.”

This examination of the production and performance of mass songs (*Massenlieder*) as “folk songs of their time” uncovers a complex negotiation between the imperatives of socialist realism and the ideals of German musical heritage (*Erbe*), ultimately presenting song and communal singing as vehicles for collective expression and social cohesion. The concept of *Wirkung* (impact) is crucial to understanding these efforts, emphasizing the belief that music—particularly song—could directly influence social behavior and collective consciousness.

Further evidence of performative concepts of singing and song in the GDR emerges from a historiographical analysis of vocal performances of Hanns Eisler’s art songs. The findings challenge recent attempts to define a static “authentic” style and suggest that authentic performance requires singers to engage with the material in ways that reflect evolving social contexts, rather than adhering to predetermined aesthetics or past models.

By integrating musicology, performance studies, sociology, and cultural history, this research calls for a dynamic understanding of music as a socially engaged practice, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of East German musical culture and its role in shaping a “nation of song.”

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AdK Akademie der Künste (German Academy of the Arts. Current Archive—Robert Koch Platz 10, Berlin)
- ALA Arbeiterlied Archiv (Worker’s Song Archive of the GDR. Housed at the AdK)
- EGW Hanns Eisler, Gesammelte Werke (Collected Works)
- DEFA Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (East German Film Studios)
- DRA Deutsche Rundfunk Archiv (German Radio Archive. Archives for East German Radio in Babelsberg, Potsdam)
- DSV Deutsche Schriftstellerverband (German Association of Writers)
- FDGB Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (Free German Trade Union Federation)
- FDJ Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth, Youth Organization of the GDR)
- FRG Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany)
- GDR Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Democratic Republic, or East Germany)
- MuG *Musik und Gesellschaft* (Monthly journal of the VKM)
- SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (Socialist Unity Party, or East German Communist Party)
- VBK Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR (Association of Visual Artists. Archive housed at the AdK, Berlin)
- VKM Verband der Deutschen Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler der DDR (Association of Composers and Musicologists. Archive housed at the AdK, Berlin)

1. Introduction

Song and singing undeniably played important roles in the cultural life of the former German Democratic Republic. As Thomas Freitag recognized in 1993, the song landscape of the GDR was complex and vast:

All of this existed in the “song country” of the GDR: sing-along movements and compulsory song ordinances, mass songs, German rock (long before Udo Lindenberg), the Festival of the Political Song and, by contrast, mindless songs of the State to clap along to, “protocol songs,” songs for emigrants, lovely, beautiful, nasty, popular, “red,” permitted and prohibited songs. Songs for everything and everyone. During my basic military service, a soldier handed me his private, handwritten songbook, containing songs that couldn’t be found in any GDR publishing houses.¹

¹ “Alles das hat es im ‘Liederland DDR’ gegeben: Singebewegungen und Pflichtliedverordnungen, Massenlieder, Deutsch-Rock (vor Udo Lindenberg), das Festival des Politischen Liedes und dagegen stupide staatliche Mitklatschlieder, ‘Protokoll-Lieder,’ Lieder für Ausgewanderte, liebliche, schöne, garstige, volksnahe, ‘rote,’ erlaubte und verbotene Lieder. Lieder für alles und jeden. Im Grundwehrdienst überreichte mir ein Soldat sein privates, handgeschriebenes Liederbuch. Es enthält Lieder, die in DDR-Verlagen damals fehlten.” Thomas Freitag, “Alles singt oder das Ende vom Lied? Liederbe und Singekultur der ehem. DDR,” *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 38 (1993): 50. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1.1. Song in the GDR

Today, the definition of “song in the GDR” varies widely, as do the implications of these varied definitions for the narration of Eastern German cultural history. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and reunification in 1990, song’s role in the subsequent historical “*Aufarbeitung*” has thus far emerged in three main ways. Firstly, political songs have mostly been associated with the *Liedermacher* or singer-songwriters of the *Singebewegung* of the 1960s and subsequent folk movements of the 70s and 80s, these exemplify the complicated relationship between East German citizens and the East German State. In retrospect, these songs signify the fight against, and eventual triumph over, an oppressive regime, but they also act as a source of nostalgia for a lost homeland and a failed anti-capitalist dream. Secondly, children’s songs have been explored in the context of East Germany as an *Erziehungsdiktatur*, presenting song as a totalitarian tool of indoctrination² and as an important part of East German emotional identity. Thirdly, art songs have been discussed, focusing on works for solo voice by East German composers, many of which have been edited and published for concert performance, in the context of the German musical heritage.

Although these three approaches cover much of the repertoire that would be recognizable to later generations, they are by no means comprehensive. While much of the literature about song in the GDR mentions works that were written in the first fifteen years of the regime, there remains a definite focus on music-making after 1965, highlighting how later generations of East Germans used these songs in practice either as *Erziehung*, propaganda, dissent, or a combination of these.

1.1.1. Knowledge Gap

The following chapters attempt to take a fourth approach to understanding the role of song in the historiography of the GDR, by examining *Liedschaffen*, the State’s efforts of

² Olaf Schäfer, *Pädagogische Untersuchungen zur Musikkultur der FDJ. Ein erziehungswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zur Totalitarismusforschung* (Wiss. Verl. Berlin, 1998).

song production of the 1950s and early 1960s. Known as the *Aufbau* or construction period, this era was shaped by, among other things, the drive to build a utopian, socialist society with new structures and language. Central to the idea of this new society was the development of the “socialist personality,” a new kind of human being endowed with impeccable traits of character on whose ardent socialist convictions rest the fate and future of socialist society.”³ The details of such a project, i.e., exactly how average citizens, their daily lives and cultural interactions, would shape and, in turn, be shaped by this new system, were still up for debate.

Starting with the founding of the GDR in 1949, spanning the turbulent 1950s, the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent liberalization, and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, this era ends in the mid-sixties when several political events, including (but not limited to) the ousting of Khrushchev in the Soviet Union in 1964, the so-called Beat Revolt in Leipzig in 1965, and the Central committee of the SED’s 11th Plenum in the same year, ushered in a new and lasting censorship policy, marking the beginning of a stable “societal state” that lasted until the end of the regime.⁴ These events coincided with gradual cultural changes within the GDR, including the coming of age of the first native East Germans and the increasing availability of technologies that allowed these young adults to culturally circumvent the Iron Curtain “through tape recorder, transistor radio, TV, and the electric guitar.”⁵

Much of the song repertoire from this time can be categorized as *Massenlieder* (mass songs), although the definition of this term remains vague. Influenced by the Soviet mass song (*Massovaya pesnya*), the products of the era of Liedschaffen are inextricably linked to socialist realism, collective singing and public celebrations, but also to a specifically German musical heritage, to folksinging, and to nineteenth-century ideas about composition and

³ Angela Brock, “Producing the ‘Socialist Personality?’: Socialisation, Education and the Emergence of New Patterns of Behaviour,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The “Normalisation of Rule?”*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 220.

⁴ See Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (Yale University Press, 2008), chap. 11.

⁵ Dorothee Wierling, “How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The “Normalisation of Rule?”*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 210.

masterworks. In search of an “ideological basis that balanced Soviet socialist realism, ethnic and folk traditions, and anti-modern tendencies,” Helma Kaldewey proposes that “East German policymakers sought a reconnection to the German humanist heritage, on one side, and a renunciation of the Weimar era’s cultural heritage, on the other.”⁶ When looking at song production, it becomes clear that singing repertoire and traditions could not be parsed into two mutually exclusive groups; the aesthetic and theoretical background of the leading East German musicologists and composers was formed in and by the cultural environment of the modernist Weimar era, which was based on the values and traditions of the century before.

Liedschaffen, therefore, describes the efforts of practitioners and functionaries of the Aufbau to amalgamate various ideologies and traditions, all having an effect on the aesthetics and the practice of music. Lying somewhere between the realms of folksong, pop song and art song, between social performance and works of music, the studies within this dissertation attempt to explore the influences and practices of this era, that laid the groundwork for what would become a “nation of song.”

1.1.2. Research Questions

The following pages contain several conference papers, interspersed with sections from the author’s online encyclopedia article on “Song in the GDR” for *Musikgeschichte Online*.⁷ The various foci of the conferences determined the central themes of the chapters. Likewise, the various conference topics account for differences in tone and internal chapter structure, however each chapter has been expanded to include more research than was originally presented. In order to avoid repetition and to facilitate understanding and accessibility for the reader, several sections of the original papers have also been removed, rewritten or repositioned. Together, these chapters aim to explain, at least in part, Liedschaffen, its meaning at the time and its importance in East German musical culture, presenting theories

⁶ Helma Kaldewey, *A People’s Music: Jazz in East Germany, 1945-1990*, New Studies in European History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 90.

⁷ Musikgeschichte Online, 2024, <https://mugo.hfm-weimar.de/de>. Article, “Lied,” is pending publication.

about how and why songs were produced in the GDR and about their role in the historiography of East German culture.

To define the subject matter, the section “‘Lied’ as Term, Genre and Practice” attempts to elucidate various understandings of the concept of song in the GDR, contrasting these with West German and contemporary understandings. Here, it becomes clear that, in East Germany, song was understood as inherently political, useful, and socially functional. This informs the methods used for the rest of the dissertation, as explained in section “Theoretical Considerations,” which includes the conference paper “Performing the GDR.” For this reason, the following chapters, aside from answering questions about Liedschaffen, also elucidate song’s role in a historiography of the GDR and contemporary music practice, both generally and specifically in vocal performance, technique and in perceptions of authenticity over time, as presented in the last chapter.

1.1.3. Hypotheses

The following studies, while varied in presentation, were conducted with the same hypotheses. Firstly, that the songs produced during the early years of the GDR are intrinsically linked to the social conditions under which, and for which, they were created. Since their creators were aware of this connection, as well as their own position in history, the musical material alone is insufficient for analysis, presentation and concert performance today, as social conditions have changed. Secondly, song creators in the GDR were, nonetheless, operating under the ideals of nineteenth-century song and the singing traditions of their German heritage. The expectations of art and artist were succinctly stated by Beethoven in his ubiquitously cited sentence: “True art remains imperishable, and the true artist takes deep pleasure in great intellectual products.”⁸ As becomes clear in what follows, practitioners also expected new compositions to enter a sort of perpetual canon, maintaining relevance

⁸ “Wahre Kunst bleibt unvergänglich und der wahre Künstler hat inniges Vergnügen an großen Geistesprodukten.” Quoted in Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Ludwig van Beethoven Leben und Schaffen* (O. Janke, 1863), 257. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

through time, despite societal changes throughout history. The evidence below is presented with this sort of ideological paradox in mind.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Art Songs

The initial intent of this research was to further the study of Paul Dessau's song oeuvre with methods similar to those applied to other monographs of song composers. Dessau composed almost 400 songs, a number that made him one of the most prolific German song composers of the twentieth century. His choice of text and authors discloses multiple facets of his artistic message. His sporadic output of songs before 1931 features texts by northern German poets like Heine, Dehmel, and lesser-known poets like Heinrich Bredow. After his time in the military, having given up his ambitions as an opera conductor, Dessau's choice of texts for his songs was almost exclusively political, selected because of their biographical source as well as the semantic subjects of the texts themselves. Dessau's consistent implementation of various modalities and scales as well as his studies and use of twelve-tone techniques make his song output an extremely attractive subject of study.

Work on the editing and publication of Dessau's songs has already been undertaken by other performer-researchers. Pianist and musicologist Fritz Hennenberg included 34 of Dessau's songs in his *Brecht-Liederbuch*, an anthology of songs with texts by Bertolt Brecht, in 1985. Baritone Michael Hix, later an Associate Professor of Voice at the University of New Mexico, focused his DMA thesis from 2006 on Dessau's songs. Three years later, Axel Bauni, a collaborative pianist and *Lied* Professor at the Universität der Künste Berlin, published a beautifully edited and annotated anthology, *Lieder aus dem Nachlass*.⁹ Since only a few dozen of Dessau's songs appeared in these sources, I looked forward to discovering the hundreds of others that had gone unexamined. However, when I asked Mr. Bauni how he had made the decision about which songs to include in his collection, he replied without hesitation that it wasn't a decision at all: The 54 songs were the only *Kunstlieder* (art songs) Dessau had written.

⁹ Axel Bauni, ed., *Lieder aus dem Nachlass* (Frankfurt am Main: Peters, 2009).

Some time spent in the archives at the Akademie der Künste confirmed that the bulk of Dessau's song output comprises songs that were never meant for any sort of solo concert. It became painfully clear to me that the majority of my prospective subject matter did not fit into a standard musicological model for Lied. In such a model, I had planned to use manuscripts that could be analyzed as works within a biographical and historical context. This analysis would hopefully prove fruitful, as the three previous publications had, providing material for performance and information for performers and musicologists. However, it is difficult to view the remainder of Dessau's songs as several self-contained works, as they were not written for recitals, but for the theater, for children's groups, for protests, for public political events or a myriad of other occasions, or as inside jokes, and many of them exist in multiple versions, in multiple genres, with multiple texts and instrumentations. It is therefore unclear how to present these compositions in the context of concert music.

The solo art songs of Dessau's contemporaries present other problems, reflected by their sporadic appearance in mainstream historical musicology. Ernst Hermann Meyer's oeuvre of over 300 songs seems like a prime candidate for performers and researchers. The English musicologist, Anthony Cross, made a few attempts to champion Meyer's mastery of the *Lied* genre in the 1980s, citing Meyer's connection to the German Romantic *Lied* tradition and Peter Schreier's advocacy as proof of their legitimacy.¹⁰ Still, Meyer's songs have yet to receive much attention beyond this.

Aesthetically, Meyer's use of tonality and straight-forward declamation seems anachronistic within most narratives of twentieth-century music. Even if many of Meyer's songs were to be considered compositionally relevant to music history, the overt reference to contemporary political events in the lyrics and scores defy an unspoken requirement of "timelessness" in musical works. As Cross admits in a review of *Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1976*,¹¹ the "emphasis on ideological content is one reason

¹⁰ Anthony Cross, "Ernst Hermann Meyer," *The Musical Times* 130, no. 1752 (1989): 95.

¹¹ Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds., *Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1976*, vol. 5, *Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Verl. Neue Musik, 1979).

among many why the music [of the GDR] remains unknown.”¹² Although many of Meyer’s songs “take up essentially Romantic themes”¹³ that could be separated from their political context in a contemporary concert, their inclusion into any canon of song cannot escape critique within historical hindsight. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, any songs that were created under the banner of socialist realism, as Meyer’s definitely were, fall squarely on the wrong side of history, further preventing them from being perceived as classics worthy of study or performance. This is also true of most other composers’ song output from the Aufbau period, perceived as both too aesthetically simple for study and too politically convoluted for standard concert repertoire.

Some exceptions to this can be found in the art songs of Hanns Eisler, which—in comparison to those of Dessau and Meyer—have gained general acceptance in both the academic and concert worlds. In terms of biography, Eisler’s ties with the GDR can be obfuscated by other, more accessible, credentials, i.e., his tutelage under Arnold Schönberg, his exile and work as a film composer, and his vehement rejection of Naziism. Eisler, as a song composer, can stand in his own right, with a large part of his oeuvre stemming from these periods.

Heidi Hart’s 2016 dissertation and subsequent book *Hanns Eisler’s Art Songs: Arguing with Beauty* dedicates two of five chapters to Eisler’s output in the GDR.¹⁴ However, she concentrates on the songs with orchestra like *Das Vorbild*, *Goethe-Rhapsodie* and *Ernste Gesänge*, while leaving out the handful of songs for voice and piano that were written in the 1950s. In doing so, she omits the more ambiguously received, compositionally simplistic *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, perhaps because, while they echo the traditions of German art song, Eisler made them difficult to categorize. These songs fit easily into the genres of art song, Massensong, or children’s songs, depending on how, where, and with which of Eisler’s instrumentations they are sung.

¹² Anthony Cross, “GDR,” *The Musical Times* 122, no. 1661 (1981): 480.

¹³ Anthony Cross, “The Music of Ernst Hermann Meyer,” *The Musical Times* 121, no. 1654 (1980): 778.

¹⁴ Heidi Hart, *Hanns Eisler’s Art Songs: Arguing with Beauty*, 1st ed. (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer Limited, 2018).

The difficulty of presenting early East German songs in a contemporary concert format became especially apparent in 2019, when researchers teamed up with art song professors from all over Germany to organize a concert series and symposium to explore the piano-accompanied solo art songs of the GDR. The title of the symposium, “Unter dem Radar,” simultaneously indicates the unjust invisibility of Eastern German music within wider narratives of twentieth-century music history and the marginal position that art song was afforded within the GDR itself.

At the symposium, which took place at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover from 17 to 19 May, arguments for the insertion of East German art songs into a narration of recent music history mostly focused on repertoire with lyrical themes like love or nature, works less indicative of uncomfortable political history and more suitable to be interpreted as thematically “neutral” concert repertoire. Songs by the later generation of composers like Reiner Bredemeyer (1929–1995), Friedrich Schenker (1942–2013), Georg Katzer (1935–2019), Udo Zimmermann (1943–2021) and Steffen Schleiermacher (*1960) also include compositional elements that better match the techniques of their Western contemporaries. As presented at the symposium by Axel Bauni, many such songs can be found in the sheet music series *Spektrum*, which consists of four anthologies published in 1969, 1979 and 1989, including over 100 contemporary art songs by more than 70 composers.

1.2.2. Political Songs

Political songs from the later decades of the GDR have been presented in various studies and publications that deal with topics such as the Singebewegung, the Festival of Political Song, or the more general folk movements of the 70s and 80s.

Lutz Kirchenwitz defines the Singebewegung (also FDJ-Singebewegung) as “the official term used in the GDR from 1967 for the song culture inspired by the international folk

revival, which developed primarily in the form of singing clubs.”¹⁵ The popularity of these singing clubs gave rise to many semi-public songwriting and singing groups, which eventually evolved into a diverse “song scene” of “dilettante” song collectives, “which mainly functioned as a leisure activity and party scene,”¹⁶ semi-professional and professional performing groups, and a vast network of singer-songwriters and fans.

Several of the authors in this field of study were active participants themselves, bringing their own eyewitness accounts into their academic analysis. Lutz Kirchenwitz, for example, was a central figure in the *Oktoberklub*. His name can be found on many albums as well as some of the preliminary academic reports on the Singebewegung, such as *Modellfall Singeklubs* from 1969.¹⁷ This was only the first of many publications on the subject produced in the GDR, underlining the perceived cultural importance of the movement, both for the State and for music-loving individuals. Officially a part of the mass youth organization, *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ), *Singeklubs* were also presented as a part of “socialist personality development,” as the title of Heinz Tosch’s 1976 publication “Singeklubs der Freien Deutschen Jugend und sozialistische Persönlichkeitsbildung” suggests.¹⁸ Much of the East German literature about the Singebewegung also focuses on the self-organized structures of Singeklubs as a modern example of successful collective cultural production.

Tosch presents Singeklubs as a way to mitigate the changing tide of mid-century youth mentality, as a new generation of political song shifted its perspective from “we” to “I”:¹⁹ “The debate was not about personality and the collective, on their own, but about [finding]

¹⁵ Lutz Kirchenwitz, “Singebewegung,” in *Musikgeschichte Online*, ed. Lars Klingberg, Nina Noeske, and Matthias Tischer, 2022, accessed June 10, 2024. <https://mugo.hfm-weimar.de/de/topics/singebewegung>.

¹⁶ Schäfer, *Pädagogische Untersuchungen*, 316.

¹⁷ “Modellfall Singeklubs,” *Forum* 22 (1969): 16–18.

¹⁸ Heinz Tosch, “Singeklubs der Freien Deutschen Jugend und sozialistische Persönlichkeitsbildung,” in *Erkundung der Gegenwart: Künste in unserer Zeit*, by Elisabeth Simons and Helmut Netzker (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976), 268–306.

¹⁹ Oskar Cox Jensen has also identified this shift in his analysis of English protest songs since 1600. Here he identifies a distinct era between 1789–1945. These songs are concerned “with giving voice to the collective,” whereas songs written in the latter half of the twentieth century present themselves as “one voice, speaking to many ears.” Oskar Cox Jensen, “Lessons from the 750 · Our Subversive Voice,” *Our Subversive Voice*, November 8, 2021, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://oursubversivevoice.com/case-study/lessons-from-the-750/>.

personality within a collective.”²⁰ The article also highlights the “complicated political-ideological conditions” under which the Singeklub movement came about, including the paradoxical relationship the GDR had with Western music. The influence that the international folk scene had on the East German song clubs was at once welcome and unwelcome. On the one hand, Singeklubs bound practitioners together in solidarity with the revolutionary, leftist artist abroad; this “musical transculturation” was seen as part and parcel of the “convergence of people in the anti-imperialist struggle,”²¹ including—or perhaps especially—protest songs from the capitalist West.²² On the other hand, the revolutionary tendencies of the international folk revival could also be understood as subversive *per se*. That is, the “ideological diversion strategies” of the capitalist pop music of the West could also be seen as a sonic marker of youthful rebellion against the establishment and the previous generation, regardless of politics or purpose.

Since German reunification, several publications have appeared on the subject of the Singebewegung and its offshoots. Lutz Kirchenwitz went on to become one of the most prominent authors on the subject, publishing numerous books and articles. His book *Folk, Chanson und Liedermacher in der DDR* from 1993 highlights later generations’ reliance on, and aversion to, the singing traditions of the previous decades, which he categorizes into the “workers’ songs” of the 1920s and 30s, the “heroic illusions” of the 1940s and 50s, “dangerous mixtures of *Schlager* (pop hits) and folksong idioms,” and a renewed interest in the production of *Massenlieder* that was followed by a “crisis of stagnation”²³ in the early 60s.

Scottish musician and musicologist, David Robb took part in the East German folk scene of the early 80s as an exchange student at the Wilhelm Pieck University in Rostock, performing extensively in student clubs and festivals as a member of the university’s Lyrik-Song-Gruppe.²⁴ Robb returned to Germany for his graduate studies after the fall of the

²⁰ Tosch, “Singeklubs,” 269.

²¹ Tosch, 274.

²² Tosch, 270.

²³ Lutz Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson und Liedermacher in der DDR: Chronisten, Kritiker, Kaisergeburtstagssänger* (Berlin: Dietz, 1993), 14.

²⁴ David Robb, “Utopia and Disillusion in the Songs of Gundermann: From the Brigade Feuerstein Productions in the GDR to His Solo Albums,” in *Imperfect Recall: Re-Collecting the*

Berlin Wall and has since focused his research on political song in the GDR. Similarly to this dissertation, much of his work highlights the complex relationship between the “folk” and the German “Erbe” or cultural heritage of the nineteenth century. However, Robb takes a different approach, presenting the ways in which East German songwriters and performers applied the touchstones of the Erbe, like the writings of Goethe, in ways that were both sincere and ironic, often putting political song in the GDR in the context of a “dialectic of conformism and subversion.”²⁵ Likewise, Wolfgang Leyn, singer of the band Die Folkländer, produced a chronicle and lexicon, *Volkes Lied und Vater Staat*, about the GDR’s folk scene²⁶ that highlights the “*doppelter Boden*” or double meaning used in classic and traditional tunes from the German revolutionary past to critique the present authority.

1.2.3. Children’s Songs

The Singebewegung is also presented as part of the planned efforts of the mass youth organization, FDJ, putting the song culture of the GDR squarely in the realm of children’s education, for example in Olaf Schäfer’s *Pädagogische Untersuchungen zur Musikkultur der FDJ*, an “education-scientific contribution to totalitarianism research.”²⁷ Schäfer gives a detailed analysis of the Singebewegung’s history, linking it to the folksong movements of the 1920’s and the musical efforts of the Nazi youth organization, the *Hitler Jugend*. According to Schäfer, “since the early years of the GDR, the production of ideological mass songs had concentrated on the youth.” As this dissertation will demonstrate, this claim is only partially true. In Schäfer’s own chapter on Massenlied, mentions of youth, education or the FDJ are conspicuously absent.

GDR, ed. Cecilia Novero, Otago German Studies (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago, German Programme, 2020), 88.

²⁵ David Robb, “Playing with the ‘Erbe’: Songs of the 1848 Revolution in the GDR,” *German Life and Letters* 63, no. 3 (July 2010): 298.

²⁶ Wolfgang Leyn, *Volkes Lied und Vater Staat: Die DDR-Folkszene 1976-1990* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2016).

²⁷ Schäfer, *Pädagogische Untersuchungen zur Musikkultur der FDJ: Ein erziehungswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zur Totalitarismusforschung*.

Nevertheless, Schäfer gives partial credit for the development of the Singebewegung to the FDJ's reaction to a "crisis of the Massenlied,"²⁸ in which East Germans began to "boycott" mass singing at public events. As an example, Schäfer cites Eva Hillmann's results from a survey of the 1964 national youth conference, *Deutschlandtreffen*.²⁹ Hillmann's analysis from 1966, however, only mentions a reluctance to sing newly composed Massenlieder, leaving out how the audience reacted to mainstays of the repertoire, and points to a "transformation" of the younger generation and their preference for current pop music above "clichés from the successful period of the mass song."³⁰ For Hillmann, the stagnation of the Massenlied has to do with changing relationships between generations and musical practices in the mid sixties. Kirchenwitz cites Carl Riha's description to elucidate the Massenlied's change in societal function, arguing that Massenlied had lost its role as a living product of the proletariat's struggle for emancipation and deteriorated into a "quasi academic" concert ritual for party elites.³¹

Like many other examples from the existing literature about song in the GDR, Schäfer's analysis focuses on the FDJ's *Liedgut*, or song heritage, after this point. Schäfer categorizes songs thematically by their lyrics, e.g. "Flag fetishism," "*Die Führer der Bewegung*," "Collectivism," "Peace and militarism," etc., using the FDJ's songbooks as reference. Since these books (like all serial publications) were curated and edited by stakeholders, the songbooks demonstrate the "political intention of the State leadership and youth organizers" who were responsible for their publication.³² Importantly, with the exception of a few examples of "classic" Massenlieder from the 1954 edition of *Leben – Singen – Kämpfen*, the songbooks he cites are from the 1985 edition. These songs were therefore integrated into the series after

²⁸ Schäfer, *Pädagogische Untersuchungen*, 241.

²⁹ Eva Hillmann, *Das Massenlied: Seine historische und gesellschaftliche Funktion*, vol. 1, Studien zu seiner Entwicklung und Bedeutung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Leipzig: Institut für Volkskunstforschung des Zentralhauses für Kulturarbeit, 1966), 90.

³⁰ Hillmann, *Das Massenlied*, 90.

³¹ "Inhalt und Gestik der Kampf- und Massenlieder der Sozialdemokratie des neunzehnten und frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts wie der Kommunistischen Partei der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre, in denen der Emanzipationskampf des Proletariats Gestalt gewonnen hat, verkommen zum Ritual, aus dem kein echter Funke mehr springt, wenn sie im Konzertsaal vor versammelter Parteiprominenz – quasi als akademischer Akt zelebriert werden." Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson und Liedermacher in der DDR*, 14-15.

³² Schäfer, *Pädagogische Untersuchungen*, 318.

1968, after the Singebewegung had been officially subsumed into the FDJ, and after the Central Board of the FDJ commissioned the publisher VEB Hofmeister for an overhaul of *Leben – Singen – Kämpfen* to include a mix of pop and folk.³³

Juliane Brauer's book, *Zeitgeföhle: Wie die DDR ihre Zukunft besang; eine Emotionsgeschichte*, exemplifies certain arguments favoring the focus on the theory and practice of songs over their musical material. Brauer's perspective and ensuing methodologies are rational for two primary reasons. Firstly, as implied by the book's title, music ought not to be solely perceived as a material artifact, but rather as the product of a societal process.³⁴ The unique personal and emotional nature of well-known or collectively sung songs renders them unsuitable for strict theoretical or "autonomous" analysis without significant socio-historical considerations. The connection between a song and the specific language in its lyrics, as well as a sung melody's physicality, mnemonic abilities, and emotional regulation, cannot be adequately examined as objects within the distant, contemporary context of the researcher but instead should be scrutinized in terms of their performative intention at the time of their creation. Brauer applies Tia DeNora's concept of emotional work to explain songs' unique ability to allow an individual to reflect upon their inner emotional state, which is the guiding principle of her book. In that context, an analysis of the actual notes and words on the page is secondary to the context of the songs and the theory behind their creation, as well as the practical conditions under which they were created and performed.

The second line of reasoning pertains to the specific political and ideological circumstances of the GDR, where the prevailing musicological views, influenced by Marxist ideology, perceived songs not only as compositional works but as functional political actions. In the context of Marxist musicology in the GDR, songs were seen as more than artistic expression. This perspective impacted the creation and interpretation of songs, regarding

³³ "Konzeption für eine zu überarbeitende Neuauflage des Liederbuches der FDJ "Leben-Singen-Kämpfen," SAPMO-BArch DY/24/6360, quoted in Schäfer, 319.

³⁴ "Musik [ist] nicht nur ein Produkt, sondern auch das Ergebnis eines Prozesses." Juliane Brauer, *Zeitgeföhle: Wie die DDR ihre Zukunft besang; Eine Emotionsgeschichte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 26.

them as vehicles for both artistic expression and for promoting political agendas. Brauer's book focuses on the role songs played within the context of music as social and political *Erziehung*, denoting their moral, social, and developmental influence on young people. The concept of music as *Erziehung* was an intrinsic part of musical life and therefore cannot be omitted from any study of culture in the GDR. Nevertheless, the primary focus of this dissertation lies not in children's songs, as in Brauer's discussion, but within the context of songs as artistic expression and the continuation of musical history, as a movement within the broader sphere of the political or ideological influence that songs exerted as an art form.

Therefore, focusing on describing the theories and practices surrounding song production, the chapters that follow employ a similar methodological approach to Brauer, treating songs as performative phenomena that exist, but that change with historical time.

1.3. Methodological Considerations

The historiography of the GDR has developed significantly since German reunification, with scholars moving beyond simplistic portrayals of the state as purely repressive and totalitarian. Early studies often focused on political oppression and intellectual dissent, but historians like Thomas Lindenberger and Mary Fulbrook have pushed for a broader, more nuanced understanding of East German society. Lindenberger advocates for the inclusion of everyday life and social history, using interdisciplinary methods to uncover how ordinary citizens navigated the complexities of life under socialism. Dorothee Wierling's work, particularly on generational memory and socialization, explores how different groups within East Germany experienced and adapted to the socialist system.

Other scholars, such as Konrad Jarausch, emphasize the importance of understanding the GDR in the context of the wider development of the modern European (welfare) state, along with the ideological contradictions that coexisted with attempts at modernization and reform.³⁵ Influential for this dissertation are also Jarausch's investigations into the emergent historical language of the GDR through the lens of a "linguistic turn."³⁶

In historical narratives of the GDR, Jarausch identifies two major ideological poles, with totalitarian narratives of an *Unrechtsstaat* (tyranny) on one end of the spectrum and "a more benign picture of the GDR as a 'failed experiment'" on the other.³⁷ Likewise, Thomas Lindenberger highlights the importance of examining the GDR through a multifaceted and evolving methodological framework. He stresses that GDR research must go beyond the earlier dominant narratives, which were often focused on political repression

³⁵ Konrad Jarausch, "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

³⁶ Konrad Jarausch, "Historische Texte der DDR aus der Perspektive des 'linguistic turn,'" *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*. Supplement, no. 24 (2012): 229-48.

³⁷ Konrad Jarausch, "Introduction: Beyond Uniformity; The Challenge of Historicizing the GDR," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 3-4.

and intellectual dissent.³⁸ Instead, scholars should engage with the everyday and mundane (*Alltagsgeschichte*), with social practices and relationships as well as the existence of multiple realities within East German life.³⁹

Similarly, Mary Fulbrook warns that it is tempting to view the history of the GDR through our own lens, highlighting the subjects that most fit our own values. Especially in the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the historical filter that was set upon the GDR amounted to what she calls “the Western fixation on dissenting intellectuals” which highlights the activities of a handful of individuals, whose biographies and artistic output are only interesting for historians because they fit nicely into a narrative of totalitarianism. In this way, argues Fulbrook, cultural historians render the majority of cultural life historically invisible; its complexity, its contradictions and its lessons are lost. Fulbrook warns that uncritical, homogeneous applications of standard methods and theories will produce one-sided narratives and will erase important facets of Eastern German cultural life from future understandings of the era. If historical musicologists take this warning to heart, musical histories of the GDR must also be constructed using self-critical, varied methods and theories.

Reflected on and reformulated in later writings,⁴⁰ Mary Fulbrook lays out various methodological considerations in her essay “Methodologische Überlegungen zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR,” calling on cultural historians who study the former East Germany to reexamine their own sources, assumptions, terminology and theories.⁴¹ Struc-

³⁸ Thomas Lindenberger, “Ist die DDR ausgeforscht? Unsere Zeitgeschichte zwischen nationalem Boom und Globalisierung,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 64 (2014): 24–26.

³⁹ Thomas Lindenberger, “Alltagsgeschichte und ihr möglicher Beitrag zu, einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR,” in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, Sammlung Vandenhoeck (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 298–325.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Mary Fulbrook, *Erfahrung, Erinnerung, Geschichtsschreibung: Neue Perspektiven auf die deutschen Diktaturen*, vol. 17, Vorträge und Kolloquien (Weimar: Wallstein Verlag, 2016); Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port, *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, 2013; Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (Yale University Press, 2008); Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴¹ Mary Fulbrook, “Methodologische Überlegungen zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR,” in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, ed. Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1996).

tured through a summary of these categories, the following presents various methodological strategies which have been influential for this dissertation in the context of song production in the GDR.

1.3.1. Sources

Fulbrook argues that researchers in the West have a tendency to use only sources which they consider to tell the truth. Such examples might come from marginal sections of the intelligentsia who documented their outright dissent to the regime. According to Fulbrook, this creates a tendency to fixate on narratives that the researcher can feel comfortable with, even though these narratives lionize a tiny fraction of individuals and render invisible the actual mechanisms, motivations, and reasoning behind cultural life.

Documents which are known to “lie” to the reader force researchers “to glean something from the documents that’s not identical to what the records state.”⁴² Fulbrook implies that archival material from the GDR demonstrates truths that are only apparent after interpretation. The researcher is thus forced to assume that the words on the page are filtered through special conditions of ritual and surveillance. Joachim Walther, in his analysis of literary censorship and surveillance of authors in the Stasi archives in 1996, similarly argues that documentation of the GDR does not give an objective picture of real life, rather it is merely a “reflection of [a] selectively perceived and purposefully documented one.”⁴³ When researching the GDR, these circumstances are inescapable. Even oral history accounts must be recorded, keeping the interim experiences, changing views, current circumstances, and perceived consequences of the interviewee in mind.

Perpetual mistrust in a source’s statements shifts the focus of the efforts of the researcher from providing an objective account of truths to an understanding of the circum-

⁴² Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port, *Becoming East Germans: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, 2013, 280.

⁴³ Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, 1st ed., *Analysen und Dokumente / Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 6* (Berlin: Links, 1996): 16.

stances that produced the idea of truth. Sources are, therefore, not necessarily a reproduction of the specific thoughts or opinions of individuals. Instead, they are to be interpreted as insights into the discourse that documented, preserved or remembered this information. Any study of any one aspect of GDR culture thus begets a study of the mechanics of the culture as a whole.

Nevertheless, as Fulbrook and others argue,⁴⁴ the process of disbelief in the truthfulness of one's sources should not only be limited to sources that "lie," but should be a point of departure for any historical research. A reluctance to mistrust sources, i.e., taking any source at face value, only amplifies the researcher's own "interpretation," i.e., that which can translate immediately into acceptable contemporary narratives and results in a reproduction of the researcher's own cultural assumptions.

On the other hand, in a totalitarian paradigm of GDR historiography, mistrust can go too far, resulting in a blind trust in mistrust between citizens and the State.⁴⁵ A historical topography of patterns of trust and distrust must be made, keeping in mind a spectrum, with radical uncertainties under Stalin on one end and relative stabilization on the other.⁴⁶ The post-war period, according to Fulbrook, is often treated without regard to the context of the Nazi regime that preceded it, the diverse attitudes and experiences of new East Germans, nor the mistrust between these various groups. Returning émigrés' hope and trust in a new State and form of government was overlaid with others' fear, hatred and resentment of the Soviets and their Red Army. Attitudes of "wait-and-see" (abwartende Haltung) existed alongside widespread exodus to the West. Tense relationships between former Nazis and their victims existed alongside generational mistrust, with a striking number of "GDR

⁴⁴ E.g., Stefan Seinerth, "Zuverlässige literaturhistorische Informationsquelle oder bloßes Lügengespinnt? Zur Authentizität der Securitate-Akten über rumäniendeutsche Schriftsteller," in *Aus den Giftschränken des Kommunismus: Methodische Fragen zum Umgang mit Überwachungsakten in Zentral- und Südosteuropa*, ed. Florian Kühner-Wielach and Michaela Nowotnick (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2018), 175-90.

⁴⁵ Mary Fulbrook, *Erfahrung, Erinnerung, Geschichtsschreibung: Neue Perspektiven auf die deutschen Diktaturen*, vol. 17, Vorträge und Kolloquien (Weimar: Wallstein Verlag, 2016), 64.

⁴⁶ Fulbrook, 64.

institutions [that] were staffed disproportionately by [the younger generation] of 29ers.”⁴⁷
Patterns of trust and distrust “reshape and re-form” between sources and over time.⁴⁸

My Sources

When preparing for this dissertation, the futility of seeking to present objective historical truth became apparent after some initial research. Sources I had thought appropriate could be divided into two rough categories: scores, and material surrounding the creation and performance of these scores, including biographical information. In terms of vocal music, the genre of Lied fit into this model, even if the addition of text added some complexity to the score. Composers like Paul Dessau, who wrote over 400 songs, seemed to fulfill any requirements for an interesting biography. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, a few preliminary studies have been conducted on the songs of Paul Dessau using this score-based model.

In total, however, these studies cover no more than 20% of the total of Dessau’s song oeuvre. While this seemed at first like fresh territory for a PhD thesis on the *Lieder* of Paul Dessau, the reasons for this limited number resulted, not from a lack of scholarly dedication, but rather from an incompatibility of the source material with standard research questions, motivations and methods. As previously mentioned, when asked why his anthology was limited to 54 songs, Axel Bauni was very blunt in his explanation: “These were the only Kunstlieder Dessau wrote,” he replied, implying that other songs were of no interest, at least to him as a collaborative pianist. Fritz Hennenberg, another collaborative pianist and musicologist, produced an anthology that goes beyond the genre of art songs, including many songs from Dessau’s theatrical collaborations with Bertolt Brecht like *Mother Courage*, *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* alongside selections from Eisler’s *Hollywooder Liederbuch*. Nonetheless, Hennenberg went through several painstaking processes in order to present all the songs as (easily) performable scores with standard piano accompaniment, explicitly mentioning that some of his versions are not the composer’s original, but the result of combining many sources, including manuscripts, publications,

⁴⁷ Fulbrook, 70.

⁴⁸ Fulbrook, 71.

performance traditions, and original recordings. Michael Hix and John Nix are both musicians who used DMA research as performance repertoire. Indeed, the main characteristic of all these studies of Dessau's *Lied*-repertoire is that they aim to facilitate performance, presenting Dessau as a worthwhile and acceptable composer for today's concert practice. The score of a Lied functions as an object, providing a truth that the researcher interprets through an acceptable contemporary narrative, both in a historiographical and musical sense.

The remaining 80% of Dessau's song repertoire is similar to the bulk of song compositions from the GDR and does not fit neatly into a historiographical model based on scores and concert performance. The scope of this dissertation, therefore, requires that my choice in sources be guided by the fact that contemporary academic ideas of song differ from those in the GDR. Thus, the primary sources for this dissertation are mainly in form of texts that discuss songs, ideals of song, and song production. These include committee meeting minutes, festival organization records, and correspondence that can be found in the archive of the VKM and the "Song Production (Liedschaffen)" committee at the AdK as well as contemporary newspaper articles and announcements, journals such as *Musik und Gesellschaft*, and influential books of the time. Similarly, while songbooks and scores are occasionally analyzed as musical material, they are mainly presented as documentary material and cultural products within a discourse.

1.3.2. Assumptions

Researchers of any field shape their studies around their own motivations. "Historiography," according to Fulbrook, is then "also a matter of politics and morality. [...] The personal, political, and ethical positions of historians help determine the metatheoretical pre-conception of research and its results."⁴⁹ The repression and violence exercised by the Stasi might prompt historians to draw comparisons with the Stalinist and Nazi regimes. On some

⁴⁹ "Die Geschichtsschreibung [...] ist auch eine Angelegenheit von Politik und Moral. Man kommt nicht darum herum, dass die persönlichen, politischen und ethischen Positionen der Historiker die metatheoretischen Voraussetzungen der Forschung und ihrer Ergebnisse mitbestimmen." Fulbrook, "Methodologische Überlegungen," 281.

levels, this might be fruitful, however, it could also lead historians to condemn the entire culture as illegitimate, leaving in important facets of East German life to be forgotten or viewed as unimportant. The regime, especially in the early decades, was not held together by violence alone. The GDR experienced phases of development and has its own unique history that, as Fulbrook argues, must be differentiated from other totalitarian narratives. Methodologies must then be created in order to parse the various aspects of culture that caused these developments.

My Assumptions

Recognizing that song production during the early years of the GDR was deeply intertwined with the social conditions of the time, my work assumes that these songs served not only as tools of ideological expression but also as vehicles for fostering social cohesion and national identity. This approach requires acknowledging the dual nature of these cultural artifacts. On the one hand, they were used by the state to promote socialist ideals and on the other, they reflected a genuine attempt to create a unique East German cultural identity that balanced Soviet influences with German folk traditions and humanist heritage. This ideological paradox is crucial to understanding the motivations behind song production in the GDR. Composers and cultural policymakers were not merely replicating Soviet models; they were also drawing on a rich German musical heritage and striving to create works that would resonate with the populace and endure over time.

Furthermore, my research hypothesizes that the songs of the early GDR are inseparable from the social conditions of their creation and that their creators operated within the ideals of nineteenth-century song traditions. The following chapters attempt to build a nuanced view of the GDR's cultural production, one that recognizes the state's role in shaping cultural output while also appreciating genuine artistic efforts to build a distinct and enduring musical tradition. By focusing on the multifaceted nature of song production, my research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of East German musical culture and its place within the broader historical narrative.

1.3.3. Theories

Fullbrook warns against the development of “Checkpoint Charlie Theory” that paints the GDR as a two-sided struggle between a few evil rulers and the innocent, heroic masses whom they repressed. A more accurate picture, she proposes, might be of a giant octopus which had reached its tentacles into every aspect of society. The structure of the dictatorship was systematically created within the first two decades and was held in place by “subtle internalized processes”⁵⁰ that saturated everyday life. Willing functionaries supported its maintenance, while the majority of the population found a much-desired normalcy within the resulting organizations. The few dissidents who refused to take part in these systems remained isolated and unorganized. These processes cannot solely be explained by theories of repression and totalitarianism. The stability of the GDR-dictatorship is due in no small part to the fact that it had rooted itself in the heart of the structures of society through mass-membership in its organizations.

In light of this, my research is based on the assumption that the GDR’s cultural and social stability was not merely the result of overt repression but was deeply embedded in societal structures that facilitated widespread participation and compliance. The study posits that the production of songs and the broader musical practices in the GDR were reflective of these internalized processes, which went beyond mere propaganda and repressive policies.

A key aspect of this cultural stability was the extensive collaboration between various state and social institutions, such as the Verband der Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler (VKM), the Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB), the Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, and the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA). These organizations worked in tandem to create a cohesive cultural policy that permeated all levels of society. The VKM, for instance, played a crucial role in shaping the musical landscape by overseeing the production of new songs and ensuring they aligned with socialist ideals. The FDGB facilitated the dissemination of these songs among workers, integrating music into the fabric of everyday labor and

⁵⁰ Fullbrook, “Methodologische Überlegungen,” 290.

life. Meanwhile, the Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit provided the infrastructure for cultural activities, and the NVA used music as a means of fostering unity and morale among soldiers.

A central concept in this context is the theory of “folksongization,” which describes the process of adapting new musical contents into a form that could be widely embraced and performed by the populace, thereby fostering a sense of national identity. This process involved creating songs that were easily singable, thematically aligned with socialist values, and reflective of both contemporary and traditional elements. By promoting these songs through public performances, media, and institutional support, the state aimed to cultivate a collective cultural consciousness that reinforced socialist ideals.

The creation and dissemination of music in the GDR were both influenced by this intricate network of institutional collaborations. While the state sought to use music as a tool for ideological indoctrination, the actual process of song production involved a diverse array of actors, including composers, performers, and everyday citizens, who contributed to and interacted with this cultural milieu. This collaborative and participatory nature of song production indicates that music served not only as a means of state propaganda but also as a medium through which people could find a sense of normalcy, create avenues of individual expression, and even develop forms of subtle resistance.

By examining the role of these institutions and their influence on musical culture, my research suggests that the GDR’s cultural policies were effective because they managed to integrate themselves into the daily lives of the population. Music, particularly communal singing, became a part of the social fabric, offering both a sense of belonging and a controlled form of cultural participation. This integration was not simply a top-down imposition but was also shaped by the population’s active engagement with and application of these cultural forms.

Furthermore, the study hypothesizes that the musical output of the GDR was shaped by an inherent tension between the state’s desire for control and the artists’ aspirations for creative expression. This tension resulted in a unique cultural product that was neither

wholly dictated by the state nor entirely free to interpretation, reflecting a complex interplay of ideological conformity and artistic innovation, wherein music served as both a vehicle for state ideology and a space for cultural experimentation.

1.3.4. Terms in GDR Discourse

One difficulty in differentiating these narratives is the sometimes-hidden necessity for terminological mediation between various historical discourses and the contemporary language of the researcher/reader. Words like “occupation,” “profession,” and “modernization,” for example, might have similar meanings in other discourses, but the character, usage and connotation of their equivalents in the GDR differed greatly to the ways in which they were used in other historical contexts, or to the interpretation a contemporary reader might give them. The complexities of language in the GDR, especially in the context of official rhetoric and its relationship to everyday speech, make up a linguistic field of study in and of itself.

Mutable Discourse

Language historians like Ulla Fix have analyzed the language of the GDR in terms of Foucauldian discourse analysis,⁵¹ in which language is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by procedures of power. These procedures include the exclusionary processes of censorship, as well as processes of division, i.e., which and whose statements can be rejected as invalid (mad) or untrue. East Germans experienced overt censorship under the SED’s regime, resulting in a monitored vocabulary among citizens. The control of functionaries also reached to almost every level of public discourse, silencing anyone whose opinion was deemed as invalid. With this in mind, comparisons to the language of the Nazi regime are easily made. Language historians like Fix draw parallels between the “Lingua

⁵¹ See Ulla Fix, “Texte mit doppeltem Boden? Diskursanalytische Untersuchung inklusiver und exklusiver personenbeurteilender Texte im Kommunikationskontext der DDR,” in *Totalitäre Sprache*, ed. Ruth Wodak, Passagen Diskursforschung (Wien: Passagen-Verl., 1995), 71-92; Ulla Fix, *Sprache, Sprachgebrauch und Diskurse in der DDR: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Sprachwissenschaft, Band 15 (Berlin: Frank & Timme, Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2014).

Tertii Imperii,” LTI or the language of the Third Reich, and the official discourse of the GDR, or “Lingua quarti imperii.”⁵²

Another component of Foucaultian discourse analysis is the concept of inclusive processes, i.e., going beyond overt censorship or negation to examine what will be seen and promoted as desirable. Internal procedures of classification decide which texts are preserved and repeated for their greater meaning. As examples, Foucault names “major narratives, which are recounted, repeated, and varied; formulae, texts, and ritualized sets of discourses which are recited in well-defined circumstances.”⁵³ In other words, these processes produce a canon of texts that carry performative meaning, “giving rise to a certain number of new speech-acts,”⁵⁴ while being invoked through rituals. The “lyrical dream of a discourse” is that these speech-acts remain constant with each repetition. However, since its performative force was only made real through repetition and commentary, the “silent articulation ‘beyond’” each text will eventually change its meaning.⁵⁵

The idea of inclusion and classification is especially relevant for examining a vocabulary of the GDR, an environment in which the inherent meaning ‘beyond’ the written word would come to be taken as a matter of course. In the later decades, while official rhetoric became “empty, rhetorical, pathetic, dishonest,” the use (or omission) of official party language communicated magnitudes.⁵⁶ Eventually, the application of easily recognizable platitudes, in turn, could be transformed into subtle doublespeak, camp and irony.⁵⁷ Such statements simultaneously manifested “recognition and rejection, freed the speaker from an annoying suspicion, and yet signaled to those in the know a certain distance, or at least a

⁵² Victor Klemperer (cousin of conductor, Otto Klemperer) coined the term in his book, *LTI. Notizbuch eines Philologen* in 1947. Starting in 1945, he mentions “sub specie LQI” several times in his journals. Quoted in R. H. Watt, “Du Liegst Schief, Genosse Klemperer: Victor Klemperer and Stalin on the Language of a Divided Germany in the 1940s and 1950s,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 1, 2001): 253.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” printed in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young, trans. Ian McLeod (Boston: Routledge & Kegan, 1981), 56.

⁵⁴ Foucault, 57.

⁵⁵ Foucault, 57-58.

⁵⁶ Ulla Fix, *Sprache, Sprachgebrauch und Diskurse in der DDR: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Sprachwissenschaft, Band 15 (Berlin: Frank & Timme, Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2014), 10.

⁵⁷ Jaraus, “Historische Texte der DDR aus der Perspektive des ‘Linguistic Turn,’” 235.

small space for individual expression.”⁵⁸ Ulla Fix presents Georg Klaus’ book, *Sprache der Politik*, as an example: While the words on the page presented criticism of the manipulative political language of the FRG in standard East German phrases, Klaus’ use of this rhetoric carried a clear second layer of meaning (*doppelter Boden*) that communicated an unmistakable criticism of the GDR, at least, that is, in the eyes of the young East German linguist in the 1970s. As mentioned above, David Robb provides another example, arguing that “classic” texts of the literary and philosophical *Erbe* such as Goethe and Marx were also used in this way by East German folk singers of the 1980s, creating a “dialectic of conformism and subversion.”⁵⁹

One cannot assume, however, that this kind of ironic use of East German rhetoric was widespread in the early decades of the GDR. As in any discursive language, the meaning “beyond” specific, recognizable language in the discourse of the GDR changed over time. For example, to students in the 1970s and 80s, expressions like “Klassenfeind” had become routinized, rhetorical tropes and were recognizable as tired and dishonest. However, for those who had experienced the worker’s movement of the 1920s and 30s, such terms encompassed and explained “all signs of difficulty and discontent” of their youth and the political opposition and organization⁶⁰ against fascism. Therefore, the documents and songs that are presented below, those from the 1950s and 60s, must be viewed with the possibility of various “second” messages in mind.

⁵⁸ “Das ironische Zitat markierte überhaupt eine DDR-spezifische Ambivalenz im Umgang mit der offiziellen Terminologie: Es manifestierte gleichzeitig Anerkennung wie Ablehnung, entzog den Sprecher einem lästigen Verdacht und signalisierte dem Wissenden doch Distanz, also zumindest einen kleinen Freiraum individuellen Sprechens.” Horst Dieter Schlosser, *Die deutsche Sprache in der DDR: Zwischen Stalinismus und Demokratie; Historische, politische und kommunikative Bedingungen* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), 163.

⁵⁹ David Robb, “Playing with the ‘Erbe’: Songs of the 1848 Revolution in the GDR,” *German Life and Letters* 63, no. 3 (July 2010): 295–310.

⁶⁰ Fulbrook, *Erfahrung, Erinnerung, Geschichtsschreibung*, 71. For more on the importance of generational differences in historical narratives, see Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

Song in Discourse

The following research delves into terms such as “Liedschaffen,” “Lied,” “Volkslied,” “Wirkung,” “bel canto,” and “authenticity,” that are crucial for accurately interpreting the cultural and musical landscape of the GDR. These definitions are not only foundational but are contextualized within their historical significance in East German society, aiming to capture their original meanings rather than imposing contemporary interpretations.

“Liedschaffen,” for instance, encapsulates the specific efforts at song creation within the socialist context, reflecting both the political and cultural aspirations of the state and the evolving definitions of musical ideals and practices. The term “Lied” extends beyond its literal meaning of “song” to embody the functional roles assigned to music in East German society. “Volkslied,” traditionally understood as folk song, was recontextualized in the GDR to uphold socialist ideals, emphasizing collective identity and solidarity through its musical applications in everyday life. In this context, “Volkstümlichkeit” holds significant meaning, presenting challenges in translation to English due to its encompassing nature. It embodies concepts of folkishness, of popular appeal rooted in folk traditions, and a sense of cultural authenticity that deeply resonates within a specific community. “Volkstümlichkeit” was a pivotal criterion for music and cultural production in East Germany; composers aimed to create works that not only adhered to ideological standards but were also genuinely embraced and utilized by the Volk. This concept was central to fostering unity and collective identity, ensuring cultural expressions were participatory rather than elitist or disconnected from everyday life. As discussed in detail below, the term “Wirkung” holds special significance for the purposes of this dissertation, as it pertains to the intended and actual impact of music on society, viewed as a performative tool that shapes reality.

1.4. Performing the GDR: Theoretical Considerations

„Die Republik im Spiegel unserer Kunst“
-KuBa

Im klaren Licht
erscheint die Welt von heut
mit ihren Sorgen,
mit ihrer Mühe
um die Welt von morgen.
Und schön erblüht
dies Morgenangesicht.
Und ist ein Geigenstrich,
ein Farbtupf im Blauen –
kein Widerwind
trägt uns die Freude fort.

Sie bleibt in Klang und Farbe –
steht in Stein gehauen:

Ein Bild.
Ein neues Lied.
Ein gutes Wort.⁶¹

Published in 1961, KuBa's poem, "Die Republik im Spiegel unserer Kunst," demonstrates the complex relationship between the ephemerality of current events, their influence on artistic creation, and a willingness to create something lasting for the unfamiliar future.

This dissertation is guided by a central theoretical consideration: The twentieth century brought about two fundamentally different ways to approach music history. The first of these approaches treats music primarily as a collection of historical artifacts. While such a

⁶¹ In the clear light / shines the world of today / with its sorrow, / with its troubles / for the world of tomorrow. / And beautifully blooming / is this morning's sight. / And it is a violin's song, / a brushstroke of blue–/ no headwind / will sweep our joy away. / It endures in sound and color–/ carved in stone: / A picture. / A new song. / A good word.

KuBa, "Die Republik im Spiegel unserer Kunst," *Neues Deutschland*, May 21, 1961. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

method does consider biographical details and social or political contexts, it ultimately centers on musical scores and their composers. The “Musical Experience”⁶² of a work is understood and analyzed by studying the score in relation to other scores and historical documents, often without considering its live performance context. This tradition of “positivist” musicology has roots in the nationalist projects of nineteenth-century German scholars such as Johann Nikolaus Forkel, further developed by figures like E.T.A. Hoffmann, and later adopted in the English-speaking world through the influence of Heinrich Schenker.⁶³

In contrast, a second, more recent approach to musicology has been promoted by scholars such as Joseph Kerman, Lawrence Kramer, Susan McClary, Nicholas Cook, and Christopher Small from the 1980s and 1990s onward. Often referred to as “new” or “postmodern” musicology, this approach draws on methodologies from various disciplines, especially ethnomusicology, and applies them to Western “art” music. Although “historical musicology had always been concerned in one way or another with understanding music in its context, [...] what was principally new [...] was its explicit concern with the act of interpretation and with the values inherent in—or the meanings constructed by—it.”⁶⁴ According to this perspective, “the fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works at all, but in action,” in “Musicking,” that is, the ephemeral, socially situated performance of music, which derives its meaning from its context.⁶⁵ As a result, this critical approach “shifts the emphasis from the meaning that is encoded in music”⁶⁶ to how that music is enacted and received in various contexts. Scores and related materials are thus not seen as representations of “social problems” to be decoded “according to its own formal laws,” in the manner suggested by Theodor Adorno’s writings,⁶⁷ but as products of the

⁶² See Lawrence Kramer, “Music à La Mode,” *The New York Review of Books*, September 22, 1994.

⁶³ Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 33–34, 70, 76.

⁶⁴ See Nicholas Cook, “We Are All (Ethno)Musicologists Now,” in *The New (Ethno)Musicologies*, ed. Henry Stobart (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 49.

⁶⁵ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1998), 8.

⁶⁶ Cook, “We Are All (Ethno)Musicologists Now,” 55.

⁶⁷ E.g., Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music (1932),” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 391–436, here 393. Cited in Cook, 55.

specific cultural and discursive environments in which they are produced. “Musical material” is seen as the consequence—not the reflection—of the specific culture, environment, or discourse. It is here, in performance, that musical meaning is situated, not merely in musical performance, but the performance of social and political values through the acts of writing, discussing, playing and listening to music.

Influential for this aspect of a “performative turn” in musicology were the theories presented by philosopher of language John L. Austin in his book *How to Do Things with Words*,⁶⁸ as well as work by those who expanded these ideas like John Searle and Judith Butler. Austin argues that spoken words, or “performative utterances,” go beyond stating truth or reflecting reality, but can change reality when the social circumstances allow, e.g., in the case of taking vows or naming ships. For example, when I presented the first version of this chapter at a conference,⁶⁹ standing and reading these words in Bern, with my name on the program, in front of several other musicologists, I became part of that group of academics. If, however, I were to say the same words in the same way, but at 3 a.m. in front of a bunch of giraffes, this would not make me either an academic or a giraffe. If any humans were to witness this, I would probably be deemed a very strange person, or, depending on the perspective of those humans, a performance artist. In this sense, doing or saying something under certain circumstances with certain people changes reality and defines identity.

The motivations for a preference toward a “performative” view of music in this dissertation arise out of, first, my own experience and interests, as my experiences as a performer and theater-maker influence my research questions. My experiences with music, and therefore also my scientific interests, are performative ones, including questions of why and how a certain song was created and sung and how these answers are unique for every time and place and for every performer, audience and venue. Ironically, this means that my research

⁶⁸ The theories were first delivered as lectures at Harvard University in 1955 and later published in John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁶⁹ The paper, “Performing the GDR: Songs of a Budding Dictatorship, Musicological Challenges and Opportunities,” was given at the International Conference “Narrating Musicology,” which was hosted by the Institut für Musikwissenschaft at the Universität Bern, Switzerland, in 2021.

has not been very fruitful in terms of discovering new singing repertoire, as songs from the early GDR rarely transfer smoothly into concert practice. However, I've recognized an important parallel between contemporary historical narratives about vocal music and the historical narratives about music in the GDR that, perhaps more importantly, have emerged as important lessons about performance practice and the paradoxical value systems in which performers and researchers participate.

The second reason for viewing songs as social performance has to do with the impossibility of viewing songs as separate from language, speech and the human voice. Both song and instrumental music can be discussed as performative in the context of the musical embodiment or the rituals of concert performance, academic analysis and canon-building. Without lyrics, instrumental works can be thought of as more autonomous and more open to interpretation. Song, in contrast, cannot be separated entirely from the meaning of the speech it contains. Any analysis of a song must therefore contend with its given textual meaning. Dictated pitches and rhythms prevent song text from performing as the spoken or written text would, yet a song cannot independently express a meaning that is wholly separate from its text. Lawrence Kramer uses the term "transmemberment," a portmanteau combining "transformation" and "dismemberment," to describe this agonistic relationship of music and words, wherein a song at once destroys, reassembles, and contextualizes the text that it incorporates.⁷⁰ Thus, "the song gives itself as, gives itself over to, an activity of interpretation—emphasis on *activity*."⁷¹ In other words, a song is not merely an interpretation of an existing text, but rather the command to make one. Songs do things.

Of course, a recognition of what certain songs do may not be terribly important for a musicological study, especially if the goal of that study is, for example, to discover and present new potential concert repertoire. As explained above, only a small portion of East German song fits such a model, not necessarily because they are uninteresting or undeserving of discussion, but because their performances make for awkward experiences. This was

⁷⁰ Lawrence Kramer, *Song Acts: Writings on Words and Music*, ed. Richard D. Leppert and Walter Bernhart, *Word and Music Studies*, volume 16 (Leiden Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), 3–4.

⁷¹ Kramer, 3.

demonstrated at the above-mentioned symposium “Unter Dem Radar” in 2019. The initial goals of the conference were to showcase the genre of art song that had “fallen into contempt” under party rule. In the end, however, the subject matter of the lectures went well beyond songs which had slipped “under the radar.” Indeed, a large portion of the conference dealt with pop-music, folk music and—the apparent “rival” to the art song—Massenlieder. As the symposium program included concerts, this trend was also apparent in the repertoire that students and faculty performed, presenting solo art songs while standing in the crook of a grand piano, directly followed by group renditions of songs like “Wir wollen Frieden auf lange Dauer.” The “music itself,” i.e., the notes on the page, became overshadowed by the peculiarity of this event: Young students were performing a leftist protest song (that was produced in and for a regime that is widely remembered as failed) and sing-shouting the words “down with Adenauer” (a name that many of the students would surely have to research), while still in full concert attire before a polite and silently attentive audience.

A girls’ choir was even invited to sing the GDR’s national anthem “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” and several well-known songs from the FDJ, the GDR’s youth organization. Particularly at that performance, where these young girls, generations apart from those for whom the songs were intended, sang about “hope” and “future” and rebuilding “Heimat,” a palpable and particularly pronounced discomfort emerged among the audience members. The performance was immediately followed by heated discussions, exemplifying not only that a song’s performance has the ability to have real consequences in the world (i.e., performative force), but also that these consequences, and thus the meaning of the performance, change drastically through time and are impossible to reproduce in a different context. In short, they do too much; their performative power makes it impossible to present them as objective historical musical material.

It is undeniable that the songs sung in the first decades of the GDR had a lasting effect upon the German cultural landscape. The Association for Composers and Musicologists alone commissioned hundreds of songs that became the founding material for countless music festivals, youth activities, and vocal ensembles which lasted well into the 1990s. On the one hand, musical historians have good reason to research these songs. On the other

hand, the majority of these Lieder are in no way “worth rediscovering” for concert practice today. The cultural and political baggage purposefully woven into them cannot be left at the concert hall door, and the overt simplicity with which some of these songs were constructed would bore any music theorist. As is often the case with songs from any era, there exists an imbalance between the academic (in)significance of a song’s score for us today and the cultural significance of singing a particular song at a particular time. In other words, the performative force that a song possessed at a point in history is often far more interesting than the notes on the page.

The final reason for a “performative” approach to this topic is due to an observance of parallels between ideas of “musicking” and some understandings of music in the GDR. Whereas the emotional, social aspects of music and the need to rethink and criticize historical narratives, were central parts of the so-called “performative turn” in musicology, the “Aufbau” period also presented the opportunity to rethink what music is. Historical narratives about song were used as tools for practitioners in the GDR to highlight music’s relationship to class hierarchies, capitalism, imperialism, fascism and to criticize the eurocentrism of the discipline. The prominent ideology provided guidance: Music has an effect on the world, and it is our job to put it to use.

After the founding of the GDR, East German historians in all fields were expected to create new narratives of history.

“The historian, as a teacher of the people, [...] is a *propagandist* in the best sense of the word. He propagates the insights and lessons of history both in his professional work and in various ways in social life. His role is to disseminate everywhere a truthful, that is, scientific image of history: the national historical perspective of the working class. Everything the historian writes and says should ultimately help our citizens in solving their present and future tasks. The contribution to changing reality, particularly the situation in Germany, toward lasting peace and the historically necessary socialism, is the standard by which achievements in the field of historical science should be measured.”⁷²

⁷² “Der Historiker als Lehrer des Volkes [...] ist *Propagandist* im besten Sinne des Wortes. Er propagiert die Erkenntnisse und Lehren der Geschichte sowohl in seiner Berufstätigkeit als auch in der vielfältigen Art und Weise im gesellschaftlichen Leben. Seine Funktion ist es,

Socialist historians began narrating past events through the frame of class-struggle, thereby highlighting social movements rather than individual rulers, prominently featuring the lower classes, and showing the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in a critical light. This rhetoric caused new historical texts to function not only as “objective” records of the past, but also as performative acts of overt attempts to change reality.

“Historiography’s ideological function” was not only to foster a knowledge of history, but also to provide “experiences of history [...that] form an essential basis for the development of socialist core beliefs”⁷³ in socially and historically conscious citizens. The term “consciousness of history” (Geschichtsbewußtsein) did not refer to a “reflection of objective reality,” but instead:

to the political, moral, and ideological stimulus for active engagement. Consciousness here should be understood as social motivation, as a stimulus for achievement, and also as a general guide for orientation, providing political grounding for the individual and, importantly, an emotional sense of purpose in human existence within a rational environment, driven by science and technology.⁷⁴

According to Konrad Jarausch, since the writing of history was understood as an active “struggle” for the good of humanity, historians participated in a “double discourse,” using language to simultaneously report on, celebrate, and critique both history and the present,

überall ein wahrhaftes, d.h. wissenschaftliches Bild von der Geschichte, das nationale Geschichtsbild der Arbeiterklasse, zu verbreiten. Alles, was der Historiker schreibt und sagt, soll letztlich unseren Staatsbürgern bei der Lösung ihrer gegenwärtigen und zukünftigen Aufgaben helfen. Der Beitrag zur Veränderung der Wirklichkeit und besonders der Lage in Deutschland in der Richtung auf einen dauerhaften Frieden und den historisch notwendigen Sozialismus ist der Maßstab, an dem die Leistungen auf dem Gebiet der Geschichtswissenschaft zu messen sind.“ Ernst Laboor, “Die gesellschaftlichen Aufgaben des Historikers und Geschichtslehrers bei der sozialistischen Bewußtseinsbildung,” in *Einführung in das Studium der Geschichte*, ed. Walther Eckermann and Hubert Mohr (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaft, 1966), 517–18. Italics original.

⁷³ Helmut Meier, ed., *Geschichtsbewußtsein und sozialistische Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Rolle der Geschichtswissenschaft, des Geschichtsunterrichts und der Geschichtspropaganda bei der Entwicklung des sozialistischem Bewußtseins*, 1. Aufl. (Berlin: Dietz, 1970), 5.

⁷⁴ Frank Reuter, *Geschichtsbewußtsein in der DDR Programm und Aktion*, vol. 5, Bibliothek Wissenschaft und Politik (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft u. Politik von Nottbeck, 1973), 13.

while also manifesting their own scientific legitimacy with demonstrations of a superior world view.⁷⁵ Thus, these multilayered interpretations of history, heavily regulated by the discourse, were freed (at least partially) from the pretense of academic objectivity and demonstrate a self-awareness of the performative potential of historical narratives.

Although this new kind of language shifted in line with the shift from *Geisteswissenschaften* (studies of the human mind) to *Gesellschaftswissenschaften* (studies of society), historians in the GDR didn't reinvent the workings of academia. "Although GDR historiography reflected the general ideologization of communication patterns," international recognition and prestige remained important for professional academics and the State, meaning that academics were bound to present this new critical language in formats that were supposed to be objective—like monographs, biographies, or conference presentations. "Their texts therefore reflect the tension between an instrumentalizing hierarchy, ideological argumentation and epic-dramatic narrative structure and the traditional forms of communication of the discipline."⁷⁶

As creators of music, people intervene in their own history, by commenting on it, by changing it, and in order to do justice to the abundance of emotions and thoughts, they work on a constant renewal, enrichment, deepening of the content of music.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Jaraus, "Historische Texte der DDR aus der Perspektive des 'linguistic turn,'" 236–7.

⁷⁶ "Obwohl die DDR-Historiographie die generelle Ideologisierung der Kommunikationsmuster reflektierte, hielt sie gleichzeitig an den überkommenen Formen des Austauschs von wissenschaftlichen Informationen wie der Monographie oder des Zeitschriftenaufsatzes fest. Ihre Texte spiegeln daher die Spannung zwischen einer instrumentalisierenden Hierarchisierung, weltanschaulichen Argumentation und episch-dramatischer Erzählstruktur und den traditionellen Kommunikationsformen des Faches wider." Jaraus, 239.

⁷⁷ "Inhalt der Musik [ist] das, was der Komponist mittels gestalteter Klänge, mittels der Form sagt, mitteilt, darstellt. Der Inhalt der Musik reicht von einfachen Emotionen bis zu komplizierten, gedanklich-emotionellen Vorgängen. Der Inhalt der Musik, nicht ihre Form, ist das revolutionierende Element der Musik. Die Menschen, die als Schöpfer der Musik in ihre eigene Geschichte kommentierend, verändernd eingreifen, arbeiten, um der Fülle von Emotionen und Gedanken gerecht zu werden, an einer steten Erneuerung, Bereicherung, Vertiefung des Inhalts der Musik." Georg Knepler, *Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1961), 939.

For music historians, the new way to understand and write about history had profound, yet contradictory, effects on the concept of music itself and, as a result, affected not only the field of historical writing, but also that of musical practices. The composers and musicologists of the early days of the GDR were—to a great extent knowingly—caught in a tension between two value systems. On the one hand, musical life still circulated around the ideals of music traditions from the nineteenth century. Some relevant examples of these traditions are: 1) opus-based canonical practice: studying and performing a set of masterworks or composing new works with the hope that those works will be studied and performed repeatedly in the future; 2) the cult of genius: veneration of a succession of individuals who were the creators of masterworks; 3) autonomous expression of the individual: The true idea of a masterwork exists above worldly matters and has the universal tendency to morally elevate the individual.

On the other hand, dictated in part by the Bitterfeld Conference in 1958 and noted in the documents of the *Verband der Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler* (VKM), the ideals of socialism towards which practitioners in the GDR were to strive contradicted these ideals outright in many ways: 1) folk based and spontaneous performance practice: all citizens should be able to participate in all musical practices, no matter their background; 2) emphasis on and encouragement of collaboration and anonymity: the less clear a composition's source, the closer it is to having originated from the *Volk*, therefore rendering it “better”; and 3) invocation of the will of the masses and political meaning: No music is pointless and any attempt to prioritize autonomous form over functional content demonstrates an expression of the “ideology of the late-bourgeois capitalism.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Laura Silverberg, “The East German Sonderweg to Modern Music, 1956–1971” (Dissertation, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 3.

Musicologists in the GDR like Georg Knepler tried to bridge this gap, arguing for a “relative autonomy”⁷⁹ in music.⁸⁰ The methods of traditional musicology that inherently saw music as a row of autonomous works, concentrating on scores and biographies, was vital to elucidating the empirical findings of research. However, they were “*erneuerungsbedürftig*,” in need of thorough renovation.⁸¹ “It cannot be wrong,” Knepler states, “to start from a somewhat naive definition of music and initially understand music as what one has experienced in practice as music, only to advance toward a more nuanced and balanced definition of the subject of music in the course of the investigation.”⁸² Similarly to the arguments of the “new musicologists” against a positivist musicology, Knepler argued for a shift in research questions of “what” to questions “those invested in preserving outdated

⁷⁹ Lars Klingberg links Knepler’s use of this term to interactions with Dahlhaus in 1979. Knepler, however, mentioned as early as 1975 that the term had “been coined,” unfortunately omitting the term’s origin. While it was possible that Knepler was referring Dahlhaus’ lecture on “Relative Autonomy” in 1974, it is unlikely that Dahlhaus had coined the term, since the first line of his lecture defines it as a “Marxist category” of art and art history, thereby implying that the term was already in use by Marxist authors. See Lars Klingberg, “Musikgeschichtsschreibung, marxistische,” in *Musikgeschichte Online*, ed. Nina Noeske, Matthias Tischer, and Lars Klingberg, 2023, <https://mugo.hfm-weimar.de/de/topics/musikgeschichtsschreibung-folgt>; Carl Dahlhaus, “Über die relative Autonomie der Musikgeschichte,” in *Bericht über den Internationalen Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Berlin 1974* (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1980), 225–34.

⁸⁰ “While this in no way deflects from the fact that, in the last analysis, the workings of economy determine the general laws that are responsible for social phenomena, including the production of music with all its rules and methods, one must take into account the ways in which the special ideas, rules, and methods work. Neither the common chord nor the prohibition of parallel fifths can be directly deduced from the social conditions of the society in which they originated; nor can they be separated from that society and reduced, say, to the workings of eternal laws of nature. To denote this general truth the term ‘relative autonomy’ has been coined.” Georg Knepler, “Music Historiography in Eastern Europe,” in *Perspectives in Musicology: The Inaugural Lectures of the Ph. D. Program in Music at the City University of New York*, ed. Barry S Brook (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 231.

⁸¹ Georg Knepler, *Geschichte als Weg zum Musikverständnis: Zur Theorie, Methode und Geschichte der Musikgeschichtsschreibung* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1977), 24.

⁸² Knepler, 26.

social conditions would rather avoid, [... such as:] Why like this? Why under such circumstances? Why then? Why not anymore today?”⁸³ Indeed, Knepler’s insistence on interdisciplinary methods and on critical analysis of historiological theory, has made him into “a—mostly unknown—founding father of the *New Musicology*.”⁸⁴

According to this perspective, sociological methods must no longer be seen as “*Hilfswissenschaften*,” but instead be applied in order to understand “the very specialized set of ideas, rules, and methods” under which music is created, understood and applied.⁸⁵ Since music history is “but one of several aspects of mankind’s history,” Knepler argues that the two methodologies of sociology and musicology are necessary parts of a single discipline of music historiography, and that each should complement, inform and cultivate the other.⁸⁶ Individual composers and works, as well as compositional trends, “must be reviewed in their relation to newly emerging subject matters and tasks, and to the changing demands and needs of the potential audience.”⁸⁷ The inclusion of music sociology, therefore, results in the assumption that a certain music’s essence changes with society throughout time because it is heard differently with each societal change of history.⁸⁸

⁸³ “Um das Prinzip des dialektischen Determinismus, das an jede Erscheinung Fragen von der Art: Warum so? Warum unter solchen Umständen? Warum damals? Warum heute nicht mehr? heranträgt, kommt man nicht herum. Diese harmlos klingenden Fragen bergen, wenn sich ihre Unabweisbarkeit den Massen einprägt, eine Kraft, mit der sich verständlicherweise nicht einlassen will, wem es an der Konservierung überholter gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse liegt; sie taugen gleichzeitig als Ansatzpunkte zur Lösung subtilster Detailfragen. Das ist das eine. Das zweite Prinzip soll lauten: den Gegenstand im Auge – genauer: Musik im Ohr – zu behalten und ihr zu folgen, wohin immer sie uns führt, und sei es auch in Gegenden, die bei der traditionellen Forschung als verrufene gelten.” Knepler, 26.

⁸⁴ “Kein anderer ging so konsequent auf interdisziplinäre Kommunikation und Arbeitsformen aus wie er, die *New Musicology* hat in ihm einen – unerkannten – Gründungsvater.” Peter Gülke, “Knepler, Georg,” in *MGG Online*, ed. Laurenz Lütteken (New York, Kassel, 2003/2016), accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/526683>.

⁸⁵ Knepler, “Music Historiography in Eastern Europe,” 230.

⁸⁶ Knepler, 228-9, 232.

⁸⁷ Knepler, 237.

⁸⁸ At the time, this stood in sharp contrast to the treatment of music sociology in the West, where it was largely seen as an auxiliary, sub-discipline of musicology. See e.g., Gilbert Chase. “American musicology and the social sciences” in Barry S Brook, Edward O. D Downes, and Sherman Van Solkema, *Perspectives in Musicology: The Inaugural Lectures of the Ph. D. Program in Music at the City University of New York* (New York: W.W. Norton &

The historical significance of the German Lied made song a handy tool to create a “relative autonomy” in practice. The German folksong was long considered the basis of the “great German musical heritage” that fostered a sense of national identity. Wolfgang Steinitz’s massive anthology of German folk songs of “democratic character” from 1955⁸⁹ and its subsequent importance as the “große Steinitz” acted as a narrative counterbalance to the autonomous idea of the German art song tradition, giving a deep history of politically motivated songs of the *Volk*. It also legitimized multidisciplinary approaches, centering ethnographic, sociological methodologies in the field of historical musicology, in ways that continued to be marginal in the BRD.⁹⁰ Likewise, Inge Lammel’s research and the Workers’ Song Archive made a point to present joke songs, drinking songs and parodies, in addition to work songs, hiking songs, and street ballads (*Bänkelgesang*), demonstrating past social conditions and actively reifying *Volkslieder* as the functional, authentic expression of the contemporary working class.

1.4.1. “Wirkung”

It is unlikely that composers and musicologists in the GDR were aware of Austin’s theories as there is no evidence that the term “performativity” or translations thereof were applied to discussions of music. However, similar ideas to that which can now be called music’s “performative force” can be found in the importance and prevalence of the word

Company, 1975). In the 1960s and 70s, many West German musicologists were able to, and perhaps even motivated to, reject any calls from Eastern scholars, who argued for integrating sociological methods into musicology, for the simple reason that these methods were based on Marxist political theory, “a palpable threat to the integrity of the discipline.” See e.g., Anne C. Shreffler, “Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History,” *The Journal of Musicology* 20, no. 4 (2003): 499; See also James Hepokoski, “The Dahlhaus Project and Its Extra-Musicological Sources,” *19th-Century Music* 14, no. 3 (1991): 221–46. Of course, what the West was rejecting was, in large part, the restrictive, dogmatic pressures under which East German scholars were working. The calls from Eastern musicologists to treat music as a social, performative phenomenon could be the proverbial baby that got thrown out with the dogmatic bathwater.

⁸⁹ Wolfgang Steinitz, *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten*, 1st ed., Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Deutsche Volkskunde (Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 1955). A second volume appeared in 1962.

⁹⁰ See Philip V. Bohlman, “600 Jahre DDR-Musikgeschichte,” in *Musikwissenschaft und Kalter Krieg: Das Beispiel DDR*, ed. Nina Noeske and Matthias Tischer (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 82–83.

“*Wirkung*” (impact) in the discourse, especially when talking about song. Functionaries in the GDR believed that song, due to its “close relationship between sound and word,” held unique “emotional power [that] merges with the programmatic message to form a work of art of particularly immediate impact, directly influencing people’s behavior.”⁹¹ While the traditional sense of classical music production of scores remained the standard way to talk about music, discussions of criteria of judging musical quality also routinely included a song’s potential societal impact. This means, the task of song composers in the GDR was not merely to create songs for song’s sake or to represent reality in music, but to impact real life, ideally by enabling and encouraging collective singing.

The creation and production of vocal music, especially songs that could be sung by the masses, was the goal for many political composers and musicians because the latter in particular could be so socially impactful. Thinkers like Georg Knepler and Hanns Eisler⁹² underlined the importance of studying the impact of music and called for scientists and researchers to put their energy into such endeavors. Functionaries were determined to instill younger East Germans with the same socialist fervor that “Solidaritätslied” or “Spaniens

⁹¹ “Durch die enge Beziehung von Ton und Wort verbindet sich die emotionale Kraft mit der programmatischen Aussage zu einem Kunstwerk von besonders unmittelbarer, das Verhalten der Menschen direkt beeinflussender Wirksamkeit.” “Thesen zum Stand der Entwicklung auf dem Gebiet des Liedschaffens in der DDR,” August 16, 1963, VKM 870, AdK.

⁹² “Ich glaube, daß unsere Ästhetik trotz mancher Leistungen mehr den Kopf in den Wolken hat als die Füße auf der Erde. Die notwendigsten Untersuchungen über die eigentümliche Wirkung der Musik auf den Menschen wurden noch nicht gemacht. Wir können auch in der DDR nicht alles am selben Tag und zusammen leisten, aber man muß wenigstens wissen, was zu leisten wäre. Wir wissen aus den Mythen und aus ostasiatischen Kulturen, welchen enormen Einfluß Musik hat. [...] Aber wir haben noch nicht wissenschaftlich untersucht, welchen Einfluß Musik auf die Psyche und die Physis eines Menschen hat. Ich höre mit großer Freude, daß unser tschechischer Kollege Professor Sychra mittels der Kybernetik das Verhältnis von Text und Musik [...] systematisch untersucht. [...] Wäre es nicht an der Zeit, unserer Musikästhetik eine reale materielle Basis zu geben? Könnten wir nicht bei einigen unserer Institute kleine Nebeninstitute gründen, zum Beispiel bei der medizinischen Fakultät der Humboldt-Universität oder der Akademie der Wissenschaften, um solche Untersuchungen wenigstens zu beginnen?” Hanns Eisler, *Materialien zu einer Dialektik der Musik*, ed. Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: Reclam, 1973), 304. An abridged version was also printed as “Inhalt und Form,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 12 (1962): 541, and reprinted in Eisler, *EGW* 3/2, 571.

Himmel” had given their generation in their formative years. In order to reproduce the galvanizing effects of the great anti-fascist Massenlieder of the early twentieth century, the social mechanics of music had to be studied and understood.

Most practically, this meant creating scores that encouraged collective singing, which, in turn, gave singers opportunities to identify with each other, organize collectively, and (ideally) promote the State’s agenda. Of course, the will to produce effective propaganda for the State was one main driver behind the scientific interest in the impact of music. In this practical sense, the focus on Wirkung can be seen as the search for mass manipulation, not unlike the cultural manipulation for which the National Socialist (Nazi) regime is known.

However, mass control through the arts was only one driving factor behind the paradigm shift within the humanities in Eastern Europe. The motivation for seeking out alternatives to traditional theories about music was an intellectual undertaking as much as it was political. Indeed, thinkers like Georg Knepler point out that intellectual interests are intrinsically linked to political values:

If we can agree that a certain piece of music does something for us which we consider important, then we would obviously wish that as many people as possible should be able to partake of it. Here, obviously, is where a lot can be done to improve musical culture.⁹³

In other words, what “we” as musicians, musicologists and intellectuals deem important reflects our values and therefore becomes the subject of study. “We” disseminate our findings through research and performance because it matches not only what “we” think is important for ourselves, but also for others. The “improvement of musical culture,” for which any cultural institution arguably exists, is thus exposed as a political endeavor in any context, not just a totalitarian one. Therefore, the study of the Wirkung of music is political, but also becomes part of a larger intellectual critique on musicology as a whole and an important key to understanding music on a philosophical level.

⁹³ Knepler, “Music Historiography in Eastern Europe,” 239.

Understanding Impact

Internal documents of the VKM reveal that not all functionaries understood *Wirkung* in the same way. For some, especially professional composers, a song's lasting impact was merely the inevitable result of "satisfactory" compositional quality. These sort of comments blamed "weaknesses in craftsmanship"⁹⁴ for the fact that few of the hundreds of songs composed in the 1950s had become widely popular. In this sense, *Wirkung* also means a song's ability to change or guide German culture by way of gaining a place in a canon of compositional masterpieces. This view was especially advantageous for professionally trained composers, as it perpetuated the composer-interpreter-listener trichotomy in which they alone held the expertise to create impactful music. However, this also meant that a song's lasting impact depended on a correct education, or *Erziehung*, that prepared musicians and listeners to recognize and be receptive to quality music. The way to achieve social impact, therefore, depended on a top-down model of education of the masses and training of professionals within the realm of the great German musical heritage.

Ernst Hermann Meyer argued that the "factors that stand in the way of the reception and understanding of 'beauty,' especially the 'longevity' of pieces of music" were social ones, the result of a class-based society, where the working class' access to education and appreciation were systematically cut short.⁹⁵ Meyer clearly connects the idea of musical impact with the ability for music to endure as written material through time. "On the other hand," he wrote, recognizing the ephemeral quality of music and the effect of history on music's meaning,

Even where music is notated, the musical notation (if we can decipher it clearly at all) only gives us half the truth. Music must be heard, must be performed in order to live. The performance practice of music, however, is largely dependent on the reproduction of the original *expression*, especially the crucial *emotional* element, which is usually not notated or only hinted at. In the music of many primitive peoples, for example, the connection with dance movement is so strong that the emotional power of this music cannot be recognized at all if it is missing. But even European music,

⁹⁴ "Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes," 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

⁹⁵ Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 1st ed. (Berlin: AdK / Bruno Henschel und Sohn, 1952), 87.

such as most of the music of the Baroque period and even later works, either does not “live” in the modern performance, or we project a “life” into it according to our own judgment, so that the original content of the composition is often distorted.⁹⁶

Here, while hinting at the concept of “floating intentionality” coined decades later,⁹⁷ Meyer still professes his belief in a “true,” unchanging beauty of music. The solution to retaining, understanding, and expressing this truth, for Meyer, is the study of history. The working people must be taught to understand and value the classics, so that the “original, living meaning of the work” can be appreciated. The composer-interpreter-listener trichotomy must be adjusted so that the listeners and composers see each other as partners in a larger social project, but it must, in any case, be upheld.

In other sources, *Wirkung* was not solely a result of satisfactory craftsmanship and *Erziehung*, but rather a phenomenon that was contingent on the current social situation and the listeners’ own emotional world. The task for creators is, therefore, to observe the current reality of their intended audience as they are. Composers (and amateurs) should produce songs that encourage collective singing in the current context, without waiting for the ideal audience. Understandably, this view is less common in the writings of professional composers, since their own careers and expertise depended, to some extent, on traditional ways

⁹⁶ “Andererseits gibt uns selbst da, wo Musik notiert ist, die Notenschrift (wenn wir sie überhaupt eindeutig entziffern können) nur die halbe Wahrheit. Musik muß ja erklingen, muß aufgeführt werden, um zu leben. Die Aufführungspraxis der Musik ist aber weitgehend abhängig von einer Reproduktion des ursprünglichen *Ausdruckswesens*, besonders des so entscheidenden *emotionellen* Elementes, das meistens nicht oder nur andeutungsweise notiert wurde. So ist z.B. in der Musik vieler Naturvölker die Verbundenheit mit der tänzerischen Bewegung so stark, daß bei deren Fehlen die emotionelle Kraft dieser Musik überhaupt nicht erkannt werden kann. Aber auch europäische Musik, wie z.B. der größte Teil der Musik des Barockzeitalters und auch noch spätere Tonwerke, “lebt” entweder nicht in der modernen Aufführung, oder wir projizieren ein ‘Leben’ nach unserem eigenen Gutdünken in sie hinein, so daß der ursprüngliche Inhalt der Komposition oft verzerrt wird.” Meyer, 88.

⁹⁷ Ian Cross, “Is Music The Most Important Thing We Ever Did? Music, Development and Evolution,” in *Music, Mind and Science*, ed. Suk Won Yi (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1999).

of thinking, but it is easily found in the discourse of music educators and other cultural functionaries.

One prominent champion of this view was Hans Bentzien, a self-professed “musical amateur” and the Minister of Culture from 1961–1966. In his essay “Das Wollen in die Tat umsetzen” (Turning will into deed), Bentzien challenges the view that listeners must be properly educated to understand music and disparages art for art’s sake as “compositional busywork.”⁹⁸ For Bentzien, the central figure of music is not the composer, who dictates “listener guidelines,” but the listeners themselves. The tendency for the masses to prefer Schlager (pop songs), of which many complain, is only due to the lack of melodious, song-based music. Mixing the categories of listener and interpreter, Bentzien claims song and singing to be the best foundation for musical culture. The *Volk* wants, and searches for, melodies, therefore “the promotion of song production, should be top priority everywhere.”⁹⁹

The VKM seemed to want to strike a balance between these two views and published a call for its members in *Musik und Gesellschaft* in 1964:

Increasingly, the music lovers of our republic want to go beyond the first immediate impression and penetrate deeper, more comprehensively and more precisely into the essence and content of a work of art that has caught their attention. They relate it directly to their own sphere of experience and regard the socialist present in which they live, from which and for which the work of art was created, as the common “link.” This is where the wishes of the individual listeners and the composer’s social mission meet at a decisive point. The better the composer knows how to fulfill his mission, the more clearly, inventively and interestingly he solves his task, the greater the impact and significance of the work for the listener. Our survey also made it clear that more or less attractive music-making is no longer enough. Concreteness and the ability to grasp the message from the specific musical design are primary criteria for the degree of social effectiveness of a work of art—especially in music¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Hans Bentzien, “Das Wollen in die Tat umsetzen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 449.

⁹⁹ Bentzien, 451.

¹⁰⁰ “In zunehmendem Maße wollen die Musikfreunde unserer Republik über den ersten unmittelbaren Eindruck hinaus tiefer, umfassender und genauer in Wesen und Gehalt eines Kunstwerkes, das ihre Aufmerksamkeit erregt hat, eindringen. Sie setzen es ganz unmittel-

Although the concept of “musicking” did not replace the norms of music production in the GDR, there is evidence that, during the Aufbau period, some thinkers and practitioners shifted from thinking solely about the interpretation of static works to the conception of music making as a social process that included performers and listeners. Even Ernst Hermann Meyer claimed that folk song was one of the only opportunities for the “ideal case” of music making within a class society because it created a “complete unity between the producers and the consumers of art.”¹⁰¹ Critiques of the composer-interpreter-listener trichotomy was repeatedly made by several practitioners, especially in support of the cultural policies of the *Bitterfelder Weg*.¹⁰² The legitimacy and quality of a musical work was dependent on the volume of its social *impact*. Therefore, the concept of *Liedschaffen* must be understood to include composition as well as burgeoning theories and practices of performance, creation, production, and dissemination.

Intonation was another term that had similar but also diverse definitions amongst socialist musicologists. The Soviet musicologist and composer, Boris Asafyev, had presented the idea of *Intonatsiya* in *Musical form as Process* in 1930, arguing that music’s expressive power relied on specific units of musical meaning called *Intonatsiyas*. While these “could be as small as an interval or as broad as the mood of an entire movement,” their intelligibility and ability to carry meaning depends on the social and historical context in which they are

bar in Beziehung zu ihrer eigenen Erlebnissphäre und betrachten als das gemeinsame ‘Bindeglied’ die sozialistische Gegenwart, in der sie leben, aus der und für die das Kunstwerk entstanden ist. Hier treffen sich an entscheidendem Punkt Wünsche der einzelnen Hörer und gesellschaftlicher Auftrag des Komponisten. Je besser der Komponist seinen Auftrag zu erfüllen versteht, je klarer, erfindungsreicher und interessanter er seine Aufgabe löst, um so stärker ist die Wirkung und Bedeutung des Werkes für den Hörer. Auch unsere Umfrage hat deutlich werden lassen, dass es mit mehr oder weniger reizvollem Musizieren nicht mehr getan ist. Konkretheit, Erfäßbarkeit der Aussage aus der spezifischen musikalischen Gestaltung sind primäre Kriterien für den Grad der gesellschaftlichen Wirksamkeit eines Kunstwerkes – gerade in der Musik.” “Zur Diskussion über Musik in der DDR,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 330-31.

¹⁰¹ “Kollektives Kunstschaffen ist die höchste Stufe der schöpferischen künstlerischen Tätigkeit. Das Volkslied als echter Lebensausdruck des arbeitenden und kämpfenden Volkes stellt im Rahmen der Klassengesellschaft in der Tat jenen ‘Idealfall’ der vollkommenen Einheit zwischen Kunstproduzenten und Kunstkonsumenten dar.” Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 82.

¹⁰² This was a central topic in the discussions surrounding the role of amateur song writers at the end of the 1950s, when the mandates of the *Bitterfelder Weg* put the value of composition into question. See “*Liedschaffen* Discussion” in chapter 3.

performed.¹⁰³ James Robert Tull's explanation of *Intonatsiya* reflects performative ideas of *Wirkung*:

"The life of a musical composition is in its performance, i.e., in the revelation of its meaning through intoning for an audience and, further, in its repeated re productions by the listeners for themselves, if, by chance, the composition has drawn attention to itself, has excited, or has "stated" something desired by, or necessary to, a given circle of listeners. If it has answered the requirements of the mind, the feelings, or the tastes of many people, they argue about it, they demand its performance again and again, they intone it, making music in their own way, in the original fashion or in various adaptations, transpositions, or arrangements."¹⁰⁴

A German translation of Asafyev's text was not available until 1976. Because German musicologists adopted the term *Intonation* through translated explanations of Asafyev's ideas by Polish, Czech, and Russian musicologists, Timberlake argues that the concept developed a separate meaning in the GDR. The role of music in social processes seems not to play a role in the German term *Intonation*, as it was used mainly to signify "content-related and formal features" of music that could be identified and used, for example by Ernst Hermann Meyer, to "distinguish the music of one country from that of other countries."¹⁰⁵

Another way to interpret the imperatives of *Wirkung* can be found in Zur Weihen's explanation of the "*Kompositorische Praxis*" of music in the GDR.¹⁰⁶ To point out the paradoxical nature of East German music production, Zur Weihen uses psychologist Rolf

¹⁰³ Anicia Timberlake, "Boris Asafyev's *Intonatsiya* and German Folk Song in the German Democratic Republic," *Music and Politics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2020).

¹⁰⁴ James Robert Tull, "B.V. Asaf'ev's Musical Form as a Process Translation and Commentary" (PhD Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1976).

¹⁰⁵ "Jede Nation entwickelt eine ganz bestimmte, charakteristische nationale Volkslied- "Intonation." Mit "nationaler Intonation" ist hier (in Auswertung der sowjetischen Volksliedforschung) die Summe der charakteristischen nationalen, inhaltlichen und formalen Eigenschaften bezeichnet, die die Musik eines Landes von der anderen Länder unterscheidet. In einer ganzen Reihe von Ländern ist das Problem der nationalen Intonation des jeweiligen Landes schon seit längerem behandelt und erforscht worden—wenn auch ohne ausdrückliche Verwendung des Begriffs Intonation, dessen bedeuten vor der sowjetische Musikwissenschaftler Boris Assafjew gefestigt hat." "Die Intonation im deutschen Volkslied," in *Aufsätze über Musik*, by Ernst Hermann Meyer, 1st ed. (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1957), 119.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Zur Weihen, "Komponieren in der DDR: Institutionen, Organisationen und die erste Komponistengeneration bis 1961" (Köln: Böhlau, 1999).

Oerter's definition of all music as a rule-based game. Within Oerter's framework of necessary steps (situation, action, result, consequences), the main purpose of a game is the action of play, while the game's result and consequences are secondary.

In terms of music, this means the rules and traditions of composition (music theory is the situation, composition of a score is the action, concert performance is the result, while payment and prestige are the consequences. As soon as the result and consequences of a game become the main purpose, the activity is no longer a game, but labor. In this understanding, music is "*zweckfrei*," a purposeless *ars gratia artis*, by definition, because music's effects are necessarily subordinate to the action of its creation. Zur Weihen posits that, although all professional composers sometimes consider the results and consequences of their efforts in the form of making a living, "all composers emphasize the subordinate nature of any purpose to their compositions."¹⁰⁷ The word "all" in this statement implies that anyone who does not emphasize the purposelessness of their compositions cannot be considered a true composer, and therefore puts the validity of all East German musical composition into question.

Zur Weihen argues that, because socialist realist art was seen as inherently functional, professional composers in the GDR were no longer able to be motivated by the creation of music alone, but by the results and consequences of that music. "Composers were able to pursue their profession as a game as long as they recognized the purposefulness of their work in a social context,"¹⁰⁸ and were thus thrown into a paradox between purposelessness and functionality. Yet Zur Weihen's definition of "all composers" fails to adequately answer the question of why the recognition of music's social value creates more of a paradox for composers than, say, calling oneself a professional or calling one's own compositions "works." Both of the actions emphasize the reception and consequences of musical activity, therefore shifting it from game-play to labor. One could easily argue that "all composers" are trained professionals, while anyone who does not make a living with composition is (in the pejorative sense) an amateur. If recognition of any result or consequence stemming

¹⁰⁷ Zur Weihen, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Zur Weihen, 25.

from one's music creates a creative paradox, it would apply to all professional musicians, not just those in the GDR.

Oerter's updated description of music as a game from 2006 (seven years after Zur Weihen's dissertation) explains that the game and the work of music are, in fact, not antithetical. Instead, in a modern society, where work is valued over play and the ideas of a "calling" or "profession" (*Beruf*) and "work" (*Arbeit*) are semantically amalgamated, professional musicians constantly play and work simultaneously.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the activity of rule-based play, itself, is not pointless. Yes, in the four-part process of rules-action-result-consequence, the activity of play remains prioritized over results and consequences. In other words, it is important for music to have recognizable rules and action, but it is less important to identify, e.g., winners and losers. However, Oerter identifies a purpose of play that is independent of results or consequences.

Similarly to Austin's descriptions of performative acts, Oerter explains that musical actions¹¹⁰ "ensure emotional security, an awareness of control, and an understanding of reality."¹¹¹ Participating in rituals of musical activity is a basis for "meaning-generating exchange between the individual and their environment."¹¹² Furthermore, even if professional artists focus on reception and payment (results and consequences), thereby transforming music from a game into work, musical activity is nevertheless important for establishing and confirming individual and group identity. Since social exchange is the purpose of such activity (not its result or consequence), a composer's recognition of music's social impact, or *Wirkung*, therefore, does not contradict their ability to play the game of creating art.

¹⁰⁹ Rolf Oerter, "Musik als Spiel," in *Musik als ...*, ed. Rudolf Flotzinger, Veröffentlichungen zur Musikforschung 28 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006): 140.

¹¹⁰ Oerter identifies four "Grundkomponenten von Handlung in der Musik" or basic components of activity in music: listening/enjoying music (*Musik genießen*), improvising/composing (*improvisieren, komponieren*), learning music (*sich einprägen*), and singing/playing music (*singen, spielen*). Oerter, 137.

¹¹¹ Oerter, 137.

¹¹² "Tätigkeit als sinnstiftender Austausch zwischen Individuum und Umwelt." Oerter, 136.

This does not mean that the requirements of socialist realism in music did not create a creative paradox for composers. Instead, the paradox arises not from composers recognizing the social impact of their music, but rather from a contradiction of covert social distinctions that define “good” music and the definition of “all” composers. Especially for the early generation of GDR composers, their own legitimacy as musical experts—and therefore their prospects as working musicians—depended upon following the rules and traditions of composition. These, of course, were inherited from the nineteenth century, when the autonomy of music was paramount to discerning its quality. When a composer admits to being motivated by social impact, essentially turning the Kantian requirement of *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck* (purposiveness without purpose) on its head, the definition of a professionally trained composer becomes paradoxical, since they are delegitimizing their own expertise.¹¹³

¹¹³ This was especially apparent in the discussions surrounding the role of amateur song writers at the end of the 1950s, when the mandates of the Bitterfelder Weg put the value of composition into question. See section “Liedschaffen Discussion” in chapter 3.

1.5. Summaries of Original Articles

1.5.1. Performing the GDR: Narrating Musicology

The paper, “Performing the GDR: Songs of a Budding Dictatorship, Musicological Challenges and Opportunities,” was given at the International Conference “Narrating Musicology,” which was hosted by the Institut für Musikwissenschaft at the Universität Bern, Switzerland, in 2021. It presents basic information on the role of song in the construction of historical narratives, both in the GDR and in recent music-historiographical efforts in GDR research. It argues that Marxist musicology, as described by Georg Knepler and applied by musicologists like Wolfgang Steinitz and Inge Lammel, shares many aspects of what has been called the “Performative Turn” or the “New Musicology,” which has become prevalent since the 1990’s. Here, social, functional aspects of music are a key element in music-historical analysis.

In the GDR, music, especially vocal music, was thought of as a social phenomenon. Thus, this paper argues that, in order to study this music, one has to adapt research methods to reflect the performative parameters under which this music was created. In researching Lied, a main goal of this dissertation is to expose some of the underlying social, aesthetic and theoretical motivations behind such music.

As the presentation time in Bern was limited, further details on the concept of the social function (performativity) of music and examples that link it with the contemporary discourse in the GDR can be found in the section entitled “Theoretical Considerations.”

1.5.2. “Lied” as Term, Genre and Practice in the GDR

The next article was written as the entry on “Lied” for the online music encyclopedia *Musikgeschichte Online*. Among the many and often contradictory definitions of the term, this article attempts to present the unique understandings of the word that arose and predominated in song discourse during the GDR. It begins with key linguistic differences between pre-war, Eastern, and Western German dictionaries that highlight the ideologies that

motivated these various definitions. Starting with the first *Liedersammlungen* (song collections) of the eighteenth century, *Lieder* stood in contrast to the more lyrical and artistic *Gesänge* and were understood to be “folk-like” melodies and signified a connection with a specific Volk or nation. By the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Kunstlied in the style of Schubert dominated most musicological descriptions as the universal height of the genre. While later Western German dictionaries like that by Dahlhaus and Eggebrecht began to acknowledge the existence of functional folksongs or political songs, they continued to concentrate on “the more or less purposeless, artistically formed song.”¹¹⁴ This emphasis still elevated ‘autonomous’ works of high art above functional, uncivilized, ‘primitive’ vocal music.

In contrast, while early East German Lexicographers still focused on the great works of individual composers, East German definitions of Lied go much further. Instead of describing genres of song by their compositional form, as Western definitions often did, categorization of song genres in the GDR often focused on a song’s purpose or context. For example, *Wanderlieder* were for collective singing outdoors, while Kunstlieder and *Vortragslieder* (presentation songs) were intended for solo concert performance. Because the larger concept of song was much more focused on collective and choral singing in the GDR, Kunstlied was often described as a subgenre of Lied, not its ideal.

The Romantic art song of the nineteenth century also played an interesting role for East German historiographers. As Elaine Kelly has described¹¹⁵, the ideals of Romanticism were often seen as a pessimistic opposition to the humanist goals of Socialist Realism. However, East German musicologists like Georg Knepler and Harry Goldschmidt staunchly opposed grouping musical history into clean-cut epochs and often championed composers like Schubert and Brahms as humanist artists who applied their art to a fight against feudalism. Furthermore, similar to other genres of German art music, the Kunstlied served as much

¹¹⁴ “Generell zu unterscheiden ist das funktionsgebundene L., also das Volkslied mit all seinen Teilbereichen, aber auch das Kirchenlied, das politische L. (Arbeiterlied) usw., vom mehr oder weniger zweckfrei entstandenen, künstlerisch geformten L., das im romantischen Kunst-L. am vollendetsten sich ausprägt.” Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, eds., “Lied,” in *Brockhaus-Riemann-Musiklexikon* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1978), 42.

¹¹⁵ See Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the GDR*, 55.

needed proof that Germany had contributed to the great treasure of human culture. These arguments countered any notion of retiring the entire canon of Romantic song from East German cultural life.

Nineteenth-century art songs remained a staple of concert performance and vocal education throughout the decades. However, tendencies in repertoire changed, depending on what sheet music was printed or made available. The production of art song recordings also fluctuated, as they were dependent on the priorities of the Eterna label.

1.5.3. The Bitterfelder Weg and the Path to Political Song in the GDR

The presentation, “The Bitterfelder Weg and the Path to Political Song in the GDR,” was delivered on September 8, 2023, at Queen’s University in Belfast, UK, for the Conference on Politics in Music and Song. It explored the connections between the Bitterfelder Weg’s policies and the subsequent Singebewegung, situating these within the broader context of political song in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

The Bitterfelder Weg, introduced at a literature and publishing conference in Bitterfeld on April 24, 1959, marked a significant shift in the GDR’s cultural-political agenda. This initiative aimed to bridge the gap between intellectuals and the working class, promoting artistic creation among workers through *Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter* (circles of writing workers) and *Zirkel komponierender Laien* (circles of composing amateurs). In a structure that extended to all arts, these kinds of groups were intended to facilitate collaboration between professionals and amateurs. These groups played a crucial role in the GDR’s cultural policy, as they were intended to foster a cultural exchange, educating workers in the arts and providing inspiration for professionals.

The Association of Composers and Musicologists (VKM), although officially an independent professional organization, was closely linked with state institutions such as the State Radio and the Ministry of Culture, and thus played a crucial role in implementing these policies. The VKM was responsible for organizing and promoting public singing, aiming to democratize music production and reinforce socialist values through collective cultural activities. The cooperative efforts between the VKM and other institutions, such as

the National People's Army (NVA), the Free German Youth (FDJ), and the Workers' Union (FDGB), included the organization of festivals, public celebrations, and competitions, all aimed at encouraging public participation in music.

Kulturhäuser (Houses of Culture) acted as venues for these events and provided spaces for artistic activities and community gatherings in most towns and workplaces. They were integral to the Bitterfelder Weg's vision, offering free access to cultural resources and supporting local initiatives, enabling the formation of ensembles and workshops, promoting the creation and performance of new music.

The end of the presentation highlighted the role of Eberhard Rebling as a central figure in the connections between international folk music, the Bitterfelder Weg and the Singebewegung. Under Rebling's leadership, the VKM published *Musik und Gesellschaft*, one of the predominant music publications in the GDR. In addition to his life as musicologist, Rebling was active as a pianist and arranger, planning and performing folk concerts with his wife, Jewish folk dancer and singer Lin Jaldati. Rebling's extensive network and broad interests in diverse musical practices made him a primary contact for American musicians of the folk and civil rights movements, such as Earl Robinson and Paul Robeson, on their visits to the GDR. Similarly, Rebling was one of the first acquaintances and biggest supporters of Canadian folk musician Perry Friedman, who, in collaboration with Rebling and Jaldati, initiated the Singebewegung with the development of the first hootenannies in the GDR.

The presentation has been expanded for this dissertation to include more details on the Zirkel and institutional collaborations, as well as further research on the VKM's internal discussions about the role of amateurs in song production. Additionally, the dissertation provides more context on the American influences on the Singebewegung, presenting the similarities and connections between the folk revivals in the US and the Bitterfelder Weg in the GDR. This expanded focus examines how American folk music movements, particularly the works of leftist folk artists like Pete Seeger and the civil rights movement's musical

expressions, resonated with the GDR's cultural policies. These influences highlight a transnational exchange of musical ideas and political aspirations, enriching the understanding of the Singebewegung within a broader global context.

1.5.4. On the Historiography of Vocal Performances in the GDR

The original presentation “‘Hier ist oratorischer Schöngesang fehl am Platz.’ Zur Historiographie Vokalperformance in der DDR,” was given in German at the *Gesellschaft für Musikforschung*'s annual conference, “Nach der Norm: Musikwissenschaft im 21. Jahrhundert,” at Humboldt University in Berlin on September 30, 2022. An expanded version was published in English in 2024.¹¹⁶

This paper begins by discussing recordings of many of the most prominent *Lieder* singers of the early GDR. These demonstrate a stark contrast to the “normal” vocal standards of Lied performance, especially for contemporary songs by East German composers. Károly Csipák claimed in 1990 that Irmgard Arnold's “screechy,” “witch-like” tone is a more “authentic” interpretation of Eisler's songs than that of Fischer-Dieskau, who utilizes a “normal” vocal quality. Here, I argue that singers of the early GDR utilized a variety of vocal styles that went beyond the classical vocal techniques of opera and *Lieder* singing, not because of a directive of “authenticity” that stems from the second Viennese school, as Csipák proposed, but from an expansion of the definition of artistic song, the influence of Brechtian declamatory style, and the inclusion of theatrical singing style into what was considered “serious” artistic vocal performance.

Recordings of the most prolific song recitalists of Hanns Eisler's repertoire (e.g., Irmgard Arnold, Ernst Busch, Gisela May and Roswitha Trexler) as well as reviews of other performances (e.g., Peter Schreier) demonstrate a shift in priorities for some vocal artists. Depending on the repertoire and the intended audience, many singers were expected to fo-

¹¹⁶ Meredith Nicoll, “‘Hier ist oratorischer Schöngesang fehl am Platz’: On Historiography of Vocal Performances in the GDR,” in *Musik in der DDR: Historiographische Perspektiven*, ed. Andreas Lueken (Baden-Baden: Tectum Verlag, 2024), 127-58.

cus on declamation of text and the intended impact of their voice rather than on the “liquid” vocal techniques, i.e., roundness, evenness, legato, and volume, that nevertheless continued as standards for performances of opera and Romantic Kunstlied. The often-disputed term “*bel canto*” is used here to signify this “classical” kind of singing that was also often described as “false,” “artificiality” and “pompousness” by musicians in the GDR.

Many compositions by Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau have been considered Kunstlieder since the last decades of the twentieth century, i.e., they have been considered to be concert pieces suitable for a classically trained solo voice with piano accompaniment and to be performed with vocal techniques that would be appropriate for Brahms or Schubert. However, Eisler in particular often expected singers to depart from the “artificial” *bel canto* sound that would normally be expected in performances of art songs.

Song performance practice in the GDR was not easily categorized into concert and non-concert, classical and non-classical genres, and this discourse also affected the expectations of vocal sound. Recordings from the 1950s and 1960s as well as written documents provide evidence that composers like Eisler and Dessau wrote songs with various vocal techniques—sometimes even specific vocal personalities—in mind.

This paper explores the conceptions of vocal performance in the GDR, taking performances of Hanns Eisler’s Hollywood Songbook as the central example. Using recordings and contemporary discourse, East German vocal practice is exemplified by the vocal techniques employed by Irmgard Arnold, Gisela May and their contemporaries. The theoretical reasoning behind such performance practice is then discussed in context of later theories of vocal performance.

2. “Lied” as Term, Genre, and Practice in the GDR

Within the German language, definitions of Lied have varied widely. Historically, the term has had competing, often paradoxical definitions that have made it especially difficult for today’s scholars to elucidate.¹¹⁷ It is often impossible to categorize song repertoire into one musicological field since it is difficult to study songs separately as either “serious,” historical works of art, as popular music, or as ethnographic material. In any case, it is undeniable that the concept of Lied has played an integral role in shaping German music history, especially that of the GDR. The following chapter first describes some key differences between the use of the term “Lied” in pre-war, West German, and East German dictionaries, then describes the role of Kunstlied (art song) repertoire in the musicological discourse, performance practice, and recordings of the GDR. Some examples of song composition will then be presented to demonstrate how practitioners understood and applied song in various ways during different periods of the GDR.

¹¹⁷ See Chanda VanderHart, “‘Lied’: Terminology and Usage in the Nineteenth-Century Evolution and Incongruence within the German-Speaking World,” in *D’un Lied à L’autre? Dynamiques Génériques et Interculturelles Du Lied*, ed. Laurine Quetin and Marie-Thérèse Mourey, *Revue Musicorum* 21 (Paris: EA Reigenn; Sorbonne Université/Lettres, 2020), 227-38.

2.1. Divergent definitions

Alfred Einstein's edition of the Riemann *Musik-Lexikon* from 1922, published by Max Hesse Verlag Leipzig, provides an example of one standard understanding of the pre-war *Lied*-concept. According to Einstein's edition, *Lied* is "by nature and from time immemorial a subjective feeling expressed in simple poetic and musical forms, a sharply defined little mood."¹¹⁸ The entry attempts to define the distinct "simple poetic and musical forms" of the "actual principle" of this kind of "little mood," describing the division of the lyrics into verses, sung to a repeated, simple, tonal melody. This attempt at an essentialist description is vague and was soon abandoned in favor of a historical account of the creation of compositions. Several "flourishings," "stagnations" and "declines" lead up to the "regeneration of the *Lied*," culminating in Schubert's compositions and his settings of Goethe's poems. Since then, art movements have gone astray. The author bemoans "the tendency of late (Liszt, Hugo Wolf, Max Reger) to compose the voice in a more declamatory than melodic manner [that] will surely bring about another decline." In the concrete directive that follows, this tendency "should be countered with (varied) strophic songs."¹¹⁹ By calling for this formal discipline from composers, the author makes a clear statement about the importance of the concept of *Lied* as a formal technique of written composition.

Functional aspects are also mentioned, however, "neither the narrative (epic) nor the dramatic element originally belongs to the *Lied*; but both found their way into it early on [...] in the work song, war song, drinking song." "Real folksongs" that contain "the actual principle of the *Lied*" have "repeatedly had a restorative effect on straying art movements."¹²⁰ The "actual principle" of the *Lied*, according to the Riemann lexicon, appears

¹¹⁸ "Lied ist von Hause aus und seit Urzeiten ein in schlichten poetischen und musikalischen Formen sich aussprechendes subjektives Empfinden, ein scharf umrissenes kleines Stimmungsbild." Hugo Riemann and Alfred Einstein, eds., "Lied," in *Musik-Lexikon* (Leipzig: Max Hesse, 1922), 737. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹¹⁹ "Die Tendenz der Liedkomposition der allerneuesten Zeit (Liszt, Hugo Wolf, Max Reger) die Singstimme mehr nur deklamierend als eigentlich melodisch zu gestalten, bringt zweifellos die Gefahr eines neuen Niederganges, der zu begegnen man sich in neuester Zeit wieder auf das Prinzip des (variieren) Strophenlieds besinnt." Riemann and Einstein, 738.

¹²⁰ "Das alles sind aber keine Gegengründe, sich zur rechten Zeit wieder auf das eigentliche Prinzip des Liedes zu besinnen, wie es im wirklichen Volksliede sich immer wieder festgestellt und wiederholt auf verirrte Kunstrichtungen regenerierend gewirkt hat." Riemann and Einstein, 737.

throughout history in several different genres, making them successful and heightening their value but, aside from the formal elements already mentioned, it is unclear what the actual principle entails or what the opposite of a “real” folksong could be. Although not specifically mentioned in the dictionary article, the almost uniform occurrence of the word “Deutsch” in the titles listed in the bibliography makes it clear that this group of works is also linked to a concept of Germanness. The emphasis on composition and the attempts to describe essentialist qualities of form, the author’s explicit opinions on quality, and the special attention to German literature indicate the values embodied within this concept of Lied.

A nationalistic emphasis is clearly demonstrated in later definitions. The next edition of the Riemann in 1939 was produced by members of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) and expressed explicit support for the superiority of the German Lied. After WWII, the first edition of *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (MGG) took a less supercilious, yet still German-centric, approach, splitting its entry for “Lied” into three sections: A. German language art song, B. solo song outside the German-speaking world, and C. church song.¹²¹ The second section covers solo songs in other European countries, comparing German song to those of England, Italy, and France, where “the work of Henri Duparc and Gabriel Fauré, the French art of song reached a height that matched the German.”¹²² The term “Lied,” in the first section is “equated with the musical terms ‘German art song’ or ‘German Lied.’”¹²³ Similarly to the description in the *Riemann*, the golden age of Lied was the nineteenth century¹²⁴, beginning with Schubert. Unlike earlier definitions, the article includes Wolf and Reger as masters of Lied, and mentions the end of Lied’s golden era more neutrally, claiming that “a new phase in the history of song” began “with the collapse of

¹²¹ Kurt Gudewill, “Lied, A. Das Kunstlied im deutschen Sprachgebiet”; Walther Lipphardt, “Lied, C. Das Kirchenlied”; Frits Noske, “Lied, B. Das Sololied außerhalb des deutschen Sprachgebiets,” in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Friedrich Blume, trans. Ursula Aarburg, vol. 8 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960), 746–856.

¹²² “[Saint-Saens] reiches Liedschaffen ist durch Vielseitigkeit und technische Meisterschaft gekennzeichnet; sein Sinn für Poesie dagegen ist ziemlich beschränkt. Im Werk Henri Duparcs und Gabriel Faurés hat die frz. Liedkunst eine Höhe erreicht, die der deutschen entspricht.” Noske, “Lied, B. Das Sololied außerhalb des deutschen Sprachgebiets,” 781.

¹²³ Gudewill, “Lied, A. Das Kunstlied im deutschen Sprachgebiet,” 746.

¹²⁴ Gudewill, 760.

functional tonality and the turn towards atonality and free tonality at the beginning of the twentieth century.”¹²⁵ The solo art song continued to “retreat into the background” in comparison to choral songs, this having to do with “singing movements and the revival of the folk song.”¹²⁶

The West German *Ullstein Lexikon der Musik* of 1971, similarly to the Riemann editions, states that “to regard Schubert’s songs as the climax is not a simplistic overestimation.”¹²⁷ However, in contrast to the Riemann of 1922, Lied is not now considered to have predated folksongs, but rather to have come “into being out of prayer to God, at work, for dancing, or in the course of the daily routine. See folksongs. Many peoples and countries know nothing else.”¹²⁸ Here, functional folksongs are understood as the uncultured form of Lied. Western composers had moved beyond this primitive form by creating formal compositions. Since the end of the eighteenth century, Lied had “received carefully prepared piano accompaniments” by German composers like Schubert, giving “rise to the new art form. It has such typical German characteristics that the word “Lied” was adopted as a foreign word in other languages.”¹²⁹ Ullstein provides a clear demarcation between the cultured and the primal, the “high” and “low” art forms of Lied. Past Germans developed the “high” form of Lied, while the lowly form, *Volkslied*, is consistently described as the inferior, uncultured phenomenon that is practiced around the world and that stands apart from the composed art form.

¹²⁵ “Das 19. Jh. war für das deutsche Sololied eine Zeit der Hochblüte, nachdem es sich vom Gegenstand der Nebenstundenbeschäftigung zum Mittel persönlicher Aussprache gewandelt und seine Gleichberechtigung mit den an deren Gattungen erlangt hatte. Wenngleich das Chor lied (s. Art. Chorkompos.) am Ende des 18. Jh. eine Wiedergeburt erlebte, so hat es doch während des 19. Jh. ganz im Schatten des Sololiedes gestanden. Mit der Auflösung der Funktionstonalität, mit der Hinwendung zur Atonalität und freien Tonalität zu Beginn des 20. Jh. beginnt auch in der Liedgeschichte ein neuer Abschn.” Gudewill, 761.

¹²⁶ Gudewill, 773.

¹²⁷ “Die Lieder von Schubert als Höhepunkt anzusehen, ist keine vereinfachende Überbewertung.” Friedrich Herzfeld, ed., “Lied,” in *Das Neue Ullstein Lexikon Der Musik* (Frankfurt/M: Ullstein, 1971), 313.

¹²⁸ Herzfeld, 313.

¹²⁹ Herzfeld, 313.

The lines drawn by the encyclopedias of West Germany between the cultivated, composed Lied and the unsophisticated, functional folksong not only followed national borders, but also class divisions. In the MGG from 1966, Wolfgang Suppan defines Volkslied as belonging to or deriving from the *Grundschichten*, which in this context might be translated as “the lower classes” but also directly as the “base layers” of society.¹³⁰ The depictive nature of the German language creates an image of this sort of music as an underlying foundation that elevates other “loftier” artistic endeavors. Folksong lifts art song above other genres that had appeared in recent decades, e.g., *Schlager* or *Unterhaltungsmusik* (commercial, German-language “hits” and entertainment music respectively). Such types of music should, according to the 1966 MGG, be differentiated from *Volksmusik* but also recognized as belonging to the base layers of society.

Suppan argues that one of the main differences between pop and folksong is the inherent usefulness of folk music to the *Grundschichten*, “by proving their use in folk life or their origin from the people.”¹³¹ Furthermore, “treatments by composers and educators” should be understood as separate from the living practice of folk music. When a song has been treated by a composer, or becomes a subject of study for educators, it has gained a “second existence.”¹³²

The aspect of performance and usefulness inherent in the concept of folksong in contrast to composed music seems to gain importance among other musicologists in the FRG during the twentieth century, as does attention to folksong as a topic of discussion. In comparison to the pre-war edition of the Riemann *Musik-Lexikon*, which contained a mere

¹³⁰ Wolfgang Suppan, “Volksgesang, Volksmusik und Volkstanz,” in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Friedrich Blume, vol. 13 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1966), 1924–56.

¹³¹ “Doch ist nicht alle Musik, die von Leuten der Grundschichten ausgeführt wird (z.B. Schlager und Unterhaltungsmusik), Volksmusik im eigentlichen Sinn. Diese ist vielmehr Eigengut der Grundschichten, sei es, dass sie aus ihnen stammt oder in produktiver Weise von ihnen angeeignet wird. [...] Die Zuordnung von Musik, Instr. und Tanz zu den Grundschichten erfolgt demnach durch den Nachweis der Verwendung im Volksleben oder der Herkunft aus dem Volk.” Suppan, 1923.

¹³² “Durch schriftliche Fixierung, wie sie von der ‘Feldforschung’ getätigt wird, können Volksgsg., Volksmusik und Volkstanz über die Bearb. durch Komp. oder Pädagogen zu einem ‘zweiten Dasein’ geführt werden, das von ihrem ursprünglichen Leben wesensmäßig zu trennen ist.” Suppan, 1923–4. Italics original.

paragraph on Volkslied, the terminology volume of the 1967 edition (edited by West Germany's most prominent musicologist Carl Dahlhaus) contained separate headings and extensive sections for Lied, Volkslied, *Arbeiterlied*, and similar categories. There was still a special concentration on the formal description, but in the 1978 edition, after a short attempt at a formal essentialist definition of Lied, the author admits that "an exact definition of the term 'Lied' is hardly possible or meaningful."¹³³ The description goes on to recognize the two ways of describing songs, as works of art or as a practice: "In general, a distinction must be made between the function-bound song, i.e., the folksong [...], and the more or less purposeless, artistically formed song, which is most fully expressed in the Romantic art song."¹³⁴

In contrast to the slowly emerging awareness of the function of Lied in the FRG, the usefulness of songs had been a central part of descriptions of them from the early days of the GDR. A simple glance at the headings associated with the concept of Lied in the first music encyclopedias in the East, the most obvious and striking difference between the definitions of the Lied-concept in the two Germanies is the ideological divide between two value systems—one of form and the other of function. In pre-war examples and in later West German sources, folksong is mentioned as a precursor of, inspiration for, or alternative to the art song, not necessarily as a concept in its own right. In contrast, the value placed upon the folksong concept is immediately obvious from a look at the multiple headings associated with various types of song in East-German sources. Horst Seeger and Andre Asriel's *Musiklexikon* from 1966, for example, contains separate articles for *Arbeiterlied*

¹³³ "Allerdings ist eine genaue und übergreifende Definition des Begriffes L. kaum möglich und sinnvoll, da historisch und systematisch sehr Unterschiedliches unter ihm zusammengefaßt wird. Generell zu unterscheiden ist das funktionsgebundene L., also das ->Volkslied mit all seinen Teilbereichen, aber auch das -> Kirchenlied, das politische L. (->Arbeiterlied) usw., vom mehr oder weniger zweckfrei entstandenen, künstlerisch geformten L., das im romantischen Kunst-L. am vollendetsten sich ausprägt." Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, eds., "Lied," in *Brockhaus-Riemann-Musiklexikon* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1978), 42.

¹³⁴ "Generell zu unterscheiden ist das funktionsgebundene L., also das Volkslied mit all seinen Teilbereichen, aber auch das Kirchenlied, das politische L. (Arbeiterlied) usw., vom mehr oder weniger zweckfrei entstandenen, künstlerisch geformten L., das im romantischen Kunst-L. am vollendetsten sich ausprägt." Dahlhaus and Eggebrecht, 42.

(worker's song), *Arbeitslied* (work song), *Lied*, *Volkslied*, as well as an entry for *Deutsches Volkslied* that is more than seven complete pages long.

To Horst Seeger, a leading musicologist of the GDR and editor-in-chief of the journal *Musik und Gesellschaft* from 1960 to 1973, the term *Lied* was similar to Western descriptions of song as anything that is sung, but, unlike the MGG, for example, explicitly includes choral music and avoids mentioning any one type of arrangement or accompaniment. Before the publication of the *Musiklexikon*, Seeger edited the *Kleines Musik Lexikon*, which was published in the GDR in 1959. In this exceedingly concise volume of less than 200 pages, the entry for the term *Lied* also provides a vague description of essential characteristics. It claims, however, that because the *Lied* derives “from folksongs as the basic form of folk music” it is “of the most widespread and [...] most influential musical genres in the history of music. The strongest bearer of national identity, its characteristics of unity and of singability, make it an integral part of many instrumental genres.”¹³⁵ In both the *Kleines Musik Lexikon* and the *Musiklexikon*, Seeger makes an explicit distinction between *Lied* and its sub-genre, the so-called *Kunstlied*, according to the *Musiklexikon* “an unfortunate term, since it obscures the direct interrelations between folksong and *Lied*.”¹³⁶

In their narrative of *Lied* history, Seeger and Asriel also directly criticize the division between “purposeless” and “functional” music. Like the authors of the Riemann, who claimed there had been a “decline” in the *Lied*, the *Musiklexikon* describes a decline in the German folksong. However, this decline was not to be ascribed to a degeneration of the techniques of composition. Instead, the decline was to be blamed on the church's preference for elite musical practices and suppression of functional music and its documentation: “The consolidation of feudal and church power in the Middle Ages sharpened the contrast

¹³⁵ “[Lied ist] eine der verbreitetsten und (vom Volksliede als der Grundform musikalischen Volksschaffens her) musikhistorisch einflußreichsten musikalischen Gattungen, die in ihrer charakteristischen Geschlossenheit und Sanglichkeit als stärkster musikalischer Ausdrucksträger nationaler Eigenart auch in zahlreiche instrumentale Gattungen hineinspielt. Beim Kunstlied (Kl.- oder Orch.-Begleitung, auch Chorlied) werden unterschieden die streng strophische Vertonung, die variierte Strophenform und das durchkomponierte Lied.” Horst Seeger, ed., “Lied,” in *Kleines Musiklexikon* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1959), 192.

¹³⁶ “Das sog. Kunst-L. [ist] ein unglückl. Begriff, da er die unmittelbaren Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Volks-L. und L. verdeckt.” Seeger, 34.

between [...] *usus* ('utility music') and *ars* ('educated music'). Fierce attacks against the rampant *musica vulgaris* deepened this divide.¹³⁷ According to this definition, intellectuals within the church thus created an unnatural division between utilitarian and artistic songs and instated the hierarchy of *ars* over *usus* to protect their own position of learned privilege: "The educational privilege of the clergy did not allow for the recording of secular songs, so that only incidental notations of folksongs have survived from this period."¹³⁸ The "decline" of folksong was therefore not the result of a deterioration of compositional form over time, but rather due to those in power overtly suppressing its practices.

In the *Musiklexikon*, Lied also forms a major part of the entry for *Deutsche Musik*. In this six-page overview of the history of German music, Lied is described less in terms of compositional form and more in terms of its function in and relationship to society. Because narratives of music history tended to focus on composition, musicologists of the FRG could claim objectivity and therefore avoided explicit mention of the purpose of music during the Nazi regime. Seeger's and Asriel's narrative, on the other hand, described German music history not only as a series of composers and compositions, but also as a social history of how and why music was created and performed. Such a narrative puts the concept of autonomous musical works in question and also forces the authors to comment on the musical practices of the past. Seeger and Asriel do not shy away from criticism of musical practices during the Nazi regime. According to the *Musiklexikon* "songs with shameful texts

¹³⁷ "Mit fortschreitender Konsolidierung der feudalen weltl. und kirchl. Macht im Mittelalter vertiefte sich der Gegensatz zwischen dem Liedschaffen der Volksmassen und der nach Regeln komp. Musik der Höfe, Klöster und Kirchen als zwei grundsätzlich gesonderten Bereichen, welche die mönchischen Fachtheoretiker als *usus* ("Gebrauchsmusik") und *ars* ("Gebildetenmusik") konfrontierten, unter heftigen Angriffen gegen das regellose Treiben der *musica vulgaris*." Lukas Richter, "Deutsches Volkslied," in *Musiklexikon*, ed. Horst Seeger (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik VEB, 1966), 218.

¹³⁸ "Die Kirchenleitungen verboten heidn. Bräuche oder deuteten sie christl. um, sie bekämpften die weltl. Praxis und reglementierten Kirchenlieder. Das Bildungsprivileg des Klerus ließ kaum Aufzeichnungen profaner Lieder zu, daher sind für diese Zeit nur Zufallsnotierungen von Volksliedern überliefert." Richter, 218.

that called for murder and racial incitement were celebrated [...] and the folksong was perverted and abused. Only in silence could individual composers still pursue humanistic goals.”¹³⁹

The assumption that composers should have humanistic goals points again to the belief that music in general is functionally political, an idea that had already accompanied German leftist political movements for generations. The politically motivated *Gebrauchslyrik* (useful lyric poetry) had been established in the period leading up to the 1848 March Revolution and had then in turn influenced the New Objectivity movement of the 1920s.¹⁴⁰ The political motivation of leftist artists is congruent with the idea that folk music (i.e., functional music) comes from and is reproduced for the *Grundsichten* of society. When writing new music with the aim of representing and joining in class struggle against the bourgeois, it follows then to make music that can be put to use (*für den Gebrauch*).

2.2. Romantic Art Song Reception in the GDR

The musicologists of the GDR often had ambivalent views of the Romantic song tradition, and the opinions surrounding art song history and contemporary practice varied greatly. The overarching themes of Romanticism were seen as inherently pessimistic, escapist and anti-progressive, but Romantic song composers' contribution to the German musical heritage was difficult to deny. In both the *Kleines Musik Lexikon* and the *Musiklexikon*,¹⁴¹ Seeger makes an explicitly clear distinction between Lied and its subgenre of the “so-called” Kunstlied (art song), which the *Musiklexikon* describes as “an unfortunate

¹³⁹ “Lieder mit schändl. Texten, die zu Mord und Rassenhetze aufriefen, wurden gefeiert; seelenlos-zackige Armeeklänge triumphierten, und das Volkslied wurde pervertiert und mißbraucht. Nur im Stillen konnten von einzelnen Komp. noch humanist. Ziele verfolgt werden.” Ernst Hermann Meyer, “Deutsche Musik,” in *Musiklexikon*, ed. Horst Seeger (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik VEB, 1966), 215–16.

¹⁴⁰ See David Robb, “The Reception of Vormärz and 1848 Revolutionary Song in West Germany and the GDR,” in *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, ed. David Robb, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2007), 11–34.

¹⁴¹ Seeger, “Lied,” 109.

term, since it obscures the direct interrelations between folksong and Lied.”¹⁴² The artificiality of the “purposeless” art song stood in contrast to the ideals of Socialist Realism and erased the direct connection music and text should have with the *Volk*. To Eisler, if an artist concentrated solely on chamber music, they would automatically isolate themselves from society.¹⁴³ The practice of writing and performing songs for a small, close-knit bourgeoisie audience was therefore a passive, decadent choice for those who chose not to engage in social change.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, as Eisler goes on to explain, chamber music was not inherently bad and could be repurposed to benefit society. Instead of a “matter simply for small circles of enthusiasts and connoisseurs,” chamber music’s purpose should be to provide learning material for composers, performers, and listeners.¹⁴⁵

The Biedermeier salon life of the nineteenth century was alternatively explained, as Harry Goldschmidt did in his biography of Schubert from 1958, as the “life of friendship that seemed to be the safest refuge against social oppression.”¹⁴⁶ Musicologists like Goldschmidt often reframed song composers like Schubert, Brahms, and Schumann, not as pessimistic Romantics, but as humanists, as artists who applied their art to a fight against feudalism. Furthermore, from a perspective of asserting a place of importance for (East) Germany on an international level, the fact that the word “Lied” signified its own genre in other languages was reason enough to maintain its importance as a German cultural export. Like other genres of German art music, the *Kunstlied* was recognized as much needed proof that Germany had contributed to the great treasure of human culture. Even if certain pieces that were undeniably problematic routinely came under scrutiny,¹⁴⁷ these types of arguments countered any notion that the canon of Romantic song should be retired as a whole.

¹⁴² “Das sog. Kunst-L. [ist] ein unglücl. Begriff, da er die unmittelbaren Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Volks-L. und L. verdeckt.” Seeger, 34.

¹⁴³ Hanns Eisler, EGW 3/1, 187.

¹⁴⁴ Elaine Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the German Democratic Republic: Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55.

¹⁴⁵ Eisler, EGW 3/1, 187.

¹⁴⁶ Harry Goldschmidt, *Franz Schubert: Ein Lebensbild*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1958), 352.

¹⁴⁷ For example, songs by Nietzsche who was dismissed as an “intellectual pathfinder of both Hitlerite fascism and the late capitalist system of the postwar West.” Nicholas Martin,

2.3. Romantic Song in Performance and Recordings

Recital programs throughout the decades reflect a tendency toward early song literature, e.g. Mozart and Zelter, as well as space for newer compositions by East German or Soviet composers, however, song repertoire from the nineteenth century continued to be a cornerstone for professional singers' education and concerts. Schubert, Brahms, and Wolf were standard for concert programs and singing competitions. Founded in 1956, the International Schumann Competition in Zwickau often included newly composed pieces in the required repertoire, but Romantic song literature remained the central focus.

Tried-and-true song repertoire easily appealed both political functionaries and audiences while the availability of scores also made older song literature attractive for practitioners. As at any point in music's history, the musical preferences of those in charge of printing and distributing sheet music had more or less direct control over what singers, educators, and audiences could access. In the case of the early GDR, paper shortages meant that the heads of East German printing organizations, who were often under the direct influence of the State, had to choose which repertoire was worthy of printing.¹⁴⁸ Even if a particular song wasn't explicitly censored, this kind of latent censorship made it more difficult to perform works that didn't align with the State's cultural goals.

This type of resource management applied to recordings as well. Reacting to the many changes in cultural policy, the trends in art song recordings varied greatly over the years. From the Aufbau period, recordings of folksongs, Massenlieder, children's songs, and other "useful" songs abound, but recordings of traditional Kunstlieder are sporadic. Eterna released an album of Schubert songs with Sonja Schöner in 1954, songs from Hugo Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch* with Paul Heyse in 1955, and Schumann's *Liederkreis* with Lore Fischer in 1956. Günther Leib's recording of *Dichterliebe* from 1962 appears to be the earliest Eterna LP to focus exclusively on Romantic art song. "Ein Liederabend mit Peter

"Nietzsche in the GDR: History of a Taboo," in *Nietzsche and the German Tradition* (Oxford: Lang, 2003), 265.

¹⁴⁸ See Bettina Hinterthür, *Noten nach Plan: Die Musikverlage in der SBZ/DDR; Zensursystem, zentrale Planwirtschaft und deutsch-deutsche Beziehungen bis Anfang der 1960er Jahre*, vol. 23, Beiträge zur Unternehmensgeschichte (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 258.

Schreier” appeared in 1967, containing songs by Beethoven, Hindemith, and Schumann, marking the beginning of Schreier’s long and productive career of recording this genre of Romantic art song. Thereafter, art song albums appeared regularly on the Eterna label.

2.4. Composing Lieder

The varying attitudes toward the genre of art song led to various compositional ideas and output, therefore it is impossible to generalize what song composers produced over the four decades of the GDR. Many political changes influenced what would be written, published, recorded, and performed as well as what was considered “serious” artistic music. Examinations of some song compositions provide some insight into the discursive trends that took place over time and consistencies in the attitudes about the purpose of song, its effect upon society, and its ability to deliver multi-layered social critique. In *Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1976*, the overview of the “begleitetes Sololied” barely covers half a page for the period before 1961. Though many composers are listed as having engaged with the Sololied (Andre Asriel, Paul Dessau, Ottmar Gerster, Günter Kochan, Ernst Hermann Meyer, Kurt Schwaen, Joachim Werzlau, Gerhard Wohlgemuth), most of these compositions are said to have “served the composers’ own self-image, remaining a personal examination of tradition,” rather than dealing with wider social issues, perhaps providing a partial explanation of the fact “that the art song led a rather marginal existence within musical life” in the GDR.¹⁴⁹

2.4.1. Song production (Liedschaffen) in the GDR

Many of the politically motivated practitioners of *Gebrauchsmusik* in the Weimar and Nazi eras went on to become principal actors in shaping the GDR’s musical-political paradigm and leading figures in the institutions of the new state. One of these institutions, the VKM, was founded in 1951 to facilitate communication between music practitioners and to promote musical life within the GDR. The VKM’s leadership met in Berlin to discuss

¹⁴⁹ Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds., *Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1976*, vol. 5, Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Berlin: Verl. Neue Musik, 1979), 110.

and make decisions about which composers would receive new song commissions for public events. These events were often conceived and operated by the VKM itself, e.g., music festivals like the *Musik-Biennale-Berlin* and the *DDR-Musiktage* or one-off events like the tenth anniversary of the VKM in 1961. Commissions also resulted from requests made by other agencies, such as the NVA, the FDGB or the Ministry of Culture. Each regional chapter of the VKM also organized concerts, festivals, and workshops to serve the local community and could therefore commission work from composers within their district.

The VKM consisted of several *Schaffenskommissionen* (this could be translated as “committees for creation,” or “production committees”) which were responsible for producing new work in various areas, such as orchestral and chamber music, opera, and dance or vocal music. Liedschaffen became an official subcommittee in the early 1960s in connection to several discussions about the importance of song and song production in the VKM’s journal *Musik und Gesellschaft*. The committee members were responsible for developing, promoting, and maintaining the culture of public singing in East Germany. The documents of this subcommittee can be found in the archives of the Akademie der Künste and contain minutes of meetings, letters between functionaries, and organizational documentation of the many activities in which the subcommittee was involved. Most of the Liedschaffen-documents belong to the period before 1967 when the Zentrale Liedkommission (Central Song Committee) was founded as an official part of the Ministry of Culture. Thereafter, the new government agency took over much of what the Liedschaffen committee had discussed and shifted the focus away from the commissioning of new songs by recognized composers. Instead, the new Commission concentrated on cultivating (and controlling) the Singebewegung (song movement) that had sprung from local singing groups within and around the youth organization, FDJ, while still occasionally drawing from the compositional expertise of members of the VKM.

The founding of the VKM subcommittee follows some key developments in the cultural landscape of the early GDR—most importantly, the Bitterfeld Conference, the name given to the fifth convention of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) that introduced the plan

for the production of art as a tool for social progress in the GDR. The Bitterfeld Path (*Bitterfelder Weg*) called upon all artists to exercise “goal-conscious creativity”¹⁵⁰ for the national rebirth of Germany.¹⁵¹ According to this plan, professional artists and amateurs were to work together to produce cultural material that would support socialist society. Practically, this resulted in collaborations between many institutions like the VKM, the NVA, the FDGB, the FDJ, the National Front, and the Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit (literally, the Central House for Cultural Work), with the aim of making music (practice, performance, and composition) a daily part of life for all citizens. Aesthetically, the plan followed the principles of socialist realism that had already been established in the USSR; the expectation was that works of art were to use socialist life as their main subject, present it in a positive manner, and use familiar, accessible music.

However, such expectations created practical paradoxes in many areas of the arts, generating lengthy debates between the artists and functionaries of the GDR. According to the aesthetic principles of socialist realism, musicians were expected to follow tradition and base their works on the “cultural inheritance” of the classics. This meant that composers, performers, and musical directors had to limit their practice to the aesthetics of the existing musical canon, which had been developed during the previous century. As described above, socialist music values functional musical practice, whereas the work-based musical practice of the nineteenth century valued form. Practitioners were therefore expected to concentrate on the usefulness and function of music, but to do this within a framework that emulated, upheld, and extended a system that valued formal, “purposeless” works. In this sense, the very values that are central to this work-based musical practice (e.g. novelty of form,

¹⁵⁰ “Umwandlung der Hochschulen und Universitäten und die große Initiative zur Entwicklung der sozialistischen nationalen Literatur und Kunst zeugen von zielbewußtem schöpferischem Schaffen” Walter Ulbricht, “Jahre Der Wende,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 1, 1959, 1.

¹⁵¹ “Für die nationale Wiedergeburt Deutschlands” Walter Ulbricht at the V. Parteitag der SED 10.-16. Juli 1958, quoted in Ulrich Dähn, ed., *Unser Staat: DDR-Zeittafel 1949-1988* (Berlin: Dietz, 1989), 75.

universality, elitism, genius, etc.)¹⁵² stand in stark contrast to the values associated with socialist ideals (e.g., familiarity, pluralism, accessibility, and the celebration of everyman).

It was not easy for the artists of the 1950s and 1960s to work with and within these contradictory guidelines. The giants of musical composition of the early GDR, Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau, were at the center of several debates, especially around opera and instrumental works. But within the realm of song, it was possible for composers to operate between elitist traditions and expectations of accessibility. In fact, this balance of elite musical training and the “lowbrow” practices of song was a tradition in itself. It was this phenomenon, Suppan’s “second existence” of folk music, that had spurred the Romantic song tradition in the first place, resulting in art songs that were imitations, if not outright copies, of German folksongs. Many of these, by composers such as Schubert or Brahms, had already become markers of German national identity. The tension between art style and folk style can therefore also be considered a part of the German identity, to which the songs contributed.¹⁵³ This elevation of the music of the “base layers of society,” while representing the continuation of musical tradition, also served as the basis for several mythologized accounts of the heroic struggles of Schubert and Beethoven,¹⁵⁴ a narrative which could then be applied to contemporary composers in the GDR. In this way, Eisler and Dessau were understood to have evolved out of the traditions of the nineteenth century while contemporary songs of the people were the result of a long musical heritage.

The task for practitioners in the GDR, then, was to retain the work-based concept of Lied while leveling the art song/folksong hierarchy. One solution was, once again, to focus on function over form. The document *Thesen zum Stand der Entwicklung auf dem Gebiet des Liedschaffens in der DDR* (On the State of the Development in the Field of Song Production in the GDR), written by members of the VKM in 1963, describes “song-making in

¹⁵² See Chapter “After 1800: The Beethoven Paradigm” in Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Clarendon Press, 1992), 205–42.

¹⁵³ David Robb goes further, arguing that this hybridity between low-brow and high-brow is a specific characteristic of the German political song and “contributes greatly to [its] uniqueness.” Robb, “The Reception of Vormärz,” 2.

¹⁵⁴ See chapter “Writing the Nation” in Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the GDR*, 31–63.

the German Democratic Republic [as] rich and varied” because it includes songs in a variety of genres.¹⁵⁵ The names of various genres appear repeatedly within the notes of the VKM and its descriptions of song writing, publication, and performance, demonstrating what Stefan Weiss has called a “continuum of genres” that both allowed for and required “extreme applicability among the masses.”¹⁵⁶ Some common examples are *Soldatenlied* (soldiers’ song), *Marschlied* (marching song), *Chorlied* (choral song), *Wiegenlied* (lullaby), *Kinderlied* (children’s song), *Wanderlied* (hiking song), *Trauerlied* (mourning song), *Zeitlied* (topical song), *Massenlied* (song for the masses), and *Kunstlied* (art song).

Almost all of these genres can be linked to a specific public function or life event, and the creation of these songs therefore explicitly promoted their intended function. In order to follow the mandate of the Bitterfelder Weg and promote socialist culture through the performance of realist music, the VKM saw the “need [for] songs of the most diverse genres, especially the lyrical song, the *Stimmungslied*, the convivial song, the youth song, the soldier song and the lullaby.”¹⁵⁷ Just as *Kinderlieder* were intended to be sung as a cultural tool for structuring activities in school or at play, *Arbeiterlieder* were intended for groups of workers, as a sign of identification and pride. The *Arbeiterfestspiele* (Workers’ Festival of the Arts), an annual collaboration between the FDGB workers’ union and the VKM, showcased the artistic pursuits of the performing arts clubs. Since every factory or major place of work had multiple musical groups integrated into or directly associated with it in that period, the *Arbeiterfestspiele* regularly involved thousands of performers, all performing music provided by the VKM. Musicologists of the GDR have also highlighted the importance

¹⁵⁵ “Das Liedschaffen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik ist reichhaltig und vielgestaltig. Vom Kunstlied, dem Solo- und Orchesterlied über das Chorlied bis zum Song und Chanson, dem Kampf- und Marschlied, dem Wander- und Liebeslied steht der Bevölkerung eine breite Auswahl an Liedliteratur zur Verfügung, deren Herausgabe in Sammelbänden, in Reihenpublikationen, in Einzelblättern und in einfachen Vervielfältigungen durch die verschiedensten Stellen erfolgt.” “Thesen zum Stand der Entwicklung auf dem Gebiet des Liedschaffens in der DDR,” August 16, 1963, VKM 870, AdK.

¹⁵⁶ Stefan Weiss, “Landschaft mit Komponisten,” in *Musikwissenschaft und Kalter Krieg: Das Beispiel DDR*, ed. Nina Noeske and Matthias Tischer (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 75.

¹⁵⁷ “Wir brauchen Lieder der verschiedensten Gattungen, ganz besonders geht es heute neben dem Kampflied der Arbeiterklasse um das lyrische Lied, das Stimmungslied, das gesellige Lied, das Jugendlied, das Soldatenlied und das Wiegenlied.” “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes,” 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

of creating new examples of the Soldatenlied in order to support the development of the NVA and the expansion of the military after the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Like the champions of the Gebrauchsmusik movement of the 1920s, composers in the GDR also aimed to write successfully in many genres for many different public functions. Andre Asriel, co-editor of the *Musiklexikon* of 1966, was one of the best-known song composers and accompanists of his generation. His output ranged from pop to art song, exemplifying the aesthetic range that a composer in the socialist state should possess. Asriel's musicological input to the *Musiklexikon*, like the writings of officials of the VKM, focused on the function, application, and performance practices of various genres, rather than solely on essentialist explanations of form. In the documentation of the Liedschaffen subcommittee, as well as the *Musiklexikon*, Kunstlied receives little attention compared to other genres. Art songs served as material for the continuing tradition of artistic concert life, while other genres were intended for other kinds of events. While the Kunstlied continued to be regarded as the zenith of the compositional development of the Lied in the FRG, in the GDR it was considered a sub-genre of the greater concept of song, not as its ideal manifestation.

According to practitioners in the early GDR, it was of utmost importance to promote singing outside the realm of the concert hall. The official view was that "there [was] too little singing in [...] public life."¹⁵⁸ Singing at "school, [...] demonstrations, meetings, and other gatherings of [...] people, as well as singing in the family" should be promoted with a wealth of new songs of several genres, in the hope that a few of them would "become folk songs of [the] time."¹⁵⁹ The concept of the "folksong of our times" was neither new nor unique to the members of the VKM. Champions of the workers' choir movements of the

¹⁵⁸ "Es ist eine Tatsache, dass in unserem öffentlichen Leben zu wenig gesungen wird. Das fängt in der Schule an, betrifft Demonstrationen, Versammlungen und andere Zusammenkünfte unserer Menschen, sowie das Singen in der Familie." "Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes," 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

¹⁵⁹ "Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes," 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

early twentieth century, precursors to the *Gebrauchsmusik* movement, had defended their choices of repertoire by claiming that “the folksong of our day is the workers’ song.”¹⁶⁰

Half a century later, the aim for any newly composed song was to become a Massenlied. Among sections for opera, cantata, oratorio, instrumental music, and music journalism, Massenlied was explicitly listed as a category of “ernste Musik” (serious music) in policy hearings within cultural institutions like the Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten (Committee for Cultural Activities). Again, like other genres described by the VKM, the genre of Massenlied was not described in terms of form but rather in terms of how these songs functioned in society. Seeger and Asriel’s definition in the *Musiklexikon* also focuses on the flexibility of the genre, its performance practice and intent, rather than its form:

Massenlied is a term that has arisen in more recent times, yet is not entirely unambiguous in terms of content and form. As a rule, a Massenlied is a choral song with a unanimous or simple polyphonic setting with political content. Easily memorized and suitable for singing at demonstrations, public celebrations, etc. in the open air or in large halls, the Massenlied can be performed by choirs, sung along with by other participants at an event, but also performed as a solo concert.¹⁶¹

The undated document “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes” (Current situation in the area of the mass song) states that the Massenlied encompasses multiple genres and that even “so-called” art songs” could become Massenlieder.¹⁶² Documents of this sort from this time period seem to have been created in response to a question

¹⁶⁰ Emanuel Wurm, “Tendenzlied,” *DAS-Zeitung*, March 17, 1907, quoted in Inge Lammel, *Arbeiterlied, Arbeitergesang: Hundert Jahre Arbeitermusikultur in Deutschland; Aufsätze und Vorträge aus 40 Jahren 1959–1998*, 1. Aufl (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), 133.

¹⁶¹ “Massenlied: ein in neuerer Zeit aufgekommener Begriff, der inhaltl. wie formal nicht ganz eindeutig ist. In der Regel ist unter M. ein chorisches-einstimmiges oder nur sehr schlicht mehrstimmig gesetztes Lied polit.-aktuellen Inhalts zu verstehen, das sich seiner Faktur nach leicht einprägt und für den Gesang bei Demonstrationen, öfftl. Feiern usw. im Freien oder in großen Sälen geeignet ist. Das M. kann von Chören ausgeführt, von weiteren Teilnehmern einer Veranstaltung mitgesungen, aber auch solistisch-konzertant ausgeführt werden.” Horst Seeger, ed., “Massenlied,” in *Musiklexikon* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik VEB, 1965), 77.

¹⁶² “Am 20.8.[1963] Nahmen der Genosse Lesser und ich an der Kollegiumssitzung des Ministeriums für Kultur teil. Die Musikabteilung des Ministeriums legte dem Kollegium eine

from Hans Bentzien, the head of the Ministry of Culture, about “whether the creation of songs could be seen as the basis for all compositional output.” The document provides a detailed account of which¹⁶³ aspects of songs were deemed to be desirable to the members of the VKM. It stresses the importance of Massenlieder to East German life and goes on to attempt to classify any obstacles to their creation and promotion. The functionaries of the VKM had apparently carried out a review of song production since 1945 and admitted that “the quality of this literature varies widely. There are only a few songs that meet the above requirements.”¹⁶⁴ However, “the above requirements” are not defined. In the meeting minutes of the VKM or reviews and letters included in their archives, examples of Massenlieder are often discussed and criticized in terms of their “quality,” but there is not much specific discussion of what makes a good Massenlied other than its *Breitenwirkung* (widespread effect). This characteristic was described in the *Musiklexikon* as an “igniting, activating, lyrically and musically powerful, and simply designed mass-political tendency,” an “essential criterion” of the Massenlied. This wide dissemination and appeal was to provide a stark contrast to “works which are cultivated by professional choirs or madrigal associations and [...] songs which require individual performance.”¹⁶⁵

Vorlage über das Liedschaffen zur Diskussion vor, die [...] sehr kurzfristig angefertigt werden sollte. [...] Genosse Minister Bentzien warf als erste Frage auf, ob das Liedschaffen als Grundlage für das gesamte kompositorische Schaffen angesehen werden darf.“ “22.8.63 Aktennotiz ‘Liedschaffen,’” 22 August, 1963. VKM 870. Bentzien also wrote a whole article about the Lied as the basis of all classical masterpieces in *Musik und Gesellschaft* in 1963. See Hans Bentzien, “Das Wollen in die Tat umsetzen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 449–52.

¹⁶³ “Es ist dabei zu sehen, dass solche Lieder sowohl von einer großen Gruppe von Menschen gesungen werden sollen, als auch von einzelnen, etwa im Sinne des Volksliedes unserer Tage.“ “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes,” 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

¹⁶⁴ “Die Qualität dieser Literatur ist jedoch sehr unterschiedlich. Es gibt nur wenige Lieder, die den obigen Ansprüchen gerecht werden.“ “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes,” 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

¹⁶⁵ “Ein wesentliches Kriterium besteht in der zündenden, aktivierenden, textlich wie musikal. schlagkräftig und einfach gestalteten massenpolit. Tendenz des M. In diesem Sinne unterscheidet es sich deutlich von Werken, die durch Berufschöre oder Madrigalvereinigungen u. a. Chöre von musizierenden Laien gepflegt werden, aber auch vom Song, der den individuellen Vortrag voraussetzt. Viele Kampflieder der Arbeitersänger sind M.“ Seeger, “Massenlied,” 77.

Of course, the powerful aspects of the lyrics were of great concern but were again not capable of being described in detail. According to the VKM, the topic and message of a *Massenlied* “is life itself in its new form” with a text that conforms to realist expectations of cultural products¹⁶⁶. In line with the prescriptions of socialist realism, these lyrics were to reflect the desired reality of a new national identity. To do this, lyrics often explicitly described what East Germany should and should not be. Songs produced in the early days of the GDR often contained expressly anti-Western texts that distanced Germany from American imperialism and war-mongering. A famous example of this is found in “Ami, go home” which Ernst Busch and Hanns Eisler wrote by adding new lyrics to the American soldier tune “Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!” (also known as “Jesus Loves the Little Children”):

Go home, Ami! Ami, go home!
 Spalte für den Frieden dein Atom.
 Sag: Good bye dem Vater Rhein.
 Rühr’ nicht an sein Töchterlein–
 Lorelei–solang du singst,
 Wird Deutschland sein!

Go home, Yank! Yank, go home!
 Split your atom for peace.
 Say goodbye to the Father Rhine.
 Don’t touch his little daughter –
 Lorelei–as long as you sing,
 Germany will remain!

Unsurprisingly then, functionaries of the GDR repeatedly referred to *Massenlieder* as “the folksong of our days.” Indeed, the concept of *Massenlied* can be further understood by reference to some of the definitions of the folksong concept at the time. As previously discussed, practitioners in the GDR saw folksongs as originating from and belonging to the *Grundschichten*, the base layers or lower classes, but also as the most important inspiration for elite artistic output. Since the *Grundschicht* was to rule the GDR in a “worker and farmer state,” *Massenlieder* would come from and belong to all citizens of the new Germany, setting it apart from the decadent West, while enriching the pluralist singing culture of the Eastern Bloc.

¹⁶⁶ “Der Gegenstand ist das Leben selbst in seiner neuen Qualität.” “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes,” 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

Creating a New German Folksong

The post-war era can be characterized by the need for a new national identity and type of patriotism that contrasted with Hitler's regime. Since "the folksong had been perverted and abused" by the Nazis¹⁶⁷, Eastern Germans were critical of the social impact that certain songs could invoke and rejected any song or song text that smacked of Naziism. According to Albin Buchholz, even the possession of old songbooks with so-called "Nazi-Liedern" could be comparable to refusing to go through the required "ideological self-purification."¹⁶⁸

The emotional and social aspects of public singing, however, were seen by many as a vital part of German culture that pre-dated National Socialism. Lyrical propaganda was not a modern invention, nor was it to be understood as one, as folk-music scholars of the GDR "launched a sweeping campaign to redefine the canon of German folk song" to fit a new historical narrative.¹⁶⁹ Musicologist Inge Lammel based her early work on highlighting the leftist tradition of public singing. In 1954, she opened the Workers' Song Archive (*Arbeiterliedarchiv*) and subsequently published dozens of songbooks and monographs that demonstrate a century-long, continuous historiography of leftist workers' songs and revolutionary *Kampflieder* (songs of struggle).¹⁷⁰ Also in 1954, after returning from exile in the USSR, the folklorist Wolfgang Steinitz published the first volume of the eminent anthology *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (German Folksongs of Democratic Character from Six Centuries)¹⁷¹ with the goal of presenting songs of

¹⁶⁷ Meyer, "Deutsche Musik," 215.

¹⁶⁸ Albin Buchholz, "'Unser Zeichen ist die Sonne': Zum Lied in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone zwischen 1945 und 1949," in *Das 20. Jahrhundert im Spiegel seiner Lieder: Tagungsbericht Erlbach/Vogtland 2002 der Kommission für Lied-, Musik- und Tanzforschung in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde e.V.*, ed. Marianne Bröcker, Schriften der Universitätsbibliothek Bamberg (Bamberg: Universitätsbibliothek Bamberg, 2004), 11.

¹⁶⁹ Philip V Bohlman, *Focus on Music of European Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2008), 52.

¹⁷⁰ See e.g., Lammel's series *Lied im Kampf geboren* (*Song born in Struggle*), published by Hofmeister and the Akademie der Künste, which includes *Lieder der Revolution von 1848* (1957), *Lieder gegen Faschismus und Krieg* (1958), *Lieder der Agitprop-Truppen vor 1945* (1959) and others.

¹⁷¹ A second volume appeared in 1962. Wolfgang Steinitz, *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten*, 1st ed., Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Deutsche Volkskunde (Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 1955).

the past that “give a clear voice to the social and political interests of working people oppressed by feudalism, capitalism, and militarism.”¹⁷² In relation to the colossal scope of “Der große Steinitz,” (The big Steinitz) as it would later be known, the few years of Nazi “perversion” appear not as the natural conclusion of public singing, but rather as a disastrous, yet short-lived anomaly within the expansive history of a democratic, humanist German folk tradition.

Song books from the early GDR celebrated being “finally allowed to sing again”¹⁷³ and provided a selection of international (often Russian) folksongs and well-known songs of previous generations of leftist social movements.¹⁷⁴ Likewise, according to Juliane Brauer, “the connection between singing, remembering, and feeling” was a way for East Germans to “generate hope, joy, and community” in order to create an “illusion of a fresh start” as well as a cultural separation from the Nazi past.¹⁷⁵ In order to fill the sudden gap between the desired demand for public singing and the lack of acceptable repertoire, hundreds if not thousands of newly composed potential folksongs were commissioned, written, published, recorded, and performed in the early years of the GDR.

Neue Deutsche Volkslieder

Hanns Eisler’s *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, composed in 1950 with poet Johannes R. Becher, exemplified the functions of song during the Aufbau period, aiming to unite Ger-

¹⁷² “So sehr ich mir ihres provisorischen Charakters bewußt bin, hoffe ich doch, damit für die nunmehr beginnende eingehende Untersuchung dieses wichtigen Teils der deutschen Volkslieder eine wichtige Vorarbeit geleistet zu haben. Unter demokratischen Volksliedern verstehe ich, wie oben gesagt, Lieder des werktätigen Volkes, die den sozialen und politischen Interessen der durch Feudalismus, Kapitalismus und Militarismus unterdrückten Werktätigen einen klaren Ausdruck geben.” Wolfgang Steinitz, *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten* (Berlin (West): das europäische buch, 1979), XXII.

¹⁷³ Introduction to *Unser Lied, unser Leben* (Berlin: Verlag JHW Dietz, 1947).

¹⁷⁴ Traditional songs of the Workers’ Movement could also be controversial due to the violent history between the former SPD and KPD parties. See chapter “Was bleibt” in Thomas Goll, “Die Partei, die Partei hat immer recht!: Das politische Lied in der DDR,” in *Sound der Zeit Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen: 1889 bis heute*, ed. Gerhard Paul and Ralph Schock (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Juliane Brauer, *Zeitgefühle: Wie die DDR ihre Zukunft besang; Eine Emotionsgeschichte* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 12.

mans and promote socialist values. Eisler's songs were meant to be easily learned, with simple accompaniments, and aimed to connect with the people's everyday life. Despite Eisler's intention to avoid concert-like effects, the songs' production blurred lines between folk practice and artistic composition, with their performance and recordings enhancing their classical legitimacy. The use of the harpsichord and other elements injected a sense of historicism and tradition. While intended to be part of the classical canon, these songs were also crafted to be connected to the people, balancing high and low culture, and making their way into public performances and school curriculums.

Not Just Children's Songs

Although Eisler and Becher didn't write the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* specifically as children's songs, the "songs are dedicated especially to the youth, to those who are open to the new."¹⁷⁶ Likewise, many of the songs created in the post-war era are known primarily as standard repertoire for schools and the youth organization Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ). Songs like "Uns're Heimat" (1951) by Hans Naumilkat, "Kleine, weiße Friedenstaube" (1948) by Erika Schirmer, and "Wenn Mutti früh zur Arbeit geht" (1951) by Kurt Schwaen are famous examples of children's songs that endured throughout the decades, emotionally contributing to the socialist upbringing which children were to receive. School song books were standardized for every grade, reserving more overtly political or thematically complex songs like "Wir wollen Frieden auf lange Dauer" (1956) by Paul Dessau for the older pupils. As Juliane Brauer's book *Zeitgeföhle: Wie die DDR ihre Zukunft besang* demonstrates, it was nearly impossible to avoid these songs while growing up in the GDR, and they therefore successfully became an important part of each individual's emotional relationship to the State, whether positive or negative.

The prevalence of children's songs and the ambivalent role they play in individual and collective memory of the GDR makes them a prime example for social historians to show the complexities of the East German past. Perhaps for this reason, the topic of children's

¹⁷⁶ Johannes R. Becher, forward to Hanns Eisler, *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag GmbH, 1950).

songs comprises a large part of literature about vocal music in the GDR.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, a musical education for children that involved so many songs was one way to achieve “the eradication of musical illiteracy,” a goal long held by many proponents of socialism. However, especially in the Aufbau period, composers and musicologists were also putting great amounts of energy into encouraging adults to sing as a way to integrate the arts and socialist life.

Massenlied

As early as 1930, Hanns Eisler suggested the importance of vocal music in Marxist terminology, explaining that since “art music is the privilege of the ruling class [and since] music requires the possession of the musical means of production[, ...]the music of the proletariat [...] will make use, above all, of the musical means of production that the working class also possesses, namely the human voice.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly at the end of the 1950s, the proletariat was to “storm the heights of culture and seize ownership” of the production of the arts under the cultural policy of the Bitterfelder Weg.¹⁷⁹ Song and singing was therefore meant as the gateway for the new ruling class (the proletariat) to overtake the artistic realm. Songs that were meant for collective singing, Massenlieder, counted as artworks that utilized the proletariat’s means of production and were therefore considered a serious musical endeavor for composers.

¹⁷⁷ See e.g., Brauer, *Zeitgeföhle*; Thomas Goll and Thomas Leurer, eds., *Ostalgie als Erinnerungskultur? Symposium zu Lied und Politik in der DDR*, 1st ed., Würzburger Universitätschriften zu Geschichte und Politik 6 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004).

¹⁷⁸ “Kunstmusik ist das Privileg der herrschenden Klasse. Die ökonomische Situation des Proletariats weist der Musik eine eigentümliche Aufgabe zu. Musik als Musik verlangt des Besitz der musikalischen Produktionsmittel. Die Musik des Proletariats kann nur eine angewandte Kunst sein. Sie wird sich vor allem des musikalischen Produktionsmittels bedienen, das auch die Arbeiterschaft besitzt, nämlich der menschlichen Stimme.” Hanns Eisler, *Gesammelte Schriften 1921-1935*, ed. Tobias Fasshauer et al., vol. 1, Hanns Eisler Gesamtausgabe 1 (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 2007), 118-9.

¹⁷⁹ “In Staat und Wirtschaft ist die Arbeiterklasse der DDR bereits der Herr. Jetzt muß sie auch die Höhen der Kultur stürmen und von ihnen Besitz ergreifen.” Walter Ulbricht, quoted in “Referat des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf dem V. Parteitag,” *Neues Deutschland*, July 12, 1958, 5.

At the beginning of the 1960s, with the construction of the Berlin Wall and the solidification of the GDR as a State, Liedschaffen (song production) became “priority number one” for many musicologists and composers.¹⁸⁰ In September of 1961, composer Joachim Werzlau published an article entitled “Ein kritisches Wort zur Diskussion um unser Liedschaffen” (A critical word about the discussion of our song production) which kicked off an active discussion about song production and Massenlied in the journal.¹⁸¹ The article bemoans the lack of musicological interest in song composition, giving an analysis of the journal articles in *Musik und Gesellschaft* from the previous ten years and demonstrating that the amount of musicological examination was “quite scanty” in comparison with “the abundance of hundreds of *Lieder* and songs that were written during this time.”¹⁸² He claims that instead of engaging with contemporary issues related to new songs and Massenlieder, the journal has exchanged these issues for discussing problems of the 18th or 19th centuries. He pleads his colleagues “to spare no ‘effort and expense’ in the struggle for this common cause of ours.”¹⁸³ In his responses the music educator Ludwig Matthies argued that the social impact of songs should take precedence over compositional ability. In his eyes, impactful songs could be written more effectively with little compositional training and therefore advocated for greater promotion of amateur compositions. Composer Siegfried Köhler, on the other hand, defended the realm of professional composition and the need for artistic quality in what was to become the new socialist culture.¹⁸⁴ Werzlau’s article and the resulting discussion prompted the formation of a *Liedschaffen* committee within the central office of the VKM. According to the announcement,¹⁸⁵ the stated intention of this committee was to include members of the authors’ association, choir directors, and performers. Internal discussions of the VKM involved the topic of Liedschaffen, but the

¹⁸⁰ Gerhard Bab, “Statt Klärung – Verwirrung?,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 715.

¹⁸¹ Joachim Werzlau, “Ein kritisches Wort zur Diskussion um unser Liedschaffen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 209-11.

¹⁸² “Der Fülle Hunderter von Liedern und Songs, die in dieser Zeit entstanden, steht eine recht magere musikwissenschaftliche Betrachtung gegenüber.” Werzlau, “Ein kritisches Wort,” 210.

¹⁸³ Werzlau, “Ein kritisches Wort,” 211.

¹⁸⁴ Siegfried Köhler, “Es geht um Qualität,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 197-98.

¹⁸⁵ “Schriftsteller und Komponisten arbeiten zusammen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 716-18.

majority of the documentation in the Liedschaffen archive consists simply of descriptions, status reports, and lists of published art songs and song books. The topic also all but disappeared from the pages of *Musik und Gesellschaft* after 1963.¹⁸⁶

The Bitterfelder Weg nevertheless provided enduring structural opportunities for the creation and performance of song. Cultural institutions like the VKM made sure that composers, both professional and amateur, had outlets to have songs performed and published. Festivals, political rallies and national sporting events often held song competitions or commissioned new songs to be performed at the opening ceremonies. Many songs were written for workplace choruses and union music ensembles to be performed at the annual *Arbeiterfestspiele* (Workers' Festival of the GDR). According to the VKM report,¹⁸⁷ there were at least seven song periodicals in which such songs could be published, and as of 1963, periodicals like *Neues Chorliederbuch*, *FDGB-Liedblätter* and *Unser neues Lied* had published a total of over 1,000 songs. 36 songbooks were reportedly published between 1959 and 1963 alone, including 400 songs in the first two volumes of the FDGB songbook *Brüder am Werk* and two volumes of the *Neues Volksliederbuch* with 400 songs each. Several of these publications included reprints of classic Massenlieder like the *International* and *Spaniens Himmel* as well as new arrangements of previously published songs, but a large portion of the repertoire was curated from the immense number of songs that had been recently composed for festivals, rallies, competitions or other occasions.

Songs for Every Voice: Concerts, Hootenannies, and Chansons

By the mid 60s, the discussions around Massenlieder had died down amongst musicologists along with the waning enthusiasm for the policies of the Bitterfelder Weg. It became clear that Massenlieder in the form that had been such an impactful cultural force for the previous generation, had little political meaning for contemporary citizens behind the newly built Wall. Composers, according to *Musikgeschichte der DDR*, found new inspiration in the *begleitetes Sololied* with guitar or chamber ensemble accompaniments: Dessau's

¹⁸⁶ For more detail on this debate, see section "Liedschaffen under Debate" in chapter 3.

¹⁸⁷ "Liederbücher und Liedblattreihen," August 14, 1963, VKM 870, AdK.

settings of Georg Maurer's *Dreistrophenkalendar* and Ernst Hermann Meyer's "new phase [of] his richest and most beautiful songs" seem to usher in a new era that moves away from universal singability and concentrates more on a "high degree of difficulty and great demands on the performers' creative powers."¹⁸⁸ Collective singing, however, would remain an important cultural and political tool for many composers as well as the ability to adapt artistic traditions to more accessible genres.

Many prominent members of the first generation of GDR composers were known for their song-writing in various styles and for various uses. Hanns Eisler's *Hollywood Songbook* has since secured a place in the standard canon of twentieth-century art song, but before his death in 1962, his status as song composer *par excellence* was largely due to his ability to integrate artistic quality into mass songs, folk songs, workers' songs, and other non-concert vocal music. Paul Dessau's oeuvre includes over 400 songs, but less than sixty of these are considered suitable "art songs" for concert performance today.¹⁸⁹

Similarly, Andre Asriel's ability to write skillfully for a variety of genres helped him to become one of the most successful composers of his generation. His cabaret songs, pop songs, mass songs, and art songs made him a model for success in the GDR. Guided by his belief that his music must be useful, Asriel refocused his compositional efforts over the 1960s toward the creation of *Chansons*, an overtly political song genre rooted in cabaret traditions, and named the singing style of actress Gisela May as central to the genre.¹⁹⁰

Encouraged by Hanns Eisler, Gisela May had gained popularity as a new voice of socialist song, continuing the interpretative traditions of cabaret artists like Claire Waldoff or Brechtian singing actors like Ernst Busch. Trained as actors, performers such as May, Sonja Kehler and Vera Oelschlegel became household names both within and outside the GDR for their chanson interpretations, all using a non-classical, belting vocal technique that composers kept in mind when writing for them. Lin Jaldati, the dancer and vocalist, known for

¹⁸⁸ Brockhaus and Niemann, *Musikgeschichte der DDR*, 237.

¹⁸⁹ Preface to Axel Bauni, ed., *Lieder aus dem Nachlass* (Frankfurt am Main: Peters, 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Andre Asriel, *Stimmen des Exils: Ein Österreicher remigriert in die DDR*, interview by Jochanan Shelliem, July 25, 2013, accessed July 10, 2024, <https://kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Content/DE/Sonderausstellungen/StimmendesExil/Objekte/asriel-andre.html>.

her interpretations of Yiddish songs, was another non-classical singer for whom composers, including Paul Dessau and her husband, pianist and musicologist Eberhard Rebling, wrote and arranged songs.¹⁹¹

Rebling, who also served as the editor in chief of *Musik und Gesellschaft* for 7 years, was just one of the many “serious” musicians who were active members of the early Singebewegung. Whereas folk music movements in the West and the tourist songs of the USSR¹⁹² were often associated with a counter-culture rebellion, the Hootenanny-culture that Canadian Perry Friedman had imported seemed to share many of the same goals that functionaries sought, while providing a way out of the stagnation of the Bitterfelder Weg. The Singebewegung combined the ideals of spontaneity and collectivism of folk culture with a new-found internationality. In this context, songs could still be explicitly political, but as the basis of the great German musical heritage, folksong retained legitimacy as a serious art form among a diverse array of musical genres and influences. Participation in the Singebewegung allowed composers like Asriel, Dessau, and Schwaen to experiment with various instrumentations, vocal styles, and texts.

Records like *Schützt diese Welt* from 1971 showcased arrangements of *Lieder* and *Chansons* that express overtly political texts while blurring the borders between serious concert music, rock, and folksong. The album features tracks by established song composers Paul Kurzbach, Günter Kochan, Wolfgang Lesser, Kurt Schwaen Paul Dessau, and Andre Asriel as well as younger composers like Günter Hauk, Georg Katzer, and Tilo Müller-Medek. For the first track, Kochan had made an orchestral arrangement for “Schützt diese Welt,” which he had published with piano accompaniment in 1967. With the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and men’s chorus and baritone Hermann Hähnel, the recording is reminiscent of a cantata recitativo at first, followed by a rhythmic refrain that is similar to

¹⁹¹ See John Nix, “Transforming Postwar East Germany through Song: Paul Dessau’s *Lieder* Composed for Lin Jaldati, Lecture-Recital by Michael Hix, Baritone,” *College Music Symposium* 59, no. 1 (2019): 23.

¹⁹² See Christian Noack, “Songs from the Wood, Love from the Fields,” in *The Socialist Sixties*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker, Crossing Borders in the Second World (Indiana University Press, 2013), 167-92.

Ernst Busch's bombastic recordings of the previous decade. The next track, "Vier Studenten aus Kent" by Manfred Schmitz, sounds like a typical rock song of the time, featuring Gisela May and a contemporary rock-jazz ensemble, with xylophone, trumpets, drum set, electric guitar and electric bass. The rest of the tracks similarly blend and oscillate between the sounds of jazz, rock, cantata, art song, and traditional Massenlied, all while taking classical traditions into account. Such compilations represent the extreme eclecticism that musicians were expected to provide, serving as many artistic needs and tastes as possible to their (ideally) politically-minded audience.

The last half of the record's a-side is taken up by Paul Kurzbach's *Fünf Songs und Chansons* (1969) for voice and piano on texts by Rose Nyland and Peter Hacks, a set of songs that exemplify the hybrid nature of the political *Chanson* genre. Similar to many song texts of the previous decade, Rose Nyland's *Chanson von der freundlichen Wolke* and *Die ganz alten Bäume* use nature themes to express more general ideas of hope for the future and world peace, while Peter Hacks' *Oktober-Song* glorifies the October Revolution new world that has since emerged. The other poems are direct critiques of contemporary global politics. Nyland's *Wie weit liegt Vietnam entfernt?* (How far is Vietnam), relates the German listener's life to that of the Vietnamese people, stating that "distance is no longer measured in kilometers" since "the same enemy is standing at our borders." The score of the *Chansons* from 1969 includes *Humanität* with text by Willi Layh, a protest against Apartheid in South Africa. For the recording, however, *Humanität* was substituted by *Schlaflied für Johnson* (Lullaby for Johnson), another Vietnam War protest song that was later published in Kurzbach's *Sechs Lieder auf Gedichte von Peter Hacks* (1977). Here, the singer speaks directly to Lyndon B. Johnson, the president of the United States from 1963 to 1969, accusing him of the murder of children and wishing that his victims will haunt his dreams until the fateful morning when the world will punish him.

Like Asriel, Kurzbach was one of the leading song composers for classical compositions and Massenlieder who also turned his attention to writing political *Chansons*. The declamatory setting of the text as well as the vocal range and straight-forward style of *Fünf Songs und Chansons* fit the "belter" style of voice typically used by actors and make the songs

amenable to most listeners, especially those who might feel alienated by the sound of a classically trained voice. However, the complex piano accompaniment, the use of free tonality, and the imaginative harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic irregularities also demonstrate Kurzbach's roots in modern composition, making performances of the set a challenge for anyone other than those with a professional musical education. In this way, Kurzbach's songs are easy to understand as a non-trained listener, but also act as artistically self-aware, intellectually stimulating compositions. Kurzbach, like many of his colleagues, fulfilled the goal to make songs socially impactful, by making them musically intelligible and interesting to the broadest range of people possible.

Wilhelm Weismann

Not all song composers pursued social impact through this sort of hybridity. Wilhelm Weismann, who was most well known for his vocal compositions for professional choirs or classical singers, wrote nearly 100 solo Kunstlieder which were immensely popular among voice teachers, students, and professional recitalists. Unlike his contemporaries, Weismann didn't experiment with various vocal styles and genres in order to make his music reach a broader audience. However, since he almost completely abstained from the use of free tonality and other avant-garde compositional techniques, his songs were appreciated for their "brilliant clarity" and "natural grace" that connected him to the idealized pre-Romantic German musical heritage.¹⁹³ With the exception of a few songs with texts by contemporary poets like Johannes R. Becher or Pablo Neruda, Weismann predominantly used texts from well known nineteenth-century sources, such as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* or poems by Goethe, Hölderlin or Klaus Groth.

Weismann's adherence to traditions of the nineteenth century allowed singers to easily integrate his songs into concert programs of standard Romantic repertoire. The popularity of his songs, madrigals, and choral works steadily increased among audiences and performers throughout the late 1960s into the 80s, making him one of the most performed GDR composers both before and after the *Wende*. Weismann enjoyed a prominent position as a

¹⁹³ E. S., "Weisen von natürlicher Anmut: Zum 80. Geburtstag des Komponisten Wilhelm Weismann," *Neue Zeit*, September 19, 1980, 4.

member of the VKM, editor at Edition Peters and professor of composition in Leipzig. He was also awarded the Nationalpreis in 1964 for his “significant enrichment of contemporary vocal and instrumental music”¹⁹⁴ and was mentioned by Ernst Hermann Meyer to be among the “most important” composers of the GDR.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Weismann’s name is found only sporadically in the musicological discourse of the GDR and even less often in historical studies. In contrast to his peers who had adopted the sanctioned, working-class cultural policies in their music and in writing, Weismann’s musical traditionalism was apparent both in his composition and in his refusal to publish blatant propaganda under the Peters label. Perhaps for these reasons, he was marginalized in the central musicological discussions of his time, therefore making him an outlier, both for his immense popularity among singers and for his relative obscurity in the historical narrative of the GDR to date.

The Later Generation of Composers

The later generation of East German song composers were able to further diversify their styles. Reiner Bredemeyer used song to simultaneously continue and critique several German musical and literary traditions. Mixing elements from both socialist and nineteenth-century canons, his song compositions include chansons for voice and guitar on texts by Heine, nods to the Schubertian tradition with new settings of Wilhelm Müller’s *Die Winterreise* for tenor, piano and horn and *Die schöne Müllerin* for a “low miller” and eight instruments, as well as post-modern treatments of socialist themes like *MARXimen*, a “Hegel-epigram” for tenor, three clarinets, and percussion.

Some composers like Friedrich Schenker were less eclectic in their aesthetic approaches to vocal music and adhered to more-or-less avant-garde compositional techniques. However, Schenker’s *Leitfaden für angehende Speichellecker* (Introductory Course for Aspiring Bootlickers) from 1974 continued other traditions of his East German predecessors and provides fun, accessible, impactful social commentary, albeit through the lens of contem-

¹⁹⁴ “Nationalpreis,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 15 (1965): 655.

¹⁹⁵ Ernst Hermann Meyer, “Echte Revolutionäre auch in der Kunst sein,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 327.

porary compositional techniques. Taking advantage of the vocal dexterity of soprano Roswitha Trexler, who premiered and recorded the piece, Schenker created a hilarious performance piece that ultimately results in a critique of over-bureaucratization and the meaninglessness of professional hierarchies while also offering a self-ironic warning about the self-importance and impotence of contemporary music.

2.5. GDR-Song in Performance Today

Even though ambiguities of genre and instrumentation make much of the song repertoire from the GDR difficult to insert into the comparatively narrow parameters of contemporary concert practice, there are still hundreds of songs for voice and piano that are provided in several song anthologies like *Vortragsliteratur des 20. Jahrhunderts: Lieder von Komponisten der DDR für eine Singstimme und Klavier* or the *Spektrum* song series. Newer anthologies like the collection of Dessau's songs in *Lieder aus dem Nachlass* songs, continue to make songs available to performers. Many of these compositions would aesthetically fit into a contemporary Liederabend, but they are nonetheless difficult to program. Even if a song's lyrics can be deemed acceptable to a contemporary audience, the overt political nature of this repertoire will inevitably hark back to the dictatorship under which it was written. The social potency for which composers strove has therefore endured, nevertheless with the unintended side-effect of rendering a majority of the repertoire nearly impossible to perform in concert today.

3. The Bitterfelder Weg and the Path to Political Song in the GDR

“Das Liedschaffen zu fördern, sollte überall an erster Stelle stehen.”¹⁹⁶

The *Singebewegung* is perhaps the most widely known part of East Germany’s music history. Indeed, many people automatically assume that my research about East German songs refers to that of Wolf Biermann, Bettina Wegner, or Gerhard Gundermann. Literature about the Singebewegung has been published, in large part by Lutz Kirchenwitz, who played an active part in the movement, and by others, including Holger Böning, in German,¹⁹⁷ or David Robb, in English.¹⁹⁸ As David Robb points out, the songs of the Singebewegung were created under complex and paradoxical circumstances, simultaneously representing “a proudly coveted *Erbe* of revolutionary tradition,” and a potential

¹⁹⁶ Hans Bentzien, “Das Wollen in die Tat umsetzen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 451.

¹⁹⁷ See e.g., Holger Böning, *Der Traum von Einer Sache: Aufstieg und Fall Der Utopien Im Politischen Lied Der Bundesrepublik und Der DDR*, *Presse und Geschichte* 12 (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2004).

¹⁹⁸ See e.g., David Robb, ed., *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007).

“means of subversion.”¹⁹⁹ Thus, in hindsight, the songs of the Singebewegung are a fitting representation of the self-contradictory culture of the GDR and its citizens, many of whom felt, as Heiner Müller did, to “always be on both sides.”

However, the Singebewegung does not span the entirety of the GDR’s forty years. In the existing literature, its beginnings are marked by the first *Hootenanny-Konzerte* with Canadian folk musician Perry Friedman in 1960, the founding of the Hootenanny-Klub in 1966, which was renamed the *Oktober-Klub* in 1967, and the inception of the *Festival des Politischen Liedes* (Festival of Political Song) in 1970, which became one of the most beloved and successful music festivals of the GDR. The circumstances under which these events took place is rarely or minimally discussed.

In his contribution to Friedman’s autobiography, his dear friend, Eberhard Rebling, wrote a small paragraph about the “favorable circumstances” under which Friedman “set the whole new singing movement into motion”:

After the Wall was built, a period of stabilization began in the GDR. The Central Committee’s decision to introduce “a new system of planning and management of the national economy,” in which the individual companies were given more freedom to plan, also led to greater freedom of movement in culture. For example, a broad poetry movement emerged which, following the decisions of the Bitterfeld Conference, uncovered artistic potential in many industrial companies and in the countryside. This also gave rise to the youth radio station DT64, which intensively supported this entire movement. And when the first Hootenanny Club was founded in Berlin in 1964²⁰⁰ and given its own venue in Karl-Marx-Allee, Hootenanny Clubs sprang up like mushrooms in many cities.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ David Robb, “Political Song in the GDR: The Cat-and-Mouse Game with Censorship and Institutions,” in *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, ed. David Robb, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2007), 229.

²⁰⁰ Rebling is referring to the beginning of regular hootenannies in Berlin. The Hootenanny-Klub was not founded as an organizational part of the FDJ until February of 1966.

²⁰¹ “Die Zeitumstände dafür waren günstig. Nach dem Mauerbau begann in der DDR eine Periode der Stabilisierung. Durch den ZK-Beschluß ‘ein neues System der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft’ einzuführen, bei der die einzelnen Betriebe mehr freie Hand für ihre Planungen bekamen, führte das auch in der Kultur zu größerer Freizügigkeit. So etwa entstand eine breite Lyrikbewegung, die nach den Beschlüssen der Bitterfelder Konferenz

This chapter aims to shed light and expand upon the “favorable circumstances” of the 1950s that made the Singebewegung possible.

Starting with the *Bitterfelder Weg*, a cultural program enacted in the GDR in 1959, the first section explains the origins and the practical implications of the program, first in a general overview, and then specifically in terms of music and singing culture. Descriptions of collaborations with the National People’s Army (*National Volksarmee* or NVA) and the development and purpose of the *Kulturhäuser*, as well as the *Arbeiterfestspiele* and *Sängerkonferenz* exemplify how institutions like the Composers’ and Authors’ Associations took part in the “new system of planning and management of the national economy” that created space for musical practices outside the realm of concert music.

The development of “freedom of movement in culture” is undoubtedly related to the so-called Khrushchev Thaw, in which functionaries like Eberhard Rebling, in his efforts to promote mass singing, were able to include foreign musical influences into performance practices. “The other America,” represented by figures like Earl Robinson and Paul Robeson, was of particular interest. A deeper look into the background of the American folk revival, including the Composers Collective of New York and People’s Song, Inc., reveals stark parallels with the efforts in the GDR to encourage a political singing culture two decades later.

Finally, the arrival of Perry Friedman and Earl Robinson in 1959, and their timely introduction to Eberhard Rebling and his wife Lin Jaldati explain the beginnings of the Hootenanny Club.

In the discourse of the time, song — its production, analysis and performance — was claimed by many to be “priority number one” for musicologists and composers.²⁰² Vocal

künstlerische Potenzen in vielen Industriebetrieben und auf dem Lande freilegte. So entstand auch der Jugendrundfunksender DT64, der diese ganze Bewegung intensiv unterstützte. Und als in Berlin 1964 [?] der erste Hootenanny-Klub gegründet wurde und ein eigenes Domizil in der Karl-Marx-Allee bekam, schossen in vielen Städten Hootenanny-Klubs wie Pilze aus dem Boden.“ Eberhard Rebling, “Perry Friedman – lieber Freund und singender Mitstreiter,” in *Wenn die Neugier nicht wär’: Ein Kanadier in der DDR*, by Perry Friedman (Berlin: Dietz, 2004), 173. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

²⁰² Gerhard Bab, “Statt Klärung - Verwirrung?,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 715.

music had the potential to fulfill the imperatives of socialist realism in ways that other arts and instrumental music could not. Firstly, songs, like literature, can deliver socialist realist content directly through text. Secondly, unlike prose or visual arts, songs — especially those which are not intended for concert performance — are easily learned and understood without extensive musical training and can be passed on orally without special materials or organization. Hence, song had the potential to not only affect society by means of transmitting socialist realist content, but also as a performative multiplier that affected the way people interact with each other.

While song was undisputedly important to the arts under socialism, the correct method for creating songs was contested. In subsequent sections, the many paradoxes of socialist realism in musical practice are highlighted by a discussion of conflicting understandings of the definition of song, arguments over the need for professional authorship, as well as differing opinions about song's relationship to German musical heritage and to folk song traditions.

3.1. The Bitterfeld Journey

“It was an important aim of the assignment to establish new, closer relationships between the people who commissioned the work and the composer, and despite some weaknesses, good progress has been made in this respect. The majority of the commissioned works were created in collaboration between composer and the commissioning group. New relationships have emerged, relationships that are profoundly different from those of capitalist society. If you talk about the freedom of purpose of art, the autonomy of the work of art, then you are basically doing nothing other than reducing the relationship between composer and consumer to the relationship of the buyer to a commodity and making the art market the regulator of these relationships.”²⁰³

The term *Bitterfelder Weg* or Bitterfeld Path refers to a cultural-political agenda in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was announced at a literature and publishing conference in the town of Bitterfeld on April 24, 1959. According to Lars Klingberg, the new agenda marked a departure from previous cultural-political policy, through which the State aimed to cultivate a high culture for the working class.²⁰⁴ Ingeborg Gerlach attributes this departure to the “new, in many cases confusing, possibilities” that the Krushchev era had “put in place of the previous uniformism.”²⁰⁵ The policies of the *Bitterfelder Weg* were intended to help bridge the gap between intellectuals and the working population in the

²⁰³ “Es war ein wichtiges Ziel der Auftragserteilung, neue, engere Beziehungen zwischen Auftraggeber und Komponist herzustellen, Hier hat es trotz mancher Schwächen gute Fortschritte gegeben. Die Mehrzahl der Auftragswerke ist im Zusammenwirken von Komponist und Auftraggeber entstanden. Es haben sich neue Beziehungen herausgebildet, Beziehungen, die sich zutiefst von denen der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft unterscheiden. Wenn westdeutsche Musikwissenschaftler und Kritiker der Zweckfreiheit der Kunst, der Autonomie des Kunstwerkes das Wort reden, dann tun sie im Grunde nichts anderes, als das Verhältnis zwischen Komponist und Konsument auf die Beziehung des Käufers zu einer Ware zu reduzieren und den Kunstmarkt zum Regulativ dieser Beziehungen zu machen.” Gerhard Brattke, “Zum Musikalischen Auftragswesen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 195.

²⁰⁴ Lars Klingberg, “Bitterfelder Weg,” in *Musikgeschichte Online*, ed. Nina Noeske, Matthias Tischer, and Lars Klingberg, 2024, accessed June 10, 2024, <https://mugo.hfmt-hamburg.de/de/topics/41>.

²⁰⁵ “Die ‘Ära Chruschtschow’ setzte neue, vielfach verwirrende Möglichkeiten an die Stelle des bisherigen Uniformismus.” Ingeborg Gerlach, *Bitterfeld: Arbeiterliteratur und Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR*. (Kronberg: Scriptor-Verlag, 1974), 20.

form of “*Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter*” or circles or groups of writing workers. In these groups, workers met during or after working hours in order to discuss and write their own poetry or stories with the mentorship of professional writers. In this model, workers would be able to realize their artistic and creative potential by honing their artistic skills, while professionals gained insight into the lives of the proletariat to use as the inspiration for socialist realist works. Although the slogan of the Bitterfelder Weg (Go get a pen, Mate!) focuses on literature, this model was applied to all arts including music with the formation of “*Zirkel komponierender Laien*” or “circles of composing amateurs.”

While most of the literature surrounding the Bitterfelder Weg focuses on these Zirkel and their effectiveness at producing compositions, this chapter aims to present the other theoretical influences, as well as the practical results, of these policies, in which song production played a central role. In turn, it will demonstrate that the State’s goals of collective singing were often at odds with the artistic goals of composers, reflecting the paradox between the continuation of the German musical heritage and the cultivation of the folk music culture that has been described in other chapters.

3.1.1. Conference for authors

Under the motto “pick up the pen, mate, the socialist culture of the German nation needs you” (“*Greif zur Feder, Kumpel, die sozialistische deutsche Nationalkultur braucht dich*”), the Bitterfeld initiative sought to put into practice the cultural imperatives announced by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) at the fifth party congress in 1958. According to Walter Ulbricht’s speech, the working class had already succeeded in taking control of the State and the economy. The proletariat must therefore “storm the heights of culture and seize ownership” of the production of the arts.²⁰⁶ The term “Bitterfelder Weg” therefore came to signify the ideals of artistic creation under socialism as well as the cultural

²⁰⁶ “In Staat und Wirtschaft ist die Arbeiterklasse der DDR bereits der Herr. Jetzt muß sie auch die Höhen der Kultur stürmen und von ihnen Besitz ergreifen.” Walter Ulbricht, quoted in “Referat des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf dem V. Parteitag,” *Neues Deutschland*, July 12, 1958, 5.

policy that would allow the working class to gain access to, and take charge of the arts, the final frontier in the socialist revolution.

Although the original plans for the Bitterfelder Weg were introduced at a writer's conference and the bulk of the subsequent research on the subject has been about the effects on GDR literature, the directives of the Bitterfelder Weg and the fifth conference of the SED were expected to shape culture in general, and the directives were therefore understood to apply to all the arts. In short, the aim of the initiative was to bridge the gap between professional and amateur artistic activity in two ways:

Firstly, amateurs were to gain insight into artistic practice and were encouraged to see themselves as worker-artists. This meant the development of the ideal worker (as the central identity of society) went beyond *Bildung*, i.e., knowledge and understanding of culture. Workers were to see themselves not only as the intended audience for artworks, but also as (amateur) artists, i.e., active participants in the production of a culture *of the People*.

Secondly, professionals were to spend time with actual workers and actively look for ways to take inspiration from working-class life, taking realistic struggles and—most importantly—solutions as the main themes of socialist realist works. The professionals, therefore, were to go beyond the role of cultural stewards, experts, and leaders and engage in an active, mutual artistic discourse with the *Volk*. In turn, this called for an ideological reconfiguration of the standards of “good” art, in an attempt to decouple the measure of artistic quality from the bourgeois hierarchy of society.²⁰⁷ As a result, a diversification of acceptable influences and genres was to be a hallmark of the Bitterfelder Weg for professional artists. The new “socialist German national culture” was meant not merely to maintain German cultural heritage, but also as the inevitable result of a “cultural revolution” and the reconciliation of the Volk with artistic production.

²⁰⁷ Gerlach, *Bitterfeld*, 5.

On Class and Taste

Ingeborg Gerlach describes the Bitterfelder Weg as an attempt to decouple the measure of artistic quality from the bourgeois hierarchy of society.²⁰⁸ In the West, artistic quality was defined by the culture enjoyed by those within the niche of avant-garde elites. Artworks that appealed to the masses were expected to be nothing more than cheap entertainment and were dismissed by the artistic community as such. In contrast, the Bitterfelder Weg was to inspire high art that provided “access to all who are looking for it.”²⁰⁹ This means, artists were to take the taste and background of every individual seriously, regardless of their class. Artistic taste, although no longer associated directly with an elite class, was still dependent on cultural education. This posed little concern to proponents of the Bitterfelder Weg since the extension of the school age had indeed drastically increased standards of education and literacy. The dramatic rise in (cultural) education among the broader population was therefore seen to be in an ever-growing need of culture.

Functionaries like Günter Mehnert recognized that “rapid increase in the level of cultural and educational standards in our society not only raises the overall cultural needs, it also differentiates and individualizes them.”²¹⁰ Diversification of acceptable influences and genres was to be a hallmark of the Bitterfelder Weg. In music, composers were expected to be able to produce string quartets and symphonies, but also “high quality” dance tunes, children’s songs, and operettas that would be performed and enjoyed by diverse sections of the Volk.

This explains, in part, the boom in research pertaining to a “Proletariat heritage” which in many ways countered the reliance on the canonized “German heritage” for artistic education and inspiration. While focusing on the dichotomy between a proletariat and a bourgeois artistic heritage might work as a historical model, it posed problems around the creation and evaluation of contemporary works of art. The realm of acceptable “socialist” art

²⁰⁸ Gerlach, 5.

²⁰⁹ Günter Mehnert, *Aktuelle Probleme des sozialistischen Realismus* (Berlin: Dietz, 1968), 76.

²¹⁰ Mehnert, *Aktuelle Probleme des sozialistischen Realismus*, 76.

was supposed to reflect a post-classist reality, yet the continuation of the “high” (i.e., bourgeois) art traditions alongside the production of “proletarian” works was an admission that class was a determiner of artistic quality, content, and genre.²¹¹

3.1.2. End of the Bitterfeld Path: Dead End or On-Ramp?

The practical ideals of the Bitterfelder Weg were widely discussed, debated, and held as the standard for cultural production throughout the GDR of the early 1960s. Officially, these initial collaborations were celebrated as a success. The initiative was reported not only to have engaged workers in the creation of a wealth of folk literature, but also to have improved productivity, delighting the heads of government. A second *Bitterfelder Konferenz* was held in 1964, but the initial ideals and expectations had already started to lose relevance. In the public discourse, use of the term peaked in 1964. The press made brief mention of the initiative’s ten-year anniversary in 1969, but the term Bitterfelder Weg had all but faded away by the early 1970s.

Complete eradication of the line between amateurs and professionals proved to be an impossible goal. As one contemporary witness stated:

I don’t want to criticize the Bitterfeld Way, because it also has interesting aspects. But the equation between professional and amateur art and these exaggerated demands on amateur art are absurd and idiotic. They led to such rigidities and distortions that I could never agree with them.²¹²

The structures and processes that the Bitterfelder Weg had inspired nonetheless endured for decades as centers of cultural creation in the GDR. Amateurs had relatively easy access to arts clubs, allowing them direct contact with professional artists and opportunities for performance. Although the clubs were an outlet for propaganda, most individuals

²¹¹ See Gerlach, *Bitterfeld*, 6–8.

²¹² “Ich will dem Bitterfelder Weg nichts entgegenstellen, weil der Bitterfelder Weg auch interessante Momente hat. Aber die Gleichsetzung zwischen Berufs- und Laienkunst und diese überspannten Anforderungen an Laienkunst sind absurd und idiotisch. Die haben zu solchen Verhärtungen und Deformierungen geführt, das konnte ich nie teilen.” Wolfgang Petrovsky quoted in Simone Barck, *Bitterfelder Nachlese: Ein Kulturpalast, seine Konferenzen und Wirkungen* (Karl Dietz, 2007), 110.

could practice as they pleased. Perhaps most importantly, the arts clubs provided amateurs with a place for camaraderie and self-expression, and amateur music-making duly flourished. In later decades, local cultural centers became incubators for music of all sorts, especially improvised music, achieving (perhaps) exactly what the ideology behind the Bitterfelder Weg had intended, i.e., the creation of a musical culture that was close to the people.

3.2. Bitterfelder Weg in Practice

In practice, the Bitterfelder Weg took the form of state-wide collaborations between the professional artist associations, mass organizations like the Free German Trade Union Federation (*Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* or FDGB) and local institutions. Perhaps the most significant of these collaborations was the formation of hundreds of local *Zirkel*, “circles for artist workers.” Participation in a *Zirkel* was mainly intended for union members, employees from local factories, and businesses, but was free to all local citizens who wanted to attend. These practices, according to the deputy Minister of Culture, Hans Pischner, were supposed to provide the artistic opportunities that the future socialist society would need to productively utilize the free time they were to gain as soon as the promised four-day workweek came into effect.²¹³

In the case of literature, hundreds of *Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter* (Circles of Writing Workers) were founded; a professional writer was hired to lead each *Zirkel*, providing financial security for many professional writers in all corners of the GDR, including prominent authors like Christa Wolf. Workshops dealt with classic literature and poetry, but also contemporary texts from the GDR and Soviet states. Participants were encouraged to write and share their own work and to experiment with writing in all genres. Since the *Zirkel* were official parts of the cultural apparatus, participants had several outlets for publishing their work. Publishing houses, magazines, academic journals, newspapers, and festival organizers were expected to take *Laienschaffen* (amateur works) into account. The system also provided artistic platforms for up-and-coming, socialist-realist authors like Brigitte Reimann, who exemplified the ideals of socialist realism on paper and embodied them in practice.

²¹³ Hans Pischner, “Die Laienkunst wird zum Kraftquell des sozialistischen Kulturschaftens,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 9 (1959): 322.

3.2.1. "Zirkel" for Amateur Composers

The Association of Composers and Musicologists (VKM) joined in efforts to apply this model throughout its districts, creating musical Zirkel komponierender Arbeiter. In his description of the Bitterfelder Weg for the online research portal *Musikgeschichte Online*, Lars Klingberg reports that, at the peak of the movement, there were around such groups.²¹⁴ Similarly to the *schreibender Arbeiter* model, amateur musicians in the Zirkel komponierender Arbeiter were to learn about music history and theory, to produce their own compositions in every genre, receive critique from professionals, and exchange feedback with their peers. Zirkel members also attended yearly retreats, where they could work intensively with professionals and bond with other amateur composers. At the same time, the professional composers in charge were expected to use these groups to "get nearer to the people" and to produce compositions that liaised between high art and the masses. All of this took place in the hope that "the folksong of *our* time will emerge, as the workers created in the great historical times of productivity around 1500 and 1800."²¹⁵

Astroturfing

The Zirkel-model of the Bitterfelder Weg, the deliberate integration of professional composers of "art music" into the existing realm of music making on the local level, was said to have been inspired by collaborations between local professionals and workers that had been "springing up" around the East throughout the 1950s. Indeed, some professionals had made contact with some workers. Andre Asriel had teamed up with KuBa and spent some days at the *Maschinenausleihstation* (machine lending station) in 1951, not only trying to write songs specifically for the tractor drivers, but also encouraging them to start

²¹⁴ Lars Klingberg, "Bitterfelder Weg," in *Musikgeschichte Online*, ed. Nina Noeske, Matthias Tischer, and Lars Klingberg, 2024, accessed October 6, 2023, <https://mugo.hfmt-hamburg.de/de/topics/41>.

²¹⁵ "Das erweckt auch die Hoffnung, daß das Volkslied *unserer* Zeit entstehen wird, so, wie es die Werktätigen in den großen geschichtlichen Produktivzeiten des Volksliedes, um 1500 und 1800, schufen." Karl Kleinig, "Komponierende Arbeiter in den Buna-Werken," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 79.

writing their own songs, convincing them that “composers and poets were not, in fact, obligatory do-nothings or weirdos.”²¹⁶

Other established worker’s art groups had been meeting for years. The *Malzirkel* for amateur painters in Bitterfeld Wolfen, for example, was founded as early as 1952. Likewise, amateur choirs and ensembles had established themselves in most places and some had connections to the local professionals. The soloists of the Wismar opera house were reported to have “constant collaboration with the folk art groups” starting in 1949.²¹⁷ Since paper shortages and censorship thinned out the selection of available repertoire and most of these existing amateur ensembles were dependent on the acquisition of sheet music to rehearse, it is not impossible that some of these ensembles started creating or arranging their own music with assistance from local musicians. Small scale collaborations are therefore easy to imagine, even if the evidence for them is scant. Mentions of a *Volkskunstbewegung* (folk art movement) are also common in *Musik und Gesellschaft* throughout the 1950s, and reports of *Künstlerbrigade* (artist brigades) of VKM members visiting the Bitterfeld and Buna factories appear almost concurrently with the fifth party conference in 1958.²¹⁸ After 1959, the Bitterfelder Weg could therefore be presented as the organic perpetuation of several local initiatives that were independent from, or even inspiration for, the SED’s new cultural plan.

Looking back, however, historians are skeptical about how organic these projects were in reality. Lars Klingberg, doubts that there was much in the way of a “grassroots” movement of any kind. Instead, he calls this an example of “astroturfing,” i.e., a legitimization strategy that presented top-down cultural policy to look and feel like a bottom-up grass-

²¹⁶ “Durch diesen Kontakt fanden die jungen Traktoristen heraus, dass Komponisten und Dichter nicht notwendig Nichtstuer oder komische Menschen sind.” “Ein junger Musiker lernt vom Volk,” *Neues Deutschland*, April 6, 1951.

²¹⁷ Erhard Karger, “Berufs- und Laienkünstler musizieren Gemeinsam: Solisten der Oper Wismar musizieren in ständiger Zusammenarbeit mit Volkskunstgruppen,” *Volkskunst* 6, no. 4 (1957): 27.

²¹⁸ “Kollege Kurt Schwaen berichtete über eine weitere Brigade des VDK im VEB Elektrochemisches Kombinat Bitterfeld und im VEB Gummiwerke Buna. Auch hier hat sich gezeigt, wie anregend diese Tätigkeit für die Musikschaffenden und für die Förderung der Volkskunstarbeit in den Betrieben ist.” “Aus dem Verandleben,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 8 (1958): 477.

roots movement.²¹⁹ Gilbert Stöck likewise claims that the composer Zirkels never exemplified the ideal mix of artists and blue-collar workers that descriptions of the Bitterfelder Weg had portrayed. Instead, these amateur composers were usually university educated middle management or teachers, most of whom already possessed a musical background and simply lacked the training and experience to be seen as professionals.²²⁰ Furthermore, Stöck argues, the initiative remained centralized in the districts closest to the Bitterfeld factories and no significant number of committed amateur composers was ever found outside Magdeburg and Halle.²²¹

In theory, following the literary Zirkel model, poetic and narrative ideas from the “folk” could be workshopped into prose by amateur writers and published, read, and discussed with relative ease, providing professionals with a wealth of discourse from which to take inspiration. For the realm of music, however, this proved to be difficult. Stöck points out that it was impossible to replicate this model in the realm of musical composition, claiming that, while a select few could benefit by having their songs or chamber works performed or published, the goal of musical composition was too far fetched for ordinary amateurs. The initiative of cultivating amateur composers was therefore “politically questionable and ultimately unfeasible.”²²²

Klingberg also asserts that there was a lack of enthusiasm among professional artists, many of whom limited their work with amateurs to quick visits (*Blitzbesuche*) to the factories and sporadic sponsorships (*Patenschaften*) of amateur clubs.²²³ Indeed, even though the Bitterfelder Weg was presented enthusiastically in the written discourse and *Musik und Gesellschaft* regularly published positive reports on the “composing amateurs,” the stated goals of the Zirkel collaborations seem more for the sole benefit of the workers. Descriptions of the professionals’ duty remained similar to those before the Bitterfeld conference,

²¹⁹ Klingberg, “Bitterfelder Weg.”

²²⁰ Gilbert Stöck, “Musik auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg’: Auftragswerke und Zirkelarbeit, insbesondere zur Förderung komponierender Arbeiter,” in *Aufbau, Arbeit, Sehnsucht: Bildende Kunst, Literatur und Musik auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg,’* 1st ed. (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2022), 104.

²²¹ Stöck, 105.

²²² Stöck, 106.

²²³ Klingberg, “Bitterfelder Weg.”

aiming to “raise the level of the amateur music making and to help folk music ensembles with putting together an advanced repertoire.”²²⁴ Practically speaking, many composers seem to have continued to work *for* the working class instead of *with* them, as the Bitterfelder Weg had dictated. By 1965, when composers were asked to describe their musical goals for the future, even composers like Kurt Schwaen and Johannes Paul Thilman, two composers who had often worked with amateurs, responded with answers that excluded them from their stated goals entirely.²²⁵

In the case of orchestral music, it was easier to accept that professional composers would remain as the creators. Liedschaffen, however, became a topic of debate: What was to be the role of amateurs in the creation of “the folksongs of our times?”

Many song composers — at least in writing—made their enthusiasm for working with amateurs known. Kurt Schwaen and Joachim Werzlau, for example, successfully positioned themselves as champions of the amateur music movement before and after the Bitterfeld Conference. Paul Kurzbach and Siegfried Köhler likewise published articles regularly in the *Kulturhaus’s* journal *Volkskunst*. At least one song was published on the back cover of each issue of that journal, and biographies of composers appeared in every issue starting in January of 1959. A long history of *Laienarbeit* (amateur work) increasingly became a coveted credential for professional artists. Those who could position themselves as having built long-standing relationships with amateur music-makers found themselves with new platforms and positions.

Schwaen’s biography and output exemplified his own convictions about the importance of closing the “fatal divide between amateur and professional art.”²²⁶ “In order to achieve this goal,” he wrote in 1952 in his book, *Über Volksmusik und Laienmusik*, “it is necessary to create a broad basis for artistic activity, on which the highest works of art rise

²²⁴ Heinrich Funk, “Arbeitstagung über das Laienmusizieren in Weimar,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 8 (1958): 519.

²²⁵ Kurt Schwaen, Paul Thilman, et al., “Heute, morgen, übermorgen: Komponisten sagen ihre Meinung,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1965): 303-4.

²²⁶ “Es wird von fortschrittlichen Kräften erkannt, dass es notwendig ist, die verhängnisvolle Kluft zwischen der Laienkunst und der Berufskunst zuzuschließen.” Kurt Schwaen, *Über Volksmusik und Laienmusik* (Dresdner Verlag, 1952), 10.

organically, not an art *for* the people, but *from* the people.”²²⁷ The book presents several compositional methods for bridging elitist and folk traditions,²²⁸ but does not say how art is supposed to come *from* the people in practice when the job of composers was to continue to make music *for* the people. In other words, although Schwaen personified at least one side of the Bitterfelder Weg in that he championed amateur music making, his writing matched the tone of his peers in later years. In his biography and his writing, the artistic inspiration that professionals were supposed to find in amateur collaboration—and which was supposed to be the second pillar of the Bitterfelder Weg—remained unmentioned.

3.2.2. Institutional Collaborations

Top-Down Attempts at a Singing Movement

The Bitterfelder Weg was an important part of the rhetoric surrounding another initiative for singing, the *I. Kongress der sozialistischen Sängerbewegung* (First Conference of the Socialist Singer Movement) held in Leipzig in early December 1960. Like what would later be named the Singebewegung (Singing Movement), the *Sängerbewegung* (Singers movement) was meant to be a new way of musical understanding that encouraged collective singing. However, while the Singebewegung was presented as a grass-roots development, the

²²⁷ “Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, ist es notwendig, eine breite Basis für die künstlerische Betätigung zu schaffen, auf der sich die höchsten Kunstwerke organisch erheben, nicht eine Kunst *für* das Volk, sondern *aus* dem Volk, eine Kunst des ganzen Volkes, so dass Volkskunst der umfassende Begriff ist, da alles in sich einschließt.” Author’s emphasis. Schwaen, 10.

²²⁸ Gesine Schröder, “Nationale Musik: Musik im Dienst am Volk. Zu einer Variante sozialistisch-realistischer Musik der frühen DDR: Der Fall Kurt Schwaen,” *Studia Musicologica* 56, no. 4 (2015): 307.

top-down origin of the *Sängerbewegung*²²⁹ was overtly present in the discourse, as the announcement of the festival was reprinted in several publications.²³⁰ According to contemporary reports, plans for a singer-conference had been initiated in a 1958 central committee meeting of choirs, in direct response to the Fifth Party Conference of the SED and the announcement of the new *Siebenjahrplan* (Seven year plan). The conference's organization was attributed to the FGDB, Ministry of Culture and the FDJ.

If the Composers' Association had a role in the organization, it appears to have been a small one. Nevertheless, the conference was highlighted in the first article of the January, 1961 issue of the VKM's journal, *Musik und Gesellschaft*, in the form of an open letter to the head of state, Walter Ulbricht, from the delegation committee of the singer-conference. Here, the motto of the conference, "Sing the Song of Socialism!" is used to highlight the importance of singing in every corner of organized society:

The song of socialism is a joyful song. We want to sing it in all its forms and permeate all aspects of our lives with this singing, in the clubs of the working people, in the village clubs, in the brigades, in the units of the armed forces, in the schools, in the youth association and in the pioneer groups, in sports, games and socializing and at family celebrations.²³¹

²²⁹ Although the two terms look similar, their meanings differ slightly in connotation. Directly translated, "Sängerbewegung" means "The (male) singers' movement" and therefore focuses more on the individuals that form a chorus. "Singerbewegung" is related to the imperative of the verb "singen" and therefore translates roughly to "Go-and-Sing Movement." Interestingly, the latter puts more emphasis on the act of singing and the will to sing, rather than on an implied imperative. Furthermore, a third term "Singbewegung" (Singing Movement) denotes the folksinging revival of the 1920s and 30s.

²³⁰ See e.g., Die Delegierten des I. Kongresses der sozialistischen Sängerbewegung der DDR, "Wir singen das Lied des Sozialismus," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 2-3; Erhard Karger, "Singt das Lied des Sozialismus!," *Volkskunst* 10, no. 2 (1961): 28; Werner Wolf, "Singt das Lied des Sozialismus," *Neues Deutschland*, December 12, 1960, 5.

²³¹ "Das Lied des Sozialismus ist ein fröhliches Lied. Wir wollen es in allen seinen Formen singen und mit diesem Singen alle Seiten unseres Lebens durchdringen, das Leben in den Klubs der Werktätigen, in den Dorfkclubs, in den Brigaden, in den Einheiten der bewaffneten Organe, in den Schulen, im Jugendverband und in den Pioniergruppen, bei Sport, Spiel und Geselligkeit und bei den Festen der Familie." Die Delegierten des I. Kongresses der sozialistischen Sängerbewegung der DDR, "Wir singen das Lied des Sozialismus," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 2.

After the open letter was published, a report on the conference appeared in the next issue²³². This likewise underlines the importance of opportunities for informal (*zwanglos*) public singing as “prerequisites for the flourishing of socialist choral singing.”²³³ Choral teams (*Chorarbeitsgemeinschaften*) at every place of employment and local district should dedicate various forms of singing to

public singing at a wide variety of occasions such as residents’ meetings or informal gatherings in cultural centers, village clubs, singing at demonstrations and marches, singing within the National People’s Army, in the German People’s Police, in workplace combat groups, in the Society for Sport and Technology, in the basic organizations of the FDJ, the FDGB, and other mass organizations.²³⁴

Both of these articles also discuss appropriate repertoire, of which the classical canon is an important part. Singing in choirs allows regular people to “embrace masterpieces of art and to shape their own lives artistically.”²³⁵ The “great works of our national heritage”²³⁶ should, however, stand next to the “beautiful melodies” of traditional folksongs, and there should be a “loving upkeep” of the song traditions of the workers’ movements.

Yet “the Song of Socialism” should not be limited to choral singing. It should also include the “smaller forms” like solos and duets, chansons, and love songs, as well as new amateur operas and operettas. Werner Wolf’s report in *Musik und Gesellschaft* mentions how

²³² Werner Wolf, “Wir singen das Lied des Sozialismus,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 82–87.

²³³ Wolf, “Wir Singen,” 82.

²³⁴ “Entschieden größere Aufmerksamkeit als bisher werden aber der Choraussschuß und die Chorarbeitsgemeinschaften der Bezirke und Kreise unserer Republik den anderen Formen des Singens zu widmen haben: Wirken junger Talente, dem Singen in der Schule, dem offenen Singen bei verschiedensten Anlässen wie Einwohnerversammlungen oder auch ganz zwanglosen Zusammenkünften in Kulturhäusern, Dorfklubs, dem Singen bei Demonstrationen und Aufmärschen, dem Singen in der Nationalen Volksarmee, in der Deutschen Volkspolizei, in den Kampfgruppen der Betriebe, in der Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik, in den Grundorganisationen der FDJ, des FDGB und den anderen Massenorganisationen. Damit werden faktisch erst wichtige künstlerische Voraussetzungen für eine Blüte des sozialistischen Chorsingens geschaffen.” Wolf, “Wir Singen,” 82.

²³⁵ Wolf, “Wir Singen,” 84.

²³⁶ Die Delegierten des I. Kongresses der sozialistischen Sängerbewegung der DDR, “Wir singen das Lied des Sozialismus,” 3.

composers would have to adjust their compositional output to accommodate the new singing lifestyle. In line with the ideals of the Bitterfelder Weg, composers are to have “[p]recise knowledge of the [people’s] wishes, close contact with the life of the respective groups and units” so that their songs “hit the mark” while also providing new content and expression.²³⁷ If a new song didn’t “hit,” the reasons for its failure should be analyzed.²³⁸

Outside the context of *Musik und Gesellschaft*, descriptions of the singer-conference also appeared in the newspapers. One article in *Neues Deutschland* describes the singer-conference in metaphorical terms, as a way to heal “sick” ensembles, i.e., those who are resistant to the new socialist singing life and who lack engagement with the democratic processes of the central choir committee of the GDR.²³⁹ The author reports 40 vocal ensembles in his home district of Löbau, a smaller town near the borders of Poland and the Czech Republic, including such “sick” ensembles, which he hopes would seek “medicine” by joining the others in actively developing socialist life. Wolfgang Hanke further emphasized the importance of singing in small villages in his article “In jedem Dorf ein Chor (A Choir in Every Village)”²⁴⁰ while also calling on professional composers to give more guidance to small-town amateurs.

While all the articles mention the importance of children’s choral education, it is notable that youth initiatives are listed in this context primarily as a pipeline for providing singers and choral directors for ensembles at workplaces and other *Brigaden*. The focus on adult singing seems to have lost importance, however, and, although all reports announced the conference as the First Singer Conference, subsequent conferences of its kind failed to take place.

²³⁷ Wolf, “Wir Singen,” 86.

²³⁸ Efforts to make such analyses are discussed in the Liedschaffen discussion that occurred in *Musik und Gesellschaft* from 1961 to 1963. See section “Liedschaffen under Debate” below.

²³⁹ Ernst König, “Die Gesunden und die Kranken: Kreisgemeinschaft fordert künstlerische Entwicklung der sozialistischen Sängerbewegung,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 12, 1960, 4.

²⁴⁰ Wolfgang Hanke, “In jedem Dorf ein Chor: Rückschau auf den ersten sozialistischen Chorkongreß der DDR,” *Neue Zeit*, November 12, 1960, 4.

Autorenehe: Teaming up for the National Army

The ideals of the Bitterfelder Weg were put into practice through planned collaborations between the VKM and the two most important mass organizations, the Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Free German Trade Union Federation; FDGB), and the Freier Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth; FDJ), as well as the National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*, NVA). In the summer preceding the Bitterfeld Conference, several co-operations with the NVA were reported in *Musik und Gesellschaft*.²⁴¹ Composer Gerhard Bab reported on a "brigade" of VKM members working with the military base in Eggesin as early as June 1958.²⁴² More details can be found in a report by Werner Rackwitz: A Künstlerbrigade (artist brigade) of volunteers from the VKM and the Authors' Association visited the bases to take stock of the cultural life of the soldiers. This report describes the various soldier choirs as well as groups for Cabaret, Agitprop, and pantomime.

Rackwitz reports that "the brigade, of course, was burning to know what our soldiers were singing on the march or in camp," but was disappointed to learn that many wanted a sort of "socialist version of [the Nazi's military composer] Herms Niel."²⁴³ Apparently, it was important to point out that a top-down approach, wherein soldiers had little to do with the creative process, was not working. The brigade's proposed solution was that composers needed to stop writing complicated songs, start studying soldiers' songs as a serious genre, and most importantly:

It is a necessary task for our composers—especially the younger ones—to study the special features of the soldier's song in practice, to be together with the soldiers on the march and in training for a longer period of time, so that they will be able to create songs that are easy to sing, that can be marched to, that tie in with the revolutionary traditions of the workers' song, but, in their attitude, intonation, and melodic progression, are also an expression of our time.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ "Aus dem Verandleben," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 8 (1958): 477.

²⁴² Werner Rackwitz, "Eine Künstlerbrigade bei der Nationalen Volksarmee," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 8 (1958): 450–51.

²⁴³ Rackwitz, 451.

²⁴⁴ "Es ist eine notwendige Aufgabe für unsere Komponisten—vor allem für die jüngeren—, in der Praxis die Besonderheiten des Soldatenliedes zu studieren, selbst längere Zeit mit den Soldaten auf dem Marsch, in der Ausbildung zusammen zu sein, dann werden sie auch

In line with the principles of the Bitterfelder Weg, the only way to produce relevant, useful tunes for contemporary soldiers is for composers and poets to experience soldier life first-hand. These efforts were reported as fruitful, but calls for new soldier songs would remain a topic on the agenda of the VKM.²⁴⁵ Another call from the NVA came in 1962, after the erection of the Berlin Wall and the military draft that followed.

Less than three weeks after military service for young men had become mandatory, the deputy Minister of Defense, Admiral Waldemar Verner, wrote to the VKM on February 12, 1962, requesting that the organization commission new song repertoire for the NVA. After meetings with the Ministry of Defense and the Authors' Association (DSV), Wolfgang Lesser explained the situation to the heads of the VKM branches in Leipzig, Weimar, Halle, Dresden, Schwerin, and Berlin in a letter dated April 4:

A few days ago, a meeting was held with responsible officials of the Ministry of National Defense and representatives of the German Writers' Association and our association. The comrades of the People's Army complained about the lack of new soldier songs. There are quite a number of songs, but they are not sung with pleasure, because they are too often stuck in generic declarations and phrasing, or have other shortcomings. A very diverse range of songs is needed for all occasions (i.e., not only for marching), as well as specialized ones for individual types of weaponry. The Army asks us to indicate which of our colleagues would be willing to change this situation. It is thought that a composer and a writer together could get a contact to a division and write songs out of the knowledge of the circumstances. It would be good if the composer could name his lyricist. The contact with the unit can be scheduled by the colleagues themselves, whereby it is possible both to stay there for a few days at a time and, of course, to make several visits.

Lieder schaffen können, die gut zu singen sind, nach denen man marschieren kann, die anknüpfen an die revolutionären Traditionen des Arbeiterliedes, die aber auch in ihrer Haltung, in der Intonation, dem Melodieverlauf Ausdruck unserer Zeit sind." Rackwitz, 451.

²⁴⁵ "Der Wunsch nach neuen Soldatenliedern wurde auf dem letzten Kongreß des Verbandes Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler deutlich ausgesprochen." Wolf, "Wir Singen," 85-86.

The resulting absence from work is to be compensated by the army. Likewise, of course, the new songs will be remunerated. After this arrangement, we have the feeling that the National People's Army will not be stingy in this matter. We ask you to name the colleagues who have agreed to do this work before Easter and also to name the dates on which visits to the army are possible.

Yours sincerely,
Wolfgang Lesser²⁴⁶

This time the initiative was to be more streamlined. Local teams of one composer and one poet were to visit their district's military bases for an extended amount of time. This work, Lesser assured, would be paid and the letter makes sure to point out that the NVA will surely not be tight-fisted. Some responses, like that from Marianne Döppe, the secretary for the VKM district office in Halle, replied skeptically, and hint strongly at an unwillingness for composers to work on site:

Dear colleague Lehmann!

The request to create new soldier songs for the People's Army was announced at our last general meeting. The colleagues present are prepared to get involved creatively as soon as we are provided with suitable texts.

As almost all of our colleagues are in permanent employment, it is difficult to work in the army for several days at a time. This is hardly feasible unless they are freelance composers.

²⁴⁶ "Vor einigen Tage fand eine Beratung mit verantwortlichen Mitarbeitern des Ministeriums für Nationale Verteidigung und Vertretern des Deutschen Schriftstellerverbandes und unseres Verbandes statt. Die Genossen der Volksarmee klagten über den Mangel an neuen Soldatenliedern. Es gibt zwar eine ganze Anzahl von Liedern, die aber nicht gern gesungen werden, da sie zu oft im allgemeinen, deklamatorischen und phrasenhaften steckenbleiben oder andere Mängel haben. Es wird eine sehr bunte Palette von Liedern für alle Gelegenheiten (also nicht nur zum marschieren), sowie für einzelne Waffengattungen etwas spezialisiert benötigt. Die Armee bittet uns mitzuteilen, welche unserer Kollegen bereit wären diese Situation zu verändern. Es ist daran gedacht, daß ein Komponist und ein Schriftsteller gemeinsam einen Kontakt zu einer Division vermittelt bekommen und aus der Kenntnis der Gegebenheiten heraus Lieder schreiben. Es wäre also gut, wenn schon der Komponist seinen Textdichter mit benennen könnte. Der Kontakt mit der Einheit kann terminlich von den Kollegen selbst bestimmt werden, wobei es sowohl möglich ist, einige Tage zusammenhängend dort zu bleiben, als natürlich auch mehrmals hinzufahren. Der daraus entstehende Arbeitsausfall soll von der Armee vergütet werden. Desgleichen werden natürlich auch die neuen Lieder honoriert. Nach dieser Absprache haben wir das Gefühl, Daß die Nationale Volksarmee in dieser Frage nicht kleinlich sein wird. Wir bitten Sie, uns noch vor stern die Kollegen zu benennen, die sich für diese Arbeit bereiterklärt haben und auch gleich die Termine zu nennen, an denen Besuche bei der Armee möglich sind. Mit freundlichen Grüßen, Wolfgang Lesser" Wolfgang Lesser, "Korrespondenz zur Schaffung neuer Soldatenlieder (1)," April 4, 1962, VKM 309, AdK.

The texts that are given to us by you or by the DSV, Halle district, will of course be sent immediately to the appropriate composers for setting to music.

For the time being, we cannot provide any further information.

With kind regards,
Döppe, Sekretariat²⁴⁷

Other responses, like the letters from Irene Dingelstedt, the secretary for the district of Dresden, seem quite enthusiastic. In a letter from April 14, she replied that the VKM in Dresden had already had contacts with the base in Weißenfels and dubbed the idea of pairing a poet and composer an “*Autorenehe*” (author marriage), naming Heinz Rusch and Siegfried Stolte as candidates.²⁴⁸ Two days later she reported that Herr (Johannes Paul) Thilman had already contacted the new base in Prora, set one of the soldier’s texts to music, and that the song was already being learned and actively sung. The next month she reported that Helmut Böhmer and four other composers had volunteered for the project, but that poets had still to be arranged.

The term “Autorenehe” seems to have been used for later projects, at least by VKM members in Leipzig. It also appears in a letter from the district secretary, Ms. Dähne, to Herbert Lehmann in the summer of 1962, referring to the *Autorenkollektiv* — collaborations between the radio, the Writers’ Association and the VKM. Although perhaps given a

²⁴⁷ “Lieber Kollege Lehmann! Die Aufforderung, für die Volksarmee neue Soldatenlieder zu schaffen, haben wir in unserer letzten Mitgliederversammlung bekanntgegeben. Die anwesenden Kollegen sind bereit, sich hier schöpferisch einzuschalten, sobald uns entsprechende Texte zur Verfügung gestellt werden. Da fast sämtliche Kollegen in fester Anstellung sind, ist es schwierig, mehrere Tage zusammenhängend in der Armee zu arbeiten. Das läßt sich wohl kaum durchführen, soweit es sich nicht um freiberufliche Komponisten handelt. Die Texte, die von Ihnen bzw. Vom DSV, Bezirk Halle an uns gegeben werden, erhalten selbstverständlich sofort die entsprechenden Komponisten zur Vertonung. Mehr können wir vorerst dazu nicht mitteilen. Mit freundlichen Grüßen, Döppe, Sekretariat” Marianne Döppe, “Korrespondenz zur Schaffung neuer Soldatenlieder (3),” June 24, 1962, VKM 309, AdK.

²⁴⁸ “Lieber Kollege Lesser! Für Deinen Brief möchte ich mich bedanken und Dir vorerst mitteilen, daß unser Vorschlag, den Einsatz bei der Volksarmee betreffend, wie folgt ist: Wir haben bereits seit einigen Jahren gute Verbindungen zur Volksarmee in Weißenfels. Wir schlagen als ‘Autorenehe’ für diese hoffentlich ständige Aktion Heinz Rusch und Siegfried Stolte vor. Weitere Vorschläge erhältst Du nach Ostern. Wir hoffen, Daß wir von Weißenfels dann recht bald Bescheid bekommen. Mit freundlichen Grüßen, Dingelstedt” Irene Dingelstedt, “Korrespondenz zur Schaffung neuer Soldatenlieder (2),” June 14, 1962, VKM 309, AdK.

purposefully humorous name, the idea of an *Autorenebe*, an arranged partnership between a lyricist and composer, was a pragmatic and possibly historically influenced one. Similar song-writing teams had already been active at least a decade earlier, as evidenced by the efforts of composer Andre Asriel and poet KuBa in 1951.²⁴⁹ The infrastructure of the writers and composers associations made such teams a very practical option, as local offices had direct contact with the professionals on the ground who would be the most likely to be involved with artistic exchange. While the idea that composers and poets could draw inspiration from contact with the soldiers was directly in line with the Bitterfelder Weg, the idea of forming song-writing duos is also prevalent in German music history.

Some of the most successful German song creations, according to GDR music historians, were born out of composer-poet collaborations. Perhaps most notably, Schubert's close friendships with many poets had been presented by Harry Goldschmidt as a central aspect of his work, including his "brotherly" cohabitation and intense friendship with Johann Mayrhofer.²⁵⁰ Close collaboration with contemporary poets was one more aspect that could be used to draw a historical link from Schubert to modern Massenlied and the great song composers of (East) German music history. Dessau's most beloved songs resulted from collaboration with his first wife, Gudrun Kabisch (*Die Thälmann-Kolonnen*), or Bertolt Brecht. Eisler's entire song oeuvre—from Massenlied, to national anthem, to art song—was primarily defined by his close collaborations with Brecht and Johannes R. Becher.²⁵¹

After 1965, the NVA would eventually gain a continual *Autorenebe* of sorts, yet it is unlikely that this was related to the VKM's efforts. The poet-composer team of Siegfried

²⁴⁹ Asriel, "Ein junger Musiker lernt vom Volk," 3.

²⁵⁰ Harry Goldschmidt, *Franz Schubert: Ein Lebensbild*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1958), 126.

²⁵¹ Indeed, Eisler's settings of non-contemporary lyrics were seen to have led to "slight disharmony": "Es ist kaum zu bezweifeln, daß in letzterer Hinsicht, aber auch im Hinblick auf die Geschlossenheit des Ganzen die Komposition zeitgenössischer Texte meist am günstigsten ist, am überzeugendsten wirkt (vgl. Goethe-Schubert, Heine, Eichendorff-Schumann, Brecht-Eisler, Dessau) das gilt natürlich trotz mancher Umtextierung auch für das Volkslied, während größere zeitliche Differenzen leicht zur Disharmonie führen (Goethe-Wolf, Hölderlin-Eisler)." Walther Siegmund-Schultze, "Bemerkungen zu Begriff und Gattung Lied," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 12 (1962): 95.

Berthold and Kurt Greiner-Pol became the resident song-writers for the Erich-Weinert-Ensemble after it became the official musical face of the NVA in 1965.²⁵² The integration of soldiers' songs into everyday life became the task of the Ensemble's concerts and recordings, and the team's songs are featured on many post-1970 military LPs, although, as Peter Fauser argues, these had little to do with what soldiers actually sang on base.²⁵³

Further documents make reference to a continued discussion between members of the VKM and NVA. A note from November 26, 1962, reports that several marching songs had been produced and were being sung by the soldiers. The note also reports that singing lessons for soldiers were to become mandatory starting in December. A note from March 29, 1963, tells us that singing lessons had not yet commenced,²⁵⁴ but names several songs that have supposedly resulted from the "Autorenehe" collaboration, all of which had reportedly been published in the weekly military newspaper *Volksarmee* or the military's monthly publication *Wissen und Kämpfen*:

Werzlau: "Die Kleine Stadt" (Das erste Regiment)
Zimmermann: "Susi"
Natschinski: "Ich hab' Dich nicht vergessen"
Kaufmann: Soldatenlied (Titel Moment nicht bekannt)
Winkler: "Soldat sein, heißt fröhlich sein"
Fiebig: "Der weg in die Zukunft"

These songs were listed as the most *beiter* or cheerful and therefore could be appropriate for the upcoming Arbeiterfestspiele. Joachim Werzlau's song, "Das erste Regiment," would be published in the *International Musikbibliothek's* periodical sheet music series *Unser neues Lied* in 1964. Rolf Zimmermann, a successful pop composer, had already recorded a foxtrot with the title of "Susi Melody" on the Amiga label in 1959. It is unclear if the previous work and that listed here are related, but if they are the same tune, it is unlikely that it was created as a part of the "Autorenehe" initiative. The name next to the untitled

²⁵² The duo is also credited for many songs on records for the FDJ.

²⁵³ Peter Fauser, "Friedenthematik und soldatische Prägung: Zum politischen Lied in der DDR," in *Die Entdeckung des sozialkritischen Liedes: Zum 100. Geburtstag von Wolfgang Steinitz*, ed. Eckhard John, *Volksliedstudien* 7 (Münster: Waxmann, 2006), 105.

²⁵⁴ "Akten-Notiz 29.3.63 NI/LT Über ein Telefongespräch mit Oberstleutnant Schick von der NVA," March 29, 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

“Soldatenlied” may refer to Willi Kaufmann, the composer who had assumed musical leadership of the Volkspolizei in 1960 and who was therefore unlikely to have needed to participate in the *Autorenehe* to have personal contact with the military. It can be assumed that “Soldat sein, heißt fröhlich sein” is attributed here to pop composer and music editor for VEB Lied der Zeit, Willibald Winkler, but evidence that it was printed or recorded has yet to be discovered. Of this list, Natschinski’s “Ich hab’ dich nicht vergessen” seems to have gained the most traction, at least outside the context of the military, being recorded by pop singer Hartmut Eichler and released by the Amiga label on several records in 1963.

Since a complete analysis of soldiers’ songs and their reception is not possible here, the true effects of the *Autorenehe* initiative on the singing culture of the NVA are inconclusive. However, this initial research into efforts at popularization suggest that the initiative was relatively unsuccessful in producing a wealth of soldiers’ songs that made much material impact in terms of publications or recordings. According to Peter Fauser, soldiers didn’t sing on their own in any case, only when ordered to do so. In the end, all efforts to popularize soldiers’ songs are an example of how “theory a.k.a. propaganda diverged from the real life of the people.”²⁵⁵ The impracticalities of such a project are also apparent in the VKM’s own documentation. Many composers were reluctant to take part; others blamed the difficulty of writing relevant songs on the lack of impactful lyrics; the disconnect between the aesthetic interests of serious composers and the expectations of soldiers seemed unsurmountable. Many songs that are mentioned in the documentation of the VKM also even seem to derive from other modes of working, not out of an idealized partnership model that could be fit into the grand German tradition of the Eisler/Brecht collaborations. Evidence about which professionals actually took part and to what extent the local projects reflected the original plans has yet to be uncovered.

However, similarly to the Bitterfelder Weg in general, this initiative was successful in other, less material ways. Even if the intended output of the collaboration between individ-

²⁵⁵ Fauser, “Friedensthematik und soldatische Prägung,” 106.

ual artists and soldiers was limited, the plan initiated a discourse between artistic organizations and broader society and further generated discussions about the purpose, impact, and performance of songs in the GDR.

Working with the Workers' Union

Workplace singing ensembles had already become commonplace in many factories and small towns, and the FDGB had worked to provide them with a wealth of new songs and arrangements of classic folksongs and Massenlieder, commissioning songs and publishing sheet music specifically for these choirs since 1950. The FDGB's *Kommission für kulturelle Massenarbeit* (Committee for Mass Culture),²⁵⁶ in collaboration with music publishers or independently from their own publishing houses, published song books such as *Songs for Workers: A Choral Song Collection for our Union Choirs and Singing Groups*²⁵⁷ from 1950, *Our Cry for Peace!: A Collection of Soviet Songs of Peace*²⁵⁸ from 1951, and *...And on Stalinallee: A Collection of New Songs and Lyrics for the National Construction Plan*²⁵⁹ from 1952. Starting around that time, the *FDGB-Liedblätter*, a regular series of choral arrangements of songs, was published. Initially a co-operation with the Mitteldeutscher Verlag, the project later transferred to the Hofmeister Verlag, resulting in three volumes of *Brüder am Werk (Brothers at (the Art) Work)*, hardbound song collections. According to a draft copy of the contract between the two organizations, the FDGB was obliged to consult the VDK on all publications of music literature.²⁶⁰ As described in the next chapter, members of the VKM worked in close collaboration with the FDGB on the production of these publications, providing musical expertise, vetting compositions, and editing scores. These publications provide evidence that the official apparatus of the State recognized (or at least wished

²⁵⁶ This name was changed in the early sixties to *Kommission für Kultur und Bildung* (Committee for Culture and Education).

²⁵⁷ *Lieder für Werktätige: Eine Chorliederzusammenstellung für unsere Betriebschöre und Singgruppen* (Berlin: Die Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund, 1950).

²⁵⁸ Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, *Unser Friedensruf!: Eine Sammlung neuer sowjetischer Friedenslieder* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1951).

²⁵⁹ "... und an der Stalinallee" *Eine Sammlung neuer Lieder- und Textmaterialien zum Nationalen Aufbauprogramm* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1952).

²⁶⁰ "Thesen zur Veränderung der Vereinbarung über die Zusammenarbeit mit dem FDGB," June 2, 1964, Berlin, AdK.

to foster) a singing culture that took place amongst workers, both in and outside the concert hall.

Kulturhäuser

Workers in cities and in small towns were also supplied with ample rehearsal and performance spaces through the construction and maintenance of *Kulturhäuser*. Shortly after the founding of the GDR in 1949, these houses of culture (as well as smaller *Klubs der Werktätigen* and *Dorfklubs*) were built to provide central meeting places in every town, as well as in or around major workplaces like factories from the early 1950s on. Originally, the organization in charge of the Kulturhäuser was named Zentralstelle für Volkskunst (Central Office for Folk Art), but as the responsibilities and importance of the Kulturhaus grew, the name of the organization underwent changes that reflected the changing cultural-political goals of the GDR. The Zentralstelle für Volkskunst became the Zentralhaus für Laienkunst (Central House for Amateur Art) in 1952, the Zentralhaus für Volkskunst (Central House for Folk Art) in 1954 and finally the Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR (Central House for Cultural Work) in 1962. Businesses were required to allocate a percentage of their budget for the construction and maintenance of Kulturhäuser; The Elektrochemischen Kombinat Bitterfeld alone dedicated two million Marks to its yearly cultural budget, 200,000 of it dedicated to the various Zirkels for amateur artists.²⁶¹ Most such facilities were equipped with large halls that could host community meetings and dances, theaters, and concert halls, as well as smaller meeting and class rooms. The Zentralhaus regularly published booklets with repertoire recommendations for everyday practice as well as for public events like “*Jugendweihen*,” secular coming-of-age ceremonies. One of the most prominent Kulturhäuser was the Kulturhaus “Völkerfreundschaft” (Peoples’ Friendship), associated with the Buna chemical company in the town of Schkopau. The Buna would become one of the most prominent amateur musical ensembles and, under the leadership of Karl Kleinig, one of the most productive and long-lasting composers’ circles.

²⁶¹ Eckhart J. Gillen, “Die Utopie der Einheit von Kunst und Leben: Eine Ideengeschichte des ‘Bitterfelder Weges,’” in *Aufbau, Arbeit, Sehnsucht: Bildende Kunst, Literatur und Musik auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg’* (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2022), 25.

When compared to their surroundings, some of the Kulturhäuser were immense. Located between Merseburg and Halle, Schkopau had a population of less than 6000, yet the facilities boasted a 750-seat theater, a 250-seat concert hall, restaurants, and rehearsal rooms. Another prominent example, the Kulturpalast in Bitterfeld, the venue for the Bitterfeld Conference built in 1952, had a main concert hall with 1000 seats, a restaurant, and various other smaller performance venues, as well as more than 240 rooms that were freely accessible to members of the community at no cost.

Undeniably, the State had a considerable amount of influence in and around the Kulturhäuser. The spaces were utilized for a multitude of political purposes, including official festivals, concerts, and party events. Zirkel members also enjoyed certain advantages by demonstrating the Bitterfelder Weg in action, including awards for and cash prizes for *Künstlerisches Volksschaffen*. Experienced groups would often receive paid commissions for paintings, theater productions or even large-scale musical works.

Nevertheless, until at least the mid-sixties, the Kulturhaus was regarded by its proponents as “a place where the wishes of ‘das Volk’ are realized”;²⁶² it was an idea that was as much about meeting people’s leisure-time needs (*Freizeitbedürfnisse*) as it was about political Erziehung. Thus, even for commissions for explicitly political events, the artists retained a large amount of artistic freedom.²⁶³ Groups were expected to be self-organized by their own members and to make decisions, even many artistic ones, collectively, and the continued success of any group was dependent upon the needs, interests, and tastes of its members. To the chagrin of some functionaries, like those who wanted to found a Komponistenzirkel in Bitterfeld, some planned groups failed to get off the ground.²⁶⁴ New groups could be founded by individuals who were interested in any certain topic, including those outside the realm of the established artistic categories, or *Fachsparten*. Thus, “new

²⁶² Horst Groschopp, “Kulturhäuser zwischen Volkshaus und Kunstpalast,” in *Bitterfelder Nachlese: Ein Kulturpalast, seine Konferenzen und Wirkungen*, by Simone Barck (Berlin: Karl Dietz, 2007), 34–36.

²⁶³ Marc Meißner, “Kunst und Kultur für alle auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg?’ Das betriebliche Volkskunstschaffen am Beispiel der Zirkelarbeit im Kulturpalast des Chemiekombinates Bitterfeld,” 139. See also Ute Mohrmann, *Engagierte Freizeitkunst Werdegang und Entwicklungsprobleme des bildnerischen Volksschaffens in der DDR* (Verlag Tribüne, 1983), 9.

²⁶⁴ Stöck, “Musik auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg,’” 101.

genres” of folk art emerged in the early 1960s, including “more open, unconstrained amateur groups” like film collectives, poetry groups, and Singeclubs.²⁶⁵

These developments did not go unnoticed. According to Horst Groschopp, clubs and Kulturhäuser had not fulfilled the socio-political and cultural expectations that had been placed on them since the end of the 1940s,²⁶⁶ i.e., a place where “new socialist personalities” would find expression in a “new Volkskultur.” On the contrary: Kulturhäuser had become a source of revisionist ideas and sites for experimentation with a new collective way of life. After the Eleventh Plenum of the SED’s Central Committee at the end of 1965 and the so-called “Kahlschlag” (clearcut) to culture, these collectivist tendencies were put to an end, at least publicly, and the Kulturhäuser became “less a pillar for bridging the gap between art and everyday life of workers” and more “normal” places for leisure and hobbies.²⁶⁷

Arbeiterfestspiele

An overwhelming quantity of music festivals of varying types took place in the GDR before and after 1959. These festivals can usually be categorized into one of two groups: those that were organized by the artist associations, and folk and amateur festivals. For the artist associations like the VKM, professionals performed composed works for a target audience (at least on paper) of workers. Collective singing was still a part of these festivals: the *Musikfest* of 1961 even held a canon competition at the festival ball, where guests composed canons on the spot, which were then sung by all attendees and voted upon.²⁶⁸ Many programmed concerts were given in traditional venues as well as the Kulturhäuser and even the factories themselves. The other type of festivals, mainly organized by the music departments of the FDGB or Ministry of Culture, focused on traditional folk music and dance and featured amateur performers as well as professional folk ensembles. The ideals of Bitterfelder Weg gave rise to the Arbeiterfestspiele (Worker Festival), an annual (after 1972

²⁶⁵ Meißner, “Kunst und Kultur für alle,” 137.

²⁶⁶ Groschopp, “Kulturhäuser zwischen Volkshaus und Kunstpalast,” 43.

²⁶⁷ Groschopp, 45.

²⁶⁸ “Thesen zur Veränderung,” VKM 455(1), AdK.

biannual) performing arts festival, that aimed to break down the barriers between amateur and professional performing arts. In the many events and concerts, “Professional artists [were to] not only advise and help amateur artists, but also perform together with them on stage.”²⁶⁹ The festival provided a showcase for the fruits of labor of the Bitterfelder Weg and stoked friendly competition between factories and regions.²⁷⁰ The Arbeiterfestspiele would remain one of the main collaborations between the VKM and FDGB for the following decades. In the draft of the contract between the VKM and FDGB from 1963, the Arbeiterfestspiele are the first item after the preamble:

The annual Workers’ Festival is increasingly becoming the benchmark for the qualitative and quantitative efforts of professional and amateur artists to promote socialist national culture. The commissioning of new creations of all genres and genres of music for the annual Workers’ Festival, in close connection with the orchestras and choirs to be delegated [...] is carried out jointly at a central level by the FDGB and the Composers’ Association.²⁷¹

The first Arbeiterfestspiele took place in the summer of 1959 in the district of Halle, which included the areas of Merseburg and Bitterfeld. Reportedly, nearly 15,000 participants took part in over 250 events for the first festival, which attracted up to a hundred thousand audience members.²⁷² Among the many concerts and events, public singing was a central part of the program. Among the many choral concerts and mass singing events, the Arbeiterfestspiele also provided opportunities for “composers [to get] to know the

²⁶⁹ “Berufskünstler sollen die Laienkünstler nicht nur beratend und helfend unterstützen, sondern auch gemeinsam mit ihnen auf der Bühne stehen.” “Arbeiterfestspiele des FDGB,” *Neues Deutschland*, December 20, 1958, 4.

²⁷⁰ Theresa Hörnigk, “Literatur auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg,’” in *Aufbau, Arbeit, Sehnsucht: Bildende Kunst, Literatur und Musik auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg,’”* 1st ed. (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2022), 80.

²⁷¹ “Die jährlich stattfindenden Arbeiterfestspiele werden immer mehr zum Maßstab der qualitativen und quantitativen Bemühungen von Berufs- und Laienkünstlern um die sozialistische Nationalkultur. Die Auftragsvergabe von Neuschöpfungen aller Gattungen und Genres der Musik für die jährlich stattfindenden Arbeiterfestspiele, in engem Zusammenhang mit den zu delegierenden Orchestern, Chören [...] erfolgt auf zentraler Ebene gemeinsam vom FDGB und dem Komponistenverband.” “Thesen zur Veränderung,” VKM 455(1), AdK.

²⁷² “Arbeiterfestspiele,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 9 (1959): 321.

problems and tasks of amateur musical creation in direct connection with its practice.”²⁷³ “Despite the lack of thorough preparation,” a joint event between members of the VKM and the Authors’ Association took place. According to the report, workers from the festival were also invited to give feedback about the artists’ Liedschaffen.²⁷⁴ Various songs were played either live or from recordings and composers were, yet again, reminded that “the working people want melodious songs that they can sing and that appeal not only to the mind but also to the emotions.”²⁷⁵

The festival remained extremely popular in the years to come, rotating through the districts of the GDR, with the exception of Berlin. Vocal works dominate the music programs of most of the festivals, with performances of commissioned cantatas and choral works by professional composers as well as amateur musicals, cabarets, and skits. Reports of traditional Liederabende or Kunstliedkonzerte for solo art song are rare in the documentation, although so-called *Lyrik-Abende* or literary musical evenings are easier to find. These evenings were apparently difficult to arrange, due to communication breakdowns and disagreements with the Authors’ Association. One such failure was recorded in the VKM’s notes during the planning for the 1964 festival:

As agreed in the commission, we wanted to put together a program of new poetry, songs, and chansons. However, we learned from the Writers’ Association that it [...] has come up with a completely new proposal, namely, to perform prose readings and intersperse them with a few pieces of chamber music. We will of course be happy to advise them on this, provided that they organize the evening themselves. However, if it is only a matter of breaking up the readings with a few short musical interludes, we do not need to be involved.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ “Unsere Komponisten lernten die Probleme und Aufgaben des musikalischen Laienschaffens in unmittelbarer Verbindung mit der Praxis kennen, und sie fanden die Wege zu deren Lösung in engstem Kontakt mit der Praxis.” Horst Seeger, “Unsere Komponisten waren dabei Die Arbeiterfestspiele zeigten die große Perspektive,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 9 (1959): 407.

²⁷⁴ “Unsere Komponisten lernten die Probleme und Aufgaben des musikalischen Laienschaffens in unmittelbarer Verbindung mit der Praxis kennen, und sie fanden die Wege zu deren Lösung in engstem Kontakt mit der Praxis.” Seeger, 407.

²⁷⁵ “Die Werktätigen wollen melodiöse, für sie sangbare Lieder, die nicht nur an den Verstand, sondern auch an das Gefühl appellieren.” Seeger, 408.

²⁷⁶ “Wir wollten wieder, wie in der Kommission verabredet, ein Programm aus neuer Lyrik, Liedern bzw. Chansons gestalten. Vom Schriftstellerverband erfuhren wir jedoch, dass er

Some collaborative evenings seemed to have successfully taken form, despite divergent attitudes about how the evening should go. The program with the motto “Unsere Träume sind jung (Our dreams are young)” was planned for the Arbeiterfestspiele 1963 in Cottbus, and members of the KVM and Author’s Association met in January to discuss the program. Interestingly, Wolfgang Lesser had agreed to contact Wolf Biermann for availability, and Canadian folk singer, Perry Friedman, had already agreed to perform. Although professional actors like Eva Lorenz and Reinhard Michalke were on the program list, the meeting’s minutes reveal a desire for composers to perform their own songs “wherever possible.”²⁷⁷ On the final schedule, Friedman is listed as the performer next to his song “Wenn die Neugier nicht wär,” but there is no indication that other composers volunteered to perform in the same way. In October of the same year, the program was repeated in Berlin. This time, however, the newspapers announced it as a “Gedicht- und Liederabend,” and any previously desired effect of a singer-songwriter (later known as Liedermacher) is not apparent, with no mention made of the likes of Biermann or Friedman.

3.2.3. Liedschaffen Under Debate

The role of amateurs in the creation of music was discussed and debated, especially in the realm of Liedschaffen. For many, song creation should have become priority number one for the composers of the GDR.²⁷⁸ Songs, especially those sung outside the concert hall, exemplified the bridge between the past and present as well as—most importantly for the Bitterfelder Weg—a bridge between the arts and the people. However, the practical and theoretical role of professionals and amateurs, and the relationship between the two groups, was up for debate. In a series of journal articles from 1961 to 1964, tension between the

nicht bereit ist, eine solche Veranstaltung durchzuführen. Er kommt mit einem ganz neuen Vorschlag, nämlich Prosaesungen durchzuführen und dabei einige Kammermusikwerke einzustreuen. Selbstverständlich werden wir ihn gerne dabei beraten unter der Voraussetzung, dass er diesen Abend in eigener Regie durchführt. Wenn es sich nur darum handelt, die ständigen Lesungen durch einige kürzere musikalische Zwischenspiele aufzulockern, bedarf es jedoch unserer Mitträgerschaft nicht.” “6. 64 Vorbereitung Arbeiterfestspiele,” June 1964, VKM 744, AdK.

²⁷⁷ “Protokoll Vorbereitung Literarisch-musikalische Veranstaltung ‘Unsere Träume sind jung’ Cottbus 1963,” January 22, 1963, VKM 454(1), AdK.

²⁷⁸ Bab, “Statt Klärung - Verwirrung?,” 15.

desire for inclusivity and concerns about maintaining artistic standards came to the forefront in *Music und Gesellschaft*.

Ludwig Matthies' article entitled "Clear and Enthralling?"²⁷⁹ initiates the discussion. Here he criticizes the apparent lack of attention that the VKM had paid to mass song and bemoans the low quality of many songs, as well as the efforts to popularize them through substandard sheet music and recordings. He reveals the expectation that songs are to be composed and popularized within two years and argues that ensembles, as well as radio programs, have settled into a pattern of favoring older repertoire. Significantly, the Berlin Wall was built after Matthies submitted his article on August 13, but before it was printed in the September issue of *Musik und Gesellschaft*, which prompted him to publish a "supplement" wherein he praises the expediency with which new songs were made and popularized. He lists eight titles which "spread like wildfire,"²⁸⁰ helping the State to legitimize and even make light of the newly closed border. The most infamous of these is perhaps „Im Sommer einundsechzig," a "cheerful march" with lyrics by Heinz Kahlau and music by Wolfgang Lesser.

1.
Im Sommer einundsechzig beim Kurs
von eins zu fünf,
da machten sich die Grenzgänger täg-
lich auf die Sprüng.
Klappe zu, Affe tot, endlich lacht das
Morgenrot.

2.
Im Sommer einundsechzig, da boten
aus Westend

1.
In the summer of sixty-one, during the
one to five shift,
the border crossers set out on their ad-
ventures every day.
Done and dusted, dawn is finally
beaming bright.

2.
In the summer of sixty-one, from West-
end they offered

²⁷⁹ Ludwig Matthies, "Klar und Packend? Bemerkungen zum gegenwärtigen Stand unseres Massenliedschaffens," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11, September (1961): 520-25.

²⁸⁰ "Aus dem revolutionären Kampfgeist der Einheiten der Nationalen Volksarmee, der Deutschen Grenzpolizei und der Kampfgruppen unserer volkseigenen Betriebe holten sie sich die Ideen und den Schwung für ihr künstlerisches Schaffen. In den Pausen zwischen den Einsätzen dieser Kampfeinheiten weilten Komponisten bei den Soldaten, um mit ihnen zu singen und: um die neuen Lieder einzustudieren, die aus dieser jüngsten Situation unseres Klassenkampfes geboren waren. [...] Mit Windeseile verbreiteten sich viele der neuentstandenen Lieder bei den Genossen und gingen fest in ihren Liedschatz ein." Matthies, 652.

Die Werber sich das Kopfgeld, die
Waffen der Agent'.
Klappe zu, Affe tot, endlich lacht das
Morgenrot.

the recruiters got their bounty, the
agents got their weapons.
Done and dusted, dawn is finally
beaming bright.

4.
Im Sommer einundsechzig, am 13. Au-
gust,
da schlossen wir die Grenzen und kei-
ner hat's gewußt.
Klappe zu, Affe tot, endlich lacht das
Morgenrot.

4.
In the summer of sixty-one, on August
13th,
we closed the borders and no one
knew.
Done and dusted, dawn is finally
beaming bright.

The same issue contains reports on internal meetings and discussions of the VKM about Liedschaffen,²⁸¹ including the meeting of the Central Executive Board of the VKM in March of 1961, where Liedschaffen was the first item on the agenda. Siegfried Köhler led the creation of a thesis paper on Liedschaffen that attributed a lull in new Massenlieder to “unclear ideological goals” after 1954. The report credits the events of August 13 with providing a new impetus for young composers to turn their interest to Liedschaffen. A later report gives an account of another central meeting of the VKM in Berlin, where it was decided that “close cooperation between writers and composers, the Writers’ Association and the Composers’ Association, is of great benefit to the development of our song creation.” An *Autorenkollektiv* would therefore be founded with members of the Writers Association and the VKM.²⁸² Differing from the collective at the Radio, this group would include choir directors and performers in the discussions²⁸³ and have Liedschaffen as its solitary goal. The meeting minutes²⁸⁴ also record the decision to create a Lied-archive, to which all district offices were to send photocopies of members’ songs written for festivals and other events. The minutes also mention Matties’ article and stipulates that the Liedschaffen discussion shall be continued publicly in *Musik und Gesellschaft*.

²⁸¹ sc-r [Hansjürgen Schaefer], “Diskussion um unser neues Lied,” *Musik und Gesellschaft*, Diskussion um unser neues Lied, 11 (1961): 653-56.

²⁸² “Schriftsteller und Komponisten arbeiten zusammen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 716-18.

²⁸³ Assuming this is the same Liedschaffen Committee that is discussed in chapter 4, this level of collaboration was never achieved.

²⁸⁴ “Diskussion zum Liedschaffen,” September 22, 1961, VKM 101, AdK.

In these early stages of the discussion, the contributors are mainly composers and prominent music functionaries. The topics found in the articles that followed are wide-ranging, and the arguments are nuanced and detailed. However, for the purpose of this analysis, the main arguments can be grouped into two categories. On the one hand, *Liedschaffen* is understood as the production of composed scores that must be of high compositional quality and should be produced and popularized with high-quality publications and recordings. On the other, traditional measures of quality are held up to question, and the aim of *Liedschaffen* centers more on promoting the act of singing and musical engagement. Both arguments can often be recognized in the same article.

Walther Siegmund-Schultze provided his “Notes on the Term and Musical Form Lied,” where he lists closed form and strophic structure as key characteristics of song but argues that different song genres are simply different modes of the interplay between familiarity and novelty.²⁸⁵ What makes an effective song is its ability to be sung by an individual within a community. Songs are therefore the most elemental and elevated expression of human connectedness.

In another article, Leo Spies recognizes the importance of creating masterworks, but argues that, while a scientific analysis of past songs’ *Wirkung* (impact) could help future composers, any attempts to formulate compositional standards for songs is futile, since “some good songs have a hard time establishing themselves among the masses, while others that seem too simple to us experts quickly capture the hearts of all singers.”²⁸⁶ Gerhard Bab defends composers’ song output and blames the lack of success of songs on bad production and performance, as well as low compositional quality. However, he also accuses Matthies of lacking objectivity in his critiques of some songs and calls on composers to write songs that can be sung by the “broad masses” without accompaniment.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Siegmund-Schultze, “Bemerkungen zu Begriff und Gattung Lied.”

²⁸⁶ “Kennen wir doch eine Reihe guter Lieder, die sich schwer bei der Volksmasse durchsetzen, während andere, die uns Fachleuten gar zu simpel erscheinen, schnell das Herz aller Sänger erobern.” Leo Spies, “Keine Panik - mehr Kontakte!,” *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 11 (1961): 713.

²⁸⁷ Bab, “Statt Klärung - Verwirrung?,” 715.

Siegfried Bimberg outlines his compositional inspirations, which include “singability of the nineteenth century,” “Melodic line, tonality and harmonic design following the song from the 16th and 17th centuries,” and the word-music relationships of Brecht’s musical collaborations. Aside from the “inclusion of metric-rhythmic components of contemporary dance music,” Bimberg makes no allusion to taking any inspiration from the working class.²⁸⁸ He does, however, promote composer collectives, so that, “in general, the collective development of new compositions should become the rule.”²⁸⁹

These two ways of thinking became more pronounced and clearly differentiated in 1963, when an exchange between Hans-Georg Mareck and Siegfried Köhler refocused the conversation on the Bitterfelder Weg and the role of amateurs. In summary, Köhler’s perspective aligns with a more traditional, work-based approach, emphasizing the need for deep musical understanding and a commitment to artistic excellence in creating scores. Once again, composers are to play the role of instructors and stewards of good taste for workers. Music, likewise, takes the form of compositions that are analyzed based on a measure of compositional quality. On the other hand, Mareck’s responses suggest that the barriers to entry for amateurs should be less stringent and more attuned to the needs of amateur composers. Mareck contends that Köhler’s distinction between “composing” and “creative musical activity” is unwarranted and suggests that such a dichotomy does not exist, allowing for a broader participation in musical production that is not limited to the creation of musical works. Here, music, i.e., “musical activity,” is judged on its usefulness and Wirkung.

In February of 1961, in the midst of leading and documenting the internal discussions on Liedschaffen within the VKM, Köhler published an article in the FDJ’s journal *Junge Kunst*²⁹⁰ that called out a previous report, in which Walter Meusel²⁹¹ had used the word

²⁸⁸ Siegfried Bimberg, “Gesellschaftlicher Auftrag und Komponist,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 562–63.

²⁸⁹ Bimberg, 563.

²⁹⁰ Siegfried Köhler, “Laienkomponisten – heute? Ein Brief an die Redaktion,” *Junge Kunst* 5, no. 2 (1961): 55–56.

²⁹¹ Presumably, this is the musician, composer, zoologist, botanist, and founder of the Arctic-Alpine Garden in Chemnitz.

“composition” to describe the results of a children’s music workshop. Köhler called this “an impermissible simplification of the Bitterfeld resolutions.” For Köhler, simply applying the schreibender Arbeiter model onto music was not sufficient for the creation of music. Whereas journalists were celebrating situations where amateurs were encouraged to improvise melodies and calling it musical composition, Köhler says,

Compositions are not involved here, because composing (from the Latin componere = to put together) means (in contrast to merely inventing melodies) uniting the most diverse musical factors (melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, etc.) into an artistic entity of great originality. This activity requires extensive professional qualifications, which often have to be acquired over a long period of time.²⁹²

Hans-Georg Mareck’s response was printed in *Music und Gesellschaft* as a “reader contribution” almost two years later, in 1963.²⁹³ Mareck accuses Köhler of equating creative musical activity with his specific notion of composition, creating a barrier to engagement of the working class in musical creativity. Mareck proposes that the focus should be on encouraging the creative abilities of the working class, particularly in creating Massenlieder. He disagrees that extensive compositional qualifications are necessary for the creation of simple and impactful songs. Workers should, therefore, concentrate on melodic theory and song creation, implementing methods that facilitate the widespread development of musical creativity among the population.

The title of Köhler’s rebuttal, “Es geht um Qualität (It’s about quality),” succinctly presents his view.²⁹⁴ Here, “the musical needs of the population” are served with nothing less than great compositions, for example by Hanns Eisler. Köhler states that it is Mareck who is creating a divide between amateurs and composers by accepting and expecting different

²⁹² “Um Kompositionen handelt es sich dabei nicht, denn komponieren (lat. componere = zusammenstellen) heißt doch (im Gegensatz zum bloßen Melodieerfinden), die unterschiedlichsten musikalischen Faktoren (Melodik, Harmonik, Rhythmik, Instrumentation, usw.) zu einer kunstvollen Einheit von hoher Originalität zusammenzufügen. Diese Tätigkeit setzt umfangreiche fachliche Qualifikationen voraus, die – oft über lange Zeit – erarbeitet werden müssen.” Köhler, “Laienkomponisten – heute?,” 56.

²⁹³ Hans-Georg Mareck, “Unzulässige Vereinfachung der Bitterfelder Beschlüsse?,” *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 13, no. 2 (1963): 74-76.

²⁹⁴ Siegfried Köhler, “Es geht um Qualität,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 197-98.

outcomes from the workers' *Zirkel*. "Well, what kind of music is that supposed to be?" Köhler demanded. "Something inferior, or what?"²⁹⁵

[E]ven in the circles of composing workers, there must be an objective and serious struggle for artistic quality and mastery if this work is to have any meaning at all. [...] In terms of creativity, there is no fundamental difference between the composition of an orchestral work and a song for mass singing. Both activities require a high level of compositional ability (if they are to be qualitatively flawless works!). To negate this fact would be to misdirect our circles of composing workers.²⁹⁶

Mareck's reply, published in 1964,²⁹⁷ argues that the definition of the term "composition" should be based, not on subjective quality judgments of scores, but on the process of producing music that is useful for a socialist society. He points out Köhler's "certain, albeit superficial logic" that, in order to write a simple melody, "one must learn how to compose a symphony," simply because "the current few usable songs for mass singing [happen to have been] produced by professional composers."²⁹⁸ Mareck displays his knowledge and dedication to Marxist theory, stating that most folk songs were not "composed" in this way,

²⁹⁵ "Ja, was soll denn das für Musik sein? Hans-Georg Mareck zieht hier eine Trennungslinie zwischen den Werken unserer Komponisten, also zum Beispiel auch zwischen den zündenden, massenwirksamen Liedern Hanns Eislers und den musikalischen Bedürfnissen der Bevölkerung und fordert, daß die breite Masse eine andere Musik produzieren (!) soll. Etwa eine schlechtere?," Köhler, 197-98.

²⁹⁶ "Es war damals mein Anliegen, mit allem Nachdruck darauf hinzuweisen, daß auch in den Zirkeln komponierender Arbeiter sachlich und ernsthaft um künstlerische Qualität und Meisterschaft gerungen werden muß, wenn diese Arbeit überhaupt einen Sinn haben soll. [...] Es gibt vom Schöpferischen her keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen der Komposition eines Orchesterwerks und eines Liedes für Massengesang. Beide Tätigkeiten setzen (soweit es sich um qualitativ einwandfreie Werke handeln soll!) hohe kompositorische Fähigkeiten voraus. Diese Tatsache zu negieren hieße, unseren Zirkeln für komponierende Arbeiter eine falsche Orientierung zu geben." Köhler, 197.

²⁹⁷ Hans-Georg Mareck, "Unzulässige Vereinfachung der Bitterfelder Beschlüsse? (II)," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 204-7.

²⁹⁸ "

Siegfried Köhlers Überlegung ist sehr einfach: Die wenigen brauchbaren Lieder für Massengesang, die es augenblicklich gibt, stammen von Berufskomponisten, also—um brauchbare Lieder für Massengesang produzieren zu können, muß man Komponieren lernen wie die Berufskomponisten; man muß lernen, wie eine Sinfonie komponiert wird, um Lieder für Massengesang (einstimmige Melodien) produzieren zu können. Diese Schlußfolgerung entbehrt nicht einer gewissen, wenn auch oberflächlichen Logik." Mareck, "Unzulässige Vereinfachung (II)," 206.

i.e., by qualified composers, but that recent years have produced a division of labor through which mass-singing has become a matter for composers, a situation that must be remedied.

Interestingly, the two authors' biographies provide a contrast that also mirrors and underscores their differing standpoints. Hans-Georg Mareck—presented in *Musik und Gesellschaft* as a “reader” as opposed to a member — was a music educator from a small town in the southernmost corner of the GDR. He validates his own views by pointing to his own close-up experience with children and amateurs and recounts that his own pupils have written well-liked and “useful” songs. Mareck aligns himself with the “non-elites,” presenting arguments with Marxist principles, advocating for the involvement of the masses in music production, looking beyond individuals as the sole source of artistic talent. He sees the circles of composing workers as an organizational possibility with the potential to contribute to a qualitative transformation of music production within the socialist cultural revolution.

Siegfried Köhler, a well-known composer, a major player within the VKM, and the director of the international Music Library (IMB), repeatedly refers to his own positions and qualifications. Köhler claims that Mareck had attempted to print his response in *Junge Kunst* in 1961. Without mentioning how he attained this information, Köhler tries to dismiss Mareck by explaining that the editorial team at *Junge Kunst* had deemed Mareck's first attempt “outdated” since the issues he called into question had been “regarded as settled” during the VKM's internal discussions—which Köhler himself had led and documented.

While Köhler argues that, as editor of the IMB's song publication series *Unser neues Lied*, he had seen all of the songs that had been submitted for publication and that the “best of these, which are both inventive and *volkstümlich*, were all created by authors with well-rounded compositional qualifications.”²⁹⁹ Leaving room for the possibility that amateurs

²⁹⁹ “Ich habe in den letzten sechs Jahren die Publikationsreihe ‘Unser neues Lied’ betreut, die von der Internationalen Musikbibliothek Berlin herausgegeben wird. In dieser Zeit habe ich nahezu tausend Liedmanuskripte durchsehen können. Die besten dieser Lieder, die sowohl originell als auch volkstümlich sind, wurden durchweg von Autoren geschaffen, die über eine abgerundete kompositorische Qualifikation verfügen, wobei es dahingestellt bleiben kann, ob sie ihre Kenntnisse in den Zirkeln komponierender Arbeiter oder an den Hochschulen unserer Republik erworben haben. Unverständlich ist auch die Bemerkung Hans-Georg Marecks: ‘Es geht nicht drum, daß die breite Masse der Bevölkerung in der Art

might have gained these qualifications, he continued, “it remains to be seen whether they acquired their knowledge in the circles of composing workers or at the universities of our republic.”

Köhler’s position on the role of artists later found expression in his compositional output with his setting of Georg Mauer’s poem “Konzert” for women’s *a cappella* choir in 1972. Taken from Mauer’s popular collection of poems, *Dreistropfenkalender*, written throughout the 1950s and published in 1961, “Konzert” offers an allegory on the roles of professional musicians and amateurs:

Die Vögel haben nachts gelauscht
Denn in dem großen Wäldersaal
Gab ein Konzert die Nachtigall.
Vom Mondenlicht umrauscht
Doch morgens kritisieren sie,
Und schnell erregt beschwätzen sie
Das atemlos Gehörte und sagen, was
sie störte

The birds were listening after dark
For in the great forest hall
The nightingale gave a concert.
Although stirred by the moonlight,
In the morning they criticize,
And quickly excited they complain
about
What they had breathlessly heard and
said what had bothered them

Das Finkenweib dreht sich herum
und sagt zu ihrem Finkenmann:
Du kannst genau das, was sie kann.
Steigst morgen auf das Podium.

The female finch turns around
And says to her finch husband:
You can do exactly what she can.
Get up on the podium tomorrow.

In a clever move by Mauer, it is easy to interpret this as both praise for or criticism of the Bitterfelder Weg, depending on whether the reader takes sides with the professional nightingale or the amateur finch. Köhler’s composition makes his position clear. The music of the nightingale’s concert is lyrical and lovely while the finch’s complaints are represented with laughable staccato. Köhler lets the nightingale have the last word, repeating the first three lines and the nightingale’s lyrical concert music, effectively silencing the finch and alluding to the ineffectiveness of amateur pursuits.

Musik produziert, wie das unsere Komponisten gewöhnt sind, sondern daß sie Musik produziert.” Köhler, “Es geht um Qualität,” 197.

Other voices joined the exchange in 1964. Composer Wolfgang Helm admitted that standards of quality should be discussed, but supported Köhler's position that composers should be in charge of musical composition, asking "am I a designer just because I liked designing gliders when I was fifteen? (After all, they flew so well that sometimes I couldn't find them again). Wouldn't that be absurd?"³⁰⁰ Amateur composers should therefore strive for compositional excellence and not limit themselves to the creation of songs.

On the other hand, Walter Meusel, whose use of the word composition had been the impetus for Köhler's article in *Junge Kunst*, published his own response. Here, Meusel argues that the differences between composers and amateurs are the results of a two-class system and that effective melodies can be written by "relatively 'uneducated' [...] children, adolescents, and adults of our time [...] of both genders! [...] Someone who is not [...] 'burdened' with the entire compositional craftsmanship of the past can create good new melodies. However, someone who knows and understands everything related to this craft is not always able to write a song that comes to life."³⁰¹

Finally, articles written by members of the Zirkel themselves were published in 1964. Some, like Rudolf Dawe from the Arbeitskreis Laienkomponisten in Magdeburg, side with Köhler, while others, like the members of the Zirkel komponierender Arbeiter Flöha agree wholeheartedly with Mareck. Still other Zirkel members steer the discussion in a new direction; Albert Gabriel claims that both Köhler and Mareck are on the wrong track, as they both confuse the principals of musical creation with the methods of composition. Gabriel was one of the most prominent members of the composers' Zirkel at the Buna factory. According to Gilbert Stöck, Gabriel, a schoolteacher with a musical background, had sought admittance to the VKM in 1955 before finally being admitted in 1962 after winning the Händel-Prize of the city of Halle for his work as choir director and composer. For Gabriel, the question of what can be counted as a composition does not matter; the usefulness of music stands at the center of his creative motivations. The usefulness of writing music for

³⁰⁰ Wolfgang Helm, "Qualität auf allen Gebieten," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 335-36.

³⁰¹ Walter Meusel, "Meisterwerk Volksmelodie," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 337.

amateurs lies in the community and discussion that the structure of a Zirkel provides, getting out of “dilettante isolation” and grappling with one’s own shortcomings. “In this way [the amateur composer] gains the knowledge of what composing means, namely working, developing the musical idea, penetrating it and harmonizing it with the new content.”³⁰² Composition, for Gabriel, is therefore a process of learning and working, not the production of musical works.

Claus Haake, prominent choral conductor and artistic director of the Buna factory, made similar arguments about the “real principles” of composing amateurs.³⁰³ For Haake, the division between professionals and amateurs lies not in definitions of quality or genre, but in differing motivations and goals. “The primary reason for commissioning professional composers is the need for a new composition for this or that purpose. Commissions for amateurs must primarily serve the continuous learning of the craft of composition, i.e., the further development of the author.”³⁰⁴ The “real relationship to artistic production” is therefore learning and composing for the sake of learning and composing. The Zirkel system provides opportunities for exchange, enabling others who play or listen to the Zirkel’s music to join in their continuous process of social engagement. In this way, amateur composers in Zirkel should be less comparable to professional composers and more akin to amateur singers in choirs, who derive their artistic fulfillment not from gaining payment or recognition, but from the joy of creation and collaboration.

The leader of the Buna Zirkel, Karl Kleinig, corroborates this view, arguing that the purpose of the amateur Zirkel goes beyond producing musical material. “The important

³⁰² “So gewinnt [der komponierende Laie] die Erkenntnis, was Komponieren heißt, nämlich arbeiten, den musikalischen Einfall weiterführen, ihn durchdringen und mit dem neuen Inhalt in Einklang bringen.” Albert Gabriel, “Ein neuer Lebensinhalt,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 339.

³⁰³ Claus Haake, “Auf realen Grundlagen – Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit komponierender Laien,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 590–92.

³⁰⁴ “Bei dem Auftrag an Berufskomponisten steht an erster Stelle die Notwendigkeit einer neuen Komposition den für diesen oder jenen Zweck. Der Auftrag an Laien muß primär der kontinuierlichen Erlernung des Kompositionshandwerks, also der weiteren Entwicklung des Autors dienen.” Haake, 591.

thing is the collective work, i.e., the critical collaboration on individual compositions.”³⁰⁵ Interestingly, at the end of his article, Kleinig draws another connection between amateur composition and amateur singing, stating that amateur composers should take a role in helping to break down the divide between singers and listeners that television and recordings exacerbate. Amateur singing should not be limited to choirs that perform rehearsed repertoire. “Would it not be possible for the composing working people, who create music in the midst of the Volk, to make a contribution to a new way of folk singing?”³⁰⁶

Concurrent with the fading relevance of the Bitterfelder Weg, the Liedschaffen debate faded from *Musik und Gesellschaft* at the end of 1964. However, one must also take into account that musical efforts extended far beyond composition and musicological theories. Cultural infrastructures that the Bitterfelder Weg had set in place remained available to regular citizens for decades to come. By the end of the 1950s, most places of work already had at least one choir, if not multiple folk music ensembles, orchestras, and dance groups. The Bitterfelder Weg provided these groups with further professional guidance and performance opportunities, resulting in a swift qualitative and quantitative upturn.³⁰⁷ Workers, students and children could attend lectures in music history and theory as well as exclusive concerts with professional musicians, figuratively and literally setting the stage for later generations’ own iterations of musical activity.

³⁰⁵ “Wichtig ist die Kollektivarbeit, das heißt die kritische Mitarbeit an Einzelkompositionen.” Karl Kleinig, “Notwendiges Können erwerben,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 395–96.

³⁰⁶ “Schließlich wurde noch ein Gedanke ausgesprochen, der zunächst nicht unmittelbar mit dem Laienschaffen zusammenzuhängen scheint. Nämlich, daß das Singen im allgemeinen nur in Chören vor sich gehe, also ein einstudiertes Singen sei. Wie aber steht es mit dem Volkssingen? Gibt es nicht eine tiefe Spaltung zwischen singenden und hörenden Menschen (abgesehen von den indifferenten), mitveranlaßt durch Rundfunk und Fernsehen, und wäre es nicht möglich, daß die komponierenden Werktätigen, die doch mitten im Volke stehen und schaffen, einen Beitrag zum neuen Volkssingen leisten können?,” Kleinig, 396.

³⁰⁷ Stöck, “Musik auf dem ‘Bitterfelder Weg,’” 99.

3.2.4. Ami Go Home: From Composer model to Hootenannies

The Other America

At the end of the 1950s, the focus on the collaborative imperatives of the Bitterfelder Weg in the pages of *Musik und Gesellschaft* coincided with a renewed interest in the music of “the other America.” This idea of an alternative America—aspects of whose culture the socialist East could embrace—initially emerged in tandem with the beginning of the Cold War, but the aesthetic and musical interests of many influential East Germans renewed attention to the idea at the end of the decade. Among other folk-song influences,³⁰⁸ aspects of musical culture in the US provided functionaries and policy makers with compositional and practical tools that resonated with ordinary East Germans. Key figures like Eberhard Rebling, chief editor of *Musik und Gesellschaft* until 1959, his wife, Lin Jaldati, and their Canadian friend and collaborator, Perry Friedman, were able to blend the ideals of the Bitterfelder Weg with folk song traditions and practices in a way that promised a musical alternative to Massened and paved the way for what would later be known as the Singebewegung.

In the mid to late 1950s, as McCarthyism peaked in the US and the so-called Khrushchev Thaw allowed for more nuanced discussions about Western cultural influences, the “good” side of American music impacted Liedschaffen in the GDR in terms of musical and lyrical content as well as social performance. The dichotomy between the two sides of US music are clearly presented in an article by American music writer, Sidney Finkelstein, which was translated into German and reprinted in *Musik und Gesellschaft* in 1957.³⁰⁹ Here, the negative aspects that defined the East’s Cold-War vision of America—commercial monopolies, racism, the oppression of the working class—are directly related to over-commercialized pop songs that “lack any sort of artistic value.”³¹⁰ In contrast, the anti-fas-

³⁰⁸ See, e.g., Jesse Freedman, “Political Participation and Engagement in East Germany Through Chilean Nueva Canción,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 54, no. 1 (July 2022): 1–25.

³⁰⁹ Sidney Finkelstein, “Komponisten in den USA,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 7 (1957): 269–72.

³¹⁰ Finkelstein, 270.

cist movements of the 1930s, the oppression of socialist artists in the 1940s, and the burgeoning civil rights movement of the 1950s are linked to the “astounding richness and great diversity” of American folk songs and dance traditions.³¹¹

While Finkelstein concentrates on composers and written forms of music, he also underlines the importance of music as an oral tradition, positing that pop songs, as well as art music that is “far from the people,” had been created by trained composers. Even though many influential American composers—George Gershwin, Aaron Copland or William Grant Still, for example—had been influenced by folk songs, for Finkelstein, the true musical folklore of America is preserved in oral tradition alone.

Finkelstein had recognized the importance of oral traditions, in particular within Black American music, in his earlier writings. In *How Music Expresses Ideas* (1952),³¹² composed, “finished and rounded” forms of music are presented as antithetical to the folk song, which is always changing since it is “always a music of struggle.”³¹³ Negro spirituals, the Blues, and jazz were, therefore, a prime example of folk art, not because their musical origins could be easily traced back to a single source—indeed the opposite is true of jazz—but because they “asserted the kinship of people and proved the existence of a growing national culture” of Black Americans.³¹⁴

Black American music, which Finkelstein called a “powerful weapon of the struggle against slavery,” represented for East Germans a contemporary model of functional folk art as a weapon against capitalism. However, because it inherently challenged the status quo, it

³¹¹ Finkelstein, 270.

³¹² Finkelstein makes the divide between folk music and written music even clearer in his 1970 edition: “Folk art was the product of innumerable anonymous individuals of talent, each contributing something new to the common cultural possessions. [...] [W]hatever is progressive and lasting in the arts inevitably takes a national form, for its rise accompanies the rise of nations themselves. The tendency of an advanced capitalist country is to deny the national character of the arts, for the rise to nationhood of other peoples, and the national aspirations of peoples within its own borders, are a menace to its own ruling class.” Sidney Finkelstein, *How Music Expresses Ideas*, 3rd ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 86.

³¹³ Finkelstein, 110.

³¹⁴ Finkelstein, 110.

could also be interpreted as a threat to the State. Unsurprisingly then, the concept of jazz fell in and out of favor multiple times over the decade preceding the Bitterfelder Weg.

1950s Jazz-Discourse

According to Helma Kaldewey, jazz and “negro songs” were initially seen as acceptable examples of organic anti-capitalist folk-traditions. Later, during the nationalist approach to culture of the early fifties, jazz was seen as “transracial cultural infiltration” that threatened the rejuvenation of German folk traditions and therefore the cultural and democratic unity of Germany.³¹⁵ Georg Knepler shared a similar view that recognized jazz as a “complicated and opaque chapter of music history.”³¹⁶ While allegedly forbidding his students from playing boogie-woogie or any other US-American “*Unkultur*,”³¹⁷ Georg Knepler, as Rector of the German Academy of Music Berlin, encouraged them instead to focus on “our German folk music”³¹⁸ Ernst Herman Meyer also railed against “Americanism” as a capitalist tool, characterized by an “an extreme dualism” of elitist, warped modernism on the one hand, and meaningless, mass-produced gimmicks on the other.³¹⁹

Outside this dualism, especially within the oppressed classes of Black Americans, Meyer recognized a separate music culture, wherein folksongs were organically produced, developed and passed on in a “collective artistic achievement.”³²⁰ Likewise, Knepler identified the “empty vitreosity and clownery” of commercial jazz as a corruption of a “real, original jazz,” i.e., Spirituals, Blues, and work songs, which he recognized as the true “folk music of

³¹⁵ Helma Kaldewey, *A People's Music: Jazz in East Germany, 1945-1990*, New Studies in European History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 83.

³¹⁶ Georg Knepler, “Jazz und Volksmusik,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 5 (1955): 183.

³¹⁷ See Gerhard Oberkofler and Manfred Mugrauer, *Georg Knepler: Musikwissenschaftler und marxistischer Denker aus Wien* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2014), 254.

³¹⁸ Georg Knepler, “Jazz und Volksmusik,” 183.

³¹⁹ Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 1st ed. (Berlin: AdK / Bruno Henschel und Sohn, 1952), 110.

³²⁰ “Die Volksmusik ist darum so ungeheuer wichtig für alles Musikschaffen, weil sie durch einen Prozeß der Reinigung und kritisch-schöpferischen Klärung seitens einer Vielheit von Menschen [...]. Unverfälschte Volksmusik als kollektive Kunstleistung hat von vornherein eine weiterreichende Gültigkeit als die Individualkunst. [...] Kollektives Kunstschaffen ist die höchste Stufe der schöpferischen künstlerischen Tätigkeit.” Meyer, 82.

the American negro proletariat.”³²¹ To Meyer, this “true jazz” exemplified a kind of ideal, realist song production that supported his arguments for collective folk music production: “In all these cases of Liedschaffen, the composers are at once the performers and consuming audience.”³²²

In this way, American music is not only split into good/bad, that is to say, capitalist/socialist. The “good” side of American music also has two sides of its own: material and practical. Song repertoire and conventions of musical style can be emulated by composers and continuously discussed by musicologists; these efforts can produce worthwhile compositions, but authentic folk traditions require an oral, performative folk song practice, because only this allows music to function outside of commercial consumption in a functional, communal, and social role.³²³

Musical Material vs. Musical Practices

Understanding music as a social practice and an emphasis on functional practice of songs, rather than on written compositions, were points of contention among the members of the VKM, as demonstrated in the Liedschaffen-debate that took place in *Musik und Gesellschaft* between 1961 and 1964. For many other practitioners, the ideals of the Bitterfelder Weg expanded the term Liedschaffen, taking this beyond the production of scores to focus on the creative infrastructure for the performance and production of folk music. For many, breaking down barriers between professionals and amateurs, creators and listeners,

³²¹ See Oberkofler and Mugrauer, *Georg Knepler*, 254–5.

³²² “In allen diesen Fällen von Volksliedschaffen sind die Komponisten zugleich Interpreten und konsumierendes Publikum.” Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 81.

³²³ To complicate things further, the Deputy Minister of Culture, Hans Pischner, believed jazz-improvisation to be distracting German musicians from more appropriate forms of improvisational song traditions, like singing canons: “In meiner frühen Jugend pflegten wir, von der Wiedererweckung des alten Volksliedes ausgehend, im Wandervogelverband die musikalische Improvisation. Wir waren kurz vor dem ersten Weltkrieg gerade so weit, daß wir improvisierend Kanons und kleine Fugen singen konnten. Natürlich waren durch die allgemeine Musikkultur im damaligen gebildeten Bürgertum, aus dem ich komme, dafür gewisse Vorbedingungen vorhanden. Aber an sich ist die Voraussetzung, ist auch die Bereitschaft zum musikalischen Improvisieren auch heute noch vorhanden. Wir versäumen es nur, sie zu nutzen. Oder wir überlassen sie – leider! – den Jazz-Fans, die sich durch die amerikanische Kunstindustrie aus der Musik hinausboxen lassen!” Hans Pischner, “Kriterium ist die Praxis,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 10 (1960): 338.

everyday life and artistic expression, translated into a redefinition of “production.” What can be understood today as the performative aspects of songs, conceptualization, musical collaboration, critique, and singing could also be understood as productive aspects of Liedschaffen.

It should be noted that this practical understanding of song production was not the main focus of the majority of the members of the VKM. Composers like Siegfried Köhler went out of their way to state that the production of songs inherently meant the production of theoretically sound compositions which were to be popularized through quality publications and recordings. Discussions about musical influences from the US mostly focused on American musical idioms and popular dance rhythms and whether these should be used to appeal to the masses. However, American musical idioms had already served German composers as an effective political signifier.

At the beginning of the 1950s, American folk tunes were given new German lyrics that ironically criticized the American presence in Germany, for example, Hanns Eisler and Ernst Busch’s renditions of “Ami, Go Home” or “No, Susanna.” However, several “*Protestlieder aus der USA*” were also published by official outlets for sheet music, the most prominent example being “Black and White - Gib mir die Hand.” Not to be confused with Earl Robinson’s song “Black and White” from 1954, this version, with lyrics by Ernst Busch and arranged by Werner Hübschmann, was supposedly translated from a spiritual and originally presented in East Germany in 1949 in a book of “Negro Protest Songs.” Busch’s slow, bluesy rendition features a brass band, leaving German listeners in no doubt of the intention to replicate an African American spiritual. “Black and White” appeared on the Eterna label directly after “Ami, Go Home,” underlining a desire for American troops to leave and Black American folk music to stay. The song was re-published in 1957 in the second issue of *Das Arbeiterlied im A-cappella-Satz*, a song publication of the Zentralhaus für Volkskunst, and later became one of many “songs of the American worker” that were included in the FDGB’s songbook *Brüder am Werk*. Over time, East German choirs became accustomed to American idioms, albeit by way of mostly white composers, with George Gershwin’s music becoming a common feature in the concert programs of the late fifties.

American idioms within newly composed music also gained traction. Despite arguments in the early fifties between functionaries about whether syncopations should be allowed in newly composed Massenlieder, the same people would later deem such arguments “ridiculous.”³²⁴ Retrospectively, composer Andre Asriel remembered some resistance to his use of jazz idioms in the 1950s: “There was some friction, for example, because many of the German choirmasters thought it was a violation of the German national character to try to smuggle in ‘Negro music’. I also clashed with one or two of them a few times when it got too jazzy for them.” Nonetheless, jazz (Asriel would go on to write the main East German reference book on the topic) seemed an obvious musical solution to the lack of impactful songs after the War:

I had come to Germany and thought, so now we want to write songs for young people. What should they look like? One thing was absolutely clear to me: They mustn't look like Nazi songs. [...] The only thing I could think of at the time was to smuggle in certain loose gestures, loose harmonies, which also came a bit from English pop songs: And the rhythm, which was more ambling than that of the Nazi songs, which were very [knocks energetically on the table] with big boots. That was my problem, trying not to be stiff, but loose.³²⁵

Resistance waned, and many East German composers started to unironically apply American musical idioms. One such song, *Lied der Siebenmeilenstiefeln* by Otto Hilliger

³²⁴ Lin Jaldati and Eberhard Rebling, *Sag nie, du gehst den letzten Weg: Lebenserinnerungen; 1911 bis 1988*, Sammlung 1 (Marburg: BdWi-Verlag, 1995), 457.

³²⁵ “Es gab schon die eine oder andere Reibung, zum Beispiel, weil viele der deutschen Chorleiter es einen Verstoß gegen den deutschen Nationalcharakter fanden, dass man versucht, ‘Negermusik’ einzuschleusen. Ich bin auch ein paar Mal mit dem Einen oder Andern aneinander geraten, wenn es dem zu jazzig wurde. Ich war nach Deutschland gekommen und dachte, jetzt wollen wir also Jugendlieder schreiben. Wie müssten die aussehen. Eines war mir absolut klar: Sie dürfen nicht aussehen wie die Nazi-Lieder. – Ja, mach aber was dagegen. Die Nazi-Lieder standen auch im Vier-Viertel-Takt. Und die waren auch in Dur und Moll und hatten bestimmte volksliedhafte Wendungen. Das einzige, was mir dazu damals einfiel, war das Einschleusen bestimmter lockerer Gestik, lockerer Harmonik, die auch ein bisschen aus dem englischen Schlager stammt: und der Rhythmik, die schlendernder war als die der Nazi-Lieder, die ja sehr [klopft energisch auf den Tisch] mit Schaftstiefeln daherkamen. Das war mein Problem, zu versuchen, nicht steif, sondern locker zu sein.” Andre Asriel in Maren Köster, “‘Locker und sicher, nicht laut und verkrampft.’ Gespräch mit dem Komponisten Andre Asriel Festival Musik und Politik 2005. Protokolle,” in *Festival Musik und Politik 2005. Protokolle* (Berlin: Lied und soziale Bewegung e.V., 2005), 25–32.

with lyrics by Hildegard-Maria Rauchfuss, was praised as a new Massenlied and integrated into the sanctioned song repertoire of the GDR by the late 1950s.³²⁶ By the end of the decade, blue notes, jazz harmonies, and syncopated, swung rhythms carried much more positive connotations. Instead of threats to the national heritage or to the identity of Germany, blending American folk traditions or “Negro” music with German song signaled solidarity with oppressed classes in the West, bolstering the idea of East German musical life as a part of contemporary proletarian internationalism.

Robinson, Robeson, Rebling: Setting the Stage for Folksinging

The inclusion of American song repertoire and musical idioms at the end of the decade was accompanied by a renewed championing of American musicians who represented the leftist folksong revival movement, particularly Paul Robeson and Earl Robinson. Broadly understood as the “voices of the other America,”³²⁷ both artists were respected as classical musicians — Robeson was a world-class opera singer and Robinson an internationally acclaimed composer — who had aligned themselves with socialist ideals and the struggle for civil rights for Black Americans. Robinson was apparently so closely associated with the civil rights movement that *Neues Deutschland* and the *Berliner Zeitung* assumed him to be a “Negro Composer.”³²⁸ The fact that Robeson and Robinson were victims of McCarthyism clinched their reputation in the GDR as personifications of “the fight against American propaganda-lies” and “corrupt systems of justice,” to which “upstanding democrats like Earl Robinson fell victim.”³²⁹

In late 1957, in response to the US State Department’s withdrawal of Robeson and Robinson’s passports, effectively banning them from international travel, the VKM organized a protest concert in their honor in conjunction with the national radio and television,

³²⁶ See section “Case study: Das Lied der Siebenmeilenstiefel” in chapter 4.

³²⁷ Hansjürgen Schaefer, “Brücke über den Ozean,” *Neues Deutschland*, September 4, 1958, 4.

³²⁸ “Grüße des wahren Amerika,” *Neues Deutschland*, October 27, 1957, 4; “Stimmen aus dem anderen Amerika,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 27, 1957, 3.

³²⁹ “Starb der McCarthyismus mit McCarthy? Der Erfolg von Reuben Ships ‘Verhör im Himmel’ / Kampf gegen eine USA-Propagandalüge,” *Berliner Zeitung*, September 11, 1957, 6.

the Authors' Association and the Deutsche Theater. The concert included the European premier of Robinson's symphony *A Country They Call Puget Sound*, other songs by Robinson sung by baritone Aubrey Pankey,³³⁰ and a recording of Paul Robeson singing Robinson's song "The House I Live in." Furthermore, the program included a speech given by E. H. Meyer, presenting Robinson as "the most original and interesting artistic figures of contemporary America," and a dramatic reading of Robinson's interrogation before the House Un-American Activities Committee, both of which were subsequently printed in *Musik und Gesellschaft*.

Six months later, GDR television produced Robinson's "Volksoper," *Sandhog*, and Robeson and Robinson's concert-film "Bridge over the Ocean," had its world premier at the Friedrichstadt Palast, in celebration of Robeson's 60th birthday. Newspapers pointed out the inclusion of Dessau's *Thälmann-Kolonnen* in the film's repertoire, but also the importance of Robeson's role as the "singer of freedom, the mighty voice of peace."³³¹ According to E. H. Meyer, Robinson "did not follow the path of many American musicians who devoted themselves to a pale tastelessness, but placed his first-rate musical education at the service of a new, genuine, and lively folklore."³³² Both Americans functioned as idols, not only because they were respected as world-class musicians, but because they were established folk musicians for whom oral traditions played a key role in their artistic activity.

Both Robeson and Robinson visited East Germany soon after their right to travel was restored. Earl Robinson's 1959 visit included several studio recordings for radio and the Eterna label, as well as several concerts, including the "New American Music" concert at

³³⁰ Black American musicians like Pankey, who had fled McCarthyism to East Germany, were also tokenized by the GDR. After Pankey complained of being instrumentalized by the SED for his skin color, Alfred Kurella responded by admonishing the "uncritical cult" that sought to respect spirituals, but did so with a racist, "condescending and belittling attitude." See Michael Rauhut, "The Voice of the Other America: African-American Music and Political Protest in the German Democratic Republic," in *Between the Avant-Garde and the Everyday: Subversive Politics in Europe from 1957 to the Present*, ed. Timothy Brown and Lorena Anton (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 100.

³³¹ "DDR ehrte Paul Robeson," *Neues Deutschland*, April 10, 1958, 1.

³³² "Er ging aber nicht den Weg vieler amerikanischer Musiker, die sich einem bläßlichen Geschmäckertum verschrieben, sondern er stellte seine erstrangige musikalische Bildung in den Dienst einer neuen, echten und lebendigen Folklore." Ernst Hermann Meyer, "Earl Robinson," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 7 (1957): 658.

the Berlin State Opera. “In the spirit of the deep bond between the German Democratic Republic and the progressive artists of America,” Robinson was invited to conduct the European premier of his cantata *The Lonesome Train*, alongside other works by artists whose work spanned the bridge between popular and classical: Norman Curtis, Serge Hovey, Robert Kurka, Lewis Allan, and Oscar Brown Jr., all of whom were closely associated with leftist circles, Hanns Eisler, or the civil-rights movement. Robeson returned as the honored guest of two State ceremonies in 1960, giving interviews, concerts, and making television appearances and recordings, as well as receiving an honorary doctorate from Humboldt University.

Eberhard Rebling

Although it was Perry Friedman who provided a name for the activity, the transition from a composer-performer concept of mass singing to the more interactive practice that emerged in the Singebewegung was already underway in the concert practices of other performers like Lin Jaldati and her husband, Eberhard Rebling.

Eberhard Rebling was born in Berlin and chose to leave Nazi Germany to live as a pianist in the Hague, where he met and married Lin Jaldati, a Jewish dancer and folksinger. The pair was active in organizing and performing secret concerts, and in aiding and hiding Jews during the Nazi occupation. Caught by the Nazis in 1944, Rebling escaped execution while Jaldati survived imprisonment at multiple concentration camps. The two were reunited after the war and moved to the GDR a few years later to join friends like Anna Seghers and Ernst Busch. Rebling became one of the most influential music functionaries in his generation, taking over as editor in chief of *Musik und Gesellschaft* in 1952. He held this position until he took over the rectorship of the Berlin Conservatory in 1959, which he then arranged to have renamed *Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin* in 1962. A classical pianist, Rebling’s legacy as a musicologist centers around ballet, but his activities as a musician and functionary went beyond classical genres. He was strongly influenced by his experiences with his wife’s Yiddish folk-music concerts and became an advocate for the mixing of folk, pop, and art music in performance.

While Jaldati made a career as a performer in the GDR, blending Yiddish folk traditions with workers' song repertoire, Rebling often accompanied her at the piano with his own arrangements of traditional songs. The couple made sure their concert repertoire included songs which the audience could join in and sing along.³³³ It was most likely these experiences that made Rebling the successful candidate to accompany Paul Robeson on his visit to the GDR in June of 1960.

In his memoir, published after 1989, Rebling celebrated that critique in MuG had improved under his tenure, but stated that his power over the journal was limited.³³⁴ After the reunification, he wrote that he published articles with opinions that were not his own (for example against Hanns Eisler's lecture on Arnold Schönberg in 1955), for the sake of debate.

After their performances at the Waldeck Festival in 1965, where "the opinion that singing should have nothing to do with politics prevailed," Rebling and Jaldati suggested to the Ministry of Culture in their written report that a similar festival should take place in the GDR with political songs, which came about five years later.³³⁵

US Folk revival - Charles Seeger

Another American musical movement that played a role in constructing the "other America" in the late 1950's was the folk music revival. Now associated with musicians who gained fame in the 1960's, like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Pete Seeger, the folk movement's momentum began with the workers' and anti-fascist movements of the previous generation, which William G. Roy refers to as the "first folk song project."³³⁶ The Composers'

³³³ Jaldati and Rebling, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 460.

³³⁴ Jaldati and Rebling, 470.

³³⁵ "[D]ie Meinung, dass Singen nichts mit Politik zu tun haben dürfte, herrschte vor." Jaldati and Rebling, 550-551.

³³⁶ The first legitimized folk song as "politically significant and available for social movements," while the second made songs and "collective musicking" into integral parts of collective political action. See William G. Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues. Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology (Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 78, 99.

Collective of New York, consisting of composers like Henry Cowell, Ruth and (Pete's father) Charles Seeger, and Earl Robinson, played a key role in this development. The Seegers, like most of the collective's highly educated members, had joined in hopes of using music for political good by composing "music for the Masses." Inspired by European *Massenlieder*, especially those by Hanns Eisler,³³⁷ the collective's composers relied on musical form to communicate revolutionary ideas, trying to "use ordinary fragments of technique in an unusual way, because [they] thought that was revolutionary and therefore suitable for workers to use."³³⁸

To the collective's members, who idolized European art music and "condemned the 'booboisie' and the philistinism and provincialism of rural and small-town America,"³³⁹ Eisler represented the ideal composer. His choral works centered upon revolutionary statements without having to dumb down the composition or "destroy the concert form."³⁴⁰ However, as early as the mid 1930's, the collective had started to experiment "with organizational forms outside the nexus of the composer-performer-audience relationship and beyond the media of commodified products."³⁴¹ This meant more and more collaborative partnerships with community ensembles like the Yiddish-language *Freiheit Gezang Farein* and the Workers' [Women's] Mandolin Orchestra and increased interest in the *genuine* type of folk songs, which originated from the people. Eisler's visits to the collective in 1935 further influenced this trajectory,³⁴² with his insistence that composers "must become aware of the social function for which their music is being used."³⁴³

Becoming disenchanted with the Composers' Collective, Charles Seeger accepted a job at the Federal Resettlement Administration. As part of the New Deal, the Administration

³³⁷ See Maria Cristina Fava, "The Composers' Collective of New York, 1932-1936: Bourgeois Modernism for the Proletariat," *American Music* 34, no. 3 (2016): 318-9.

³³⁸ Pete Seeger quoted in David K. Dunaway, "Charles Seeger and Carl Sands: The Composers' Collective Years," *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 2 (1980): 164.

³³⁹ Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 111.

³⁴⁰ Pescatello, 113.

³⁴¹ Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 99.

³⁴² H. L. Clarke, "Composers' Collective of New York" (Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁴³ Hanns Eisler, "The Crisis in Modern Music (1935)," in *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs (International Publishers, 1978), 115.

relocated poor urban and rural families to new land and educated them in farming methods in the hope that they would build collective, cooperative farming communities. Arts programs were established to alleviate tensions and foster common goals within the relocated groups, many of which had been thrown together without regard to ethnic or religious differences. Seeger wrote a guide entitled “General Considerations for Music Directors in Leading Community Programs” as a guide for the estimated 300 educated musicians whose job, like that of the patrons of the music ensembles under the Bitterfelder Weg, it would be to encourage community building through musical activity. In contrast to many later GDR functionaries, Seeger prioritized function over academic quality:

The main question [...] should not be “is it good music?” but “what is the music good for?” And if it bids fair to weld the community into more resourceful and democratic action for a better life for themselves, their neighbors and the human race, then it must be conceded to be “good for” that. The chances that it will be found good in technical and stylistic terms will probably be more than fair.³⁴⁴

Charles and Ruth Seeger went on to work closely with Carl Sandburg and Alan Lomax and joined them as founding figures of ethnomusicology. Charles Seeger in particular was interested in extending ethnomusicological techniques to include the art music of the West as well as its folk and popular music.³⁴⁵ Outside the realm of ethnomusicology, however, Seeger’s impact on the field of “art music” musicology remained limited until it became a major influence on scholars of the “new” musicology like Joseph Kerman. Through Lomax, Charles’ son, Pete, began working (and playing) with Huddie Ledbetter, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Woody Guthrie. Joined by Guthrie, Pete Seeger founded the Almanac Singers and launched his highly influential career as a politically active folk singer, achieving more of what his father had set out to do, reaching the masses “from the bottom up.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Charles Seeger, “General Considerations for Music Directors in Leading Community (1936),” quoted in Richard A. Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience: The Musical Odyssey of Charles Seeger,” *Western Folklore* 38, no. 4 (1979): 233.

³⁴⁵ See Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 170.

³⁴⁶ See Kerman, 158-9.

The integration of music into Roosevelt's New Deal also indirectly contributed to the development of the Hootenanny, a term that would be imported to the GDR twenty years later by Perry Friedman. In 1940, a coalition of progressive groups and New Deal supporters in Seattle, including the newspaper *The Washington New Dealer*, announced an event entitled "The New Dealer's Midsummer Hootenanny," that would include "Dancing, Refreshments, Door Prizes, [and] Uncertainty."³⁴⁷ The paper's editor, Terry Pettus, coined the term, adopting it from a slang word from his youth in Indiana that described any sort of undefined social gathering. In Seattle, the term ended up signifying a loosely organized, interactive folk music event, that was part concert, part cabaret, part sing-along, where union members and left-leaning individuals could socialize and fundraise. Earl Robinson and the Almanac Singers (which included Woody Guthrie, and Charles Seeger's son, Pete), were favored performers who subsequently aimed "to put the word Hootenanny on the market."³⁴⁸ The word quickly became synonymous with the folk revival movement surrounding the Almanac Singers, and after 1945, the non-profit folksong organization, People's Songs, Inc. (PSI).

Hootenannies were not a musical free-for-all. In contrast to open-mics or what some in the folk scene called "wing-dings," where any audience member could call songs and perform, hootenannies featured selected performers who named the repertoire and directed any audience participation. They were often more a place for entertainment than for "song swapping," as the leader of the PSI, Pete Seeger, had wished; however, as a distinguishing feature of the PSI's efforts, the hootenanny still functioned as a cohesive force for politically-minded musicians and musically interested activists.³⁴⁹

The structure and goals of the PSI mirror those of the Liedschaffen efforts of the Bitterfelder Weg in the GDR in many ways. While Wirkung (impact) was the main goal of song composers in the GDR, the PSI also focused on promoting "hard hitting songs" that

³⁴⁷ "The New Dealer's Midsummer Hootenanny: You Might Even Be Surprised," *The Washington New Dealer*, July 25, 1940, quoted in Peter Tamony, "'Hootenanny': The Word, Its Content and Continuum," *Western Folklore* 22, no. 3 (1963): 167.

³⁴⁸ Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie: A Life* (New York: Delta Trade, 1999), 213.

³⁴⁹ For more on the performative process of hootenannies see Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 136-139.

“facilitat[ed] other people to sing, providing music for picket lines, publicity, or meetings.”³⁵⁰ Like the myriad songbooks and song pamphlets produced by organizations like the VKM, the PSI produced a weekly newsletter that presented sheet music, lyrics, and tablature of domestic and international, new and old songs, as well as essays on topics such as civil rights, the Cuban Revolution, labor unions, pacifism, and war.³⁵¹ Both the PSI and the functionaries of the GDR hoped to create a singing culture amongst the working class. Thus, akin to the role of *Kulturhäuser* and clubs in their provision of a combination of grassroots community-building and top-down guidance to local communities, local PSI chapters were encouraged to use the material that the central office provided to “do music[, i.e.,] create singing groups, booking agencies, schools for song leaders, hootenannies, songwriter committees, outlets for People’s Songs records, and local radio programs.”³⁵²

What the Bitterfelder Weg in the GDR had—namely the support of political organizations - the PSI lacked. Unlike the SED, the Communist Party of the US rejected any efforts to integrate music-making into the party’s political strategies. After the US joined WWII, workers’ unions’ fervor for extracurricular singing waned, especially because pitting workers against their employers could now easily be seen as contradictory to the war effort. At the same time, the PSI was closely observed by the FBI for its “pink” undertakings, eventually leading to its members being accused of participating in a communist plot.³⁵³

Like the Bitterfelder Weg, the PSI as an organization was short-lived, only functioning for a few short years, publishing its last bulletin in 1950. However, its effects were also long-lasting: The PSI *Bulletin* provided a wealth of song repertoire for later generations³⁵⁴ and acted as a model for later publications like *Broadside* and *Sing Out!* The PSI Bulletin’s influence can be seen in its lasting cultural impact, with its songs continuing to shape social movements and serve as a means of expression and solidarity for marginalized communities.

³⁵⁰ Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 122.

³⁵¹ “Walter P. Reuther Library People’s Song Library Records,” People’s Song Library Records, accessed April 11, 2024, <https://reuther.wayne.edu/node/3170>.

³⁵² Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, 135.

³⁵³ David K. Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing?* (Random House Publishing Group, 2009), 179.

³⁵⁴ Perhaps most notable is the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.”

On the other hand, the mass-organization of the GDR lacked what a hootenanny provided, namely an alternative to the German musical heritage and a concert-style, composer-performer musical practice. Hootenannies provided an organized musical activity that allowed a balance between a sense of personal identification with an in-group tradition and the need for personal expression within that group, all the while linking groups to each other and to the leadership of the central organizers.

4. Folksongs of Our Time. Song Production in the GDR at the Beginning of the Cold War

Songs were of wide-reaching significance in the Cold War. Conclusions can be drawn about the many conscious efforts to regulate vocal music through censorship, for example of rock and roll in Eastern Europe or of songwriters and researchers like Alan Lomax, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger in the United States.³⁵⁵ However, diverging concepts of song not only defined the rules of what would be censored. The perceived value of songs, especially the differing values attributed to folk and classical song practices, regulated the production of songs as well. This was especially the case in Germany, where *das Lied* had long been integral to the formation of national identity and inspired the Romantic music tradition that continues to dominate Western art music. In East Germany, where vocal music was recognized as vital to daily life and therefore inherently political, policies were put in place that encouraged a whole new and unique system of composition, publishing, and performance of vocal music.

³⁵⁵ Minna Bromberg and Gary Alan Fine, "Resurrecting the Red: Pete Seeger and the Purification of Difficult Reputations," *Social Forces* 80, no. 4 (2002): 1135-55.

Diverging concepts of Lied in Germany can be matched to the ideological schism that appeared between East and West. An exploration of the disparate understandings of the Lied-concept, and of their resulting application in the GDR, reveals the important role of song in the discourse on ideological principles on both sides of the Iron Curtain. After examining several definitions of Lied, I will present some examples of how the particular narrative employed in the GDR influenced the mass production of song in the early years of the new state. I suggest that the functionaries of the Association of Composers and Musicologists (*Verband der Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler* or VKM) understood song not only as composition, but also as a performative practice. Songs produced at this time in East Germany therefore served both to support German traditions of the nineteenth century and the political folk practice that redefined the national identity under socialism in the second half of the twentieth century. This resulted in a process I call “folksongization,” the explicit creation of a canon of song, with institutions and practitioners using and reusing song material to reinforce the contemporary socialist value system.

4.1. Folksong production

In order for the musical leaders of the early GDR to create new folk songs, new techniques would also have to be developed if the songs were to attain broad recognition among the masses. Musicologists and composers in the GDR recognized that powerful actors had influenced the practice of music throughout history and questioned earlier narratives of the musical canon.³⁵⁶ To become included in any canon, a work must go through processes of dissemination, academic criticism, and public discourse. It must adhere to norms of audience demographics and political ritual, thereby corresponding to the social status of its originators and performers. This all results in a narrative of legitimacy around the piece, allowing it to be repeated, thereby reinforcing the process of making it part of the canon. Musicologists in the GDR cited some of these elements in their critique of bourgeois musical practices of the past and created new narratives in support of their own ideals. In doing so, they employed processes of canon building that would be identified by musicologists in later decades.³⁵⁷

In the GDR, the aim of the Liedschaffen committee was to produce new songs that were to function not only as works of art in a canon, but more importantly, as folksongs. As stated above, when understood as socialist realist folksongs, Massenlieder differ from works of the classical canon in many ways. The process of incorporating the Massenlied into the musical canon of the GDR had to accommodate concepts of both high and low practices, purposeless and functional music, and bourgeois and socialist ideals. Therefore,

³⁵⁶ Elaine Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the German Democratic Republic: Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31–63.

³⁵⁷ For example: Katherine Bergeron and American Musicological Society, eds., *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Marcia J Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Joseph Kerman, "A Few Canonic Variations," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (1983): 107–25; Erich Reimer, "Repertoirebildung und Kanonisierung zur Vorgeschichte des Klassikbegriffs (1800-1835)," *Archiv Für Musikwissenschaft* 43, no. 4 (1986): 241–60; or William Weber, "The Intellectual Origins of Musical Canon in Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47, no. 3 (1994): 488–520.

instead of describing the promotion of these songs as a “canonization,” I use the term “folk-songization” for the process in which practitioners worked toward developing a canon of “folksongs of their time.”

Some songs had already successfully gone through this folksongization process and become Massenlieder. Two pieces by the best-known composer of such songs, Hanns Eisler, will be discussed here. The title of one of Eisler’s first song projects after his return from exile, the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, makes clear the author’s intention: to create new folksongs for a new Germany. Written in collaboration with Johannes R. Becher in 1950, many songs from the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* went on to live up to their title and were accepted as folksongs of their time. Another example, the “Solidaritätslied” gained legendary status and was an obvious model for those who wanted to emulate its omnipresence in the public life of the GDR. An examination of the background of these and other compositions makes it clear that the way in which they reached their Massenlied status differs from the equivalent process for works of the classical canon. Although some factors, like dissemination of scores, academic discourse, or the status of their creators and audience play a key role in both “canonization” and a song’s “folksongization” there are some differences that must be discussed.

4.1.1. Academic discourse

In an article in the September issue of the journal in 1961, composer Joachim Werzlau bemoaned the lack of musicological discourse around newly composed song. This article became the catalyst for the Liedschaffen discussion in *Musik und Gesellschaft*, which gave rise to the Liedschaffen committee.³⁵⁸ The article and its reception demonstrate the desired link between the social importance of song and its academic criticism in public discourse. In general, academic discourse can create and reinforce a musical work’s place in a song canon. The authors of the *Musiklexikon* were also aware of these processes, as exemplified by their critique of the church’s suppression of *musica vulgaris*. In turn, as Elaine Kelly

³⁵⁸ See section “Liedschaffen Under Debate” in chapter 3.

argues, musicologists in the GDR created their own academic narratives that adhered to socialist values in order to justify and critique the inclusion or exclusion of certain works.³⁵⁹

In contrast to newly composed works, older folksongs, i.e., those that could be found in German folksong anthologies at the beginning of the twentieth century, had to be dealt with differently in order to achieve widespread recognition. Only after researchers had collected, consolidated, transcribed, and published the musical material was it possible for it to be made widely available in songbooks and other media. The academic discourse around a folksong, and its subsequent influence on composed music, then creates what Suppan has called a “second existence.” Without this academic treatment of a song, its “first existence” can be understood as a strictly oral or performative practice. Once it becomes a topic of academic discourse, it achieves this “second existence” and contributes to academic understanding of the folksong concept.

As previously discussed, many political songs of the past received this academic treatment in the GDR. The publication of Wolfgang Steinitz’s highly influential *Deutsche Volkslieder demokratischen Charakters aus sechs Jahrhunderten* in 1955 stamped “democratic” folksongs as a legitimate area of study. Likewise, the musicologist Inge Lammel dedicated her entire career to research into and collection of Arbeiterlieder. She founded the Arbeiterlieder archive within the GDR Academy of Arts in 1954 and remained in charge of the archive for over 30 years. Her doctoral dissertation and many publications about political songs helped support their academic legitimacy, which gave the “folksongs of the working class” the status of an ethnomusicological subject and provided their “second existence.”

When explicitly *trying* to create a folksong, there was no long history to legitimize a composition’s quality or importance. Nevertheless, many argued that composers should draw inspiration from the many new Massenlieder that “already provide a rich store of melodies” for symphonic works.³⁶⁰ Yet these two “first” and “second” types of existence did not

³⁵⁹ Kelly, *Composing the Canon in the GDR*.

³⁶⁰ “Die Forderung nach Melodik im sinfonischen Schaffen aber bedeutet nicht Ersatz des hier benötigten thematischen Materials durch Liedweisen.

have to occur in their usual order. Instead, the VKM played the academic role even before the song had been popularized, by meeting, discussing, sorting, and pre-approving songs that would then go through the rest of the “folksongization” process. For policy makers, publishers, and the general public, the VKM’s approval was synonymous with a stamp of quality and signaled that the songs were expected to be accepted by the broader public. Such works would then become interesting topics of research (as, for example, here) and be further legitimized as compositions and as inspiration for other artworks in the years to come.

Despite the democratic structure of the VKM, its leaders in Berlin were criticized for having complete control over what and who would be given a platform in journals, newspapers, and concerts. This small group, including Harry Goldschmidt, Georg Knepler, Nathan Notowicz, Ernst Hermann Meyer, and Eberhard Rebling, was named the “*Berliner Clique*” or “*das mächtige Häuflein*” (the mighty few) by their opponents.³⁶¹ According to Rebling, the nickname’s “antisemitic undertone was apparent [and we] also seemed suspicious to some overzealous comrades, since Knepler was Austrian, Goldschmidt Swiss, I was Dutch, and Meyer and Notowicz had returned from exile in the West. Only our expertise protected us from potential slander.”³⁶² Thus, opposition—at least in part—seemed to stem less from a resistance to the idea of a powerful clique and more out of discrimination against the individuals themselves. In any case, these few musicologists occupied positions that enabled them to act as gatekeepers between composers and policymakers, interpreting and ultimately defining what was acceptable. This gave them a vast amount of influence over

Er bedeutet vielmehr dem Genre gemäße Prägnanz, Konkretheit der Thematik, Logik, Plastizität ihrer Verarbeitung. Stärker als bisher verdient allerdings die Tatsache Berücksichtigung, daß unser neues Lied- und Massenliedschaffen schon heute einen reichen Intonationsfundus für den Sinfoniker darstellt, aus dem er Anregungen für seine Themengestaltung gewinnen kann, der ihm die Möglichkeit klarer, parteilicher und allgemein verständlicher Aussagegestaltung in seinem Genre bietet.“ Hansjürgen Schaefer, “Hörer - Komponist - Interpret,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 578. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

³⁶¹ See Peggy Klemke, *Taktgeber oder Tabuisierte: Komponisten in der DDR; Staatliche Kulturpolitik in den fünfziger Jahren* (Marburg: Tectum Verl, 2007), 38-53.

³⁶² Lin Jaldati and Eberhard Rebling, *Sag nie, du gehst den letzten Weg: Lebenserinnerungen; 1911 bis 1988, Sammlung 1* (Marburg: BdWi-Verlag, 1995), 457.

the musical discourse in the GDR. For example, as editor of the VKM's musicological journal, *Musik und Gesellschaft*, Rebling had prime influence over what compositions would be discussed in the musicological journal of the VKM.

Eisler's relationship with these leaders was complex. They enabled his return to the GDR by offering him a professorship and were active in strengthening and upholding his reputation as one of the "greats of the age," "a fighter, creator, model," and revolutionary hero.³⁶³ After publishing his libretto for the planned opera *Johann Faustus* in 1952, came under fire from critics, who thought it failed to musically represent the characteristics of the builders of socialism.³⁶⁴ Eisler was "humiliated and demotivated," to the point of being "paralyzed in his creative work from that point on."³⁶⁵ The *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, however, seemed to fit their requirements. The songs were supposed to be old and new, progressive and traditional, as well as artistically mature, yet simple. This "evident syncretism of their stylistic elements is now found irritating by sensitive ears," while Becher's poetry has been criticized as "contrived and fictitious."³⁶⁶ However, musicologists discussed the *Volkslieder* in the context of both socialist ideals and works of art by claiming Eisler enriched the Romantic song tradition "by combining elements and intonations of the German folk and workers' song to create a new type of intonation appropriate to our socialist era."³⁶⁷ The reception of the *Volkslieder*, at least in the overtly expressed opinion of the academic world, continued to be enthusiastic for decades.

Especially because of the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, Eisler became cemented in academic discourse as "playing an exemplary role" in the GDR's "Renaissance of Song" and

³⁶³ Ernst Hermann Meyer, "Kämpfer - Schöpfer - Vorbild," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 587-88.

³⁶⁴ Peggy Klemke, "Die Rolle von DDR-Musikwissenschaftlern in den fünfziger Jahren bei der Propagierung des sozialistischen Realismus," in *Form Follows Function: Zwischen Musik, Form und Funktion; Beiträge zum 18. internationalen studentischen Symposium des DVSM*, ed. Till Knipper (Hamburg: von Bockel, 2005), 275.

³⁶⁵ Nina Noeske and Matthias Tischer, "Komponieren in der DDR," in *Musik in der DDR: Historiographische Perspektiven*, ed. Andreas Lueken (Baden-Baden: Tectum Verlag, 2024), 11.

³⁶⁶ Albrecht Betz, *Hanns Eisler, Political Musician*, English ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 214.

³⁶⁷ Inge Lammel, liner notes to *Eisler: Neue deutsche Volkslieder (Texte: Becher)*, LP Vinyl (Nova VEB Deutsche Schallplatten 8 85 021, 1971).

the new “function of vocal creativity.”³⁶⁸ The *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* were adopted as the inspiration for an interdisciplinary artistic collaboration of the same name during the commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the GDR. According to its preface, the project was intended to “question the songs from the years of [the GDR’s] new beginning with their artistic means—in order to find images in which the pathos of our days finds credible form.”³⁶⁹ The resulting limited edition portfolio consisted of prints by 20 visual artists, introductory essays by leading academic figures, and a copy of the 1963 recording with Ernst Busch, just one of the many recordings which had also played an important role in the dissemination of the songs.³⁷⁰

Eisler’s Neue Deutsche Volkslieder

In many ways, Hanns Eisler’s *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, composed in the first few months of 1950 in close collaboration with the poet Johannes R. Becher, exemplify the various functions that song was supposed to serve in the Aufbau period. The title is reminiscent of several song collections from the nineteenth century (e.g., Brahms’ *Deutsche Volkslieder* from 1894), and promises the continuation of a great German musical tradition for a new Germany. As the foreword to the first edition suggests, the songs were also supposed to erase the geopolitical borders that had been “drawn through the middle of [the] fatherland” to unite the two Germanies by becoming “a song of all Germans.”³⁷¹ The original fifteen songs were written with various “characters” in mind who could “find a place in the hearts of people, who are creating a new life.” The themes of the lyrics are meant to

³⁶⁸ Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds., *Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1976*, vol. 5, Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Berlin: Verl. Neue Musik, 1979), 94.

³⁶⁹ “Neue Deutsche Volkslieder,” 1984, VBK-Zentralvorstand 1245, AdK.

³⁷⁰ *Mappe “Neue Deutsche Volkslieder,”* 1984, Druckgrafik, 1984, KS-Druckgrafik 1146, AdK.

³⁷¹ “Das Volkslied soll seinen Platz finden in den Herzen der Menschen, die ein neues Leben schaffen. Wir wollen wieder singen lernen, und ein Lied der Freiheit und des Friedens soll es sein. Wir hoffen, dass dieser neue Volksgesang über die Grenzen, wie sie noch immer mitten durch unsere Vaterland gezogen sind, sich hinwegsetzen wird und sich erheben wird zu einem Lied aller Deutschen.” Johannes R. Becher, foreword to Hanns Eisler, *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag GmbH, 1950).

accompany the many new values of everyday (ideally socialist) life: sports, nature, *Heimat*, and political activism.

According to Eisler, the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* were intentionally composed to be as easily learned as possible. His “simple” piano accompaniment was meant to assist the singer, not to give additional meaning to the lyrics “or to add psychological subtleties [...] as is typical of the concert song.”³⁷² In the first published edition of the score, the word “simple” (*einfach*) was changed to “simplified” (*vereinfacht*), misleadingly suggesting that a more complicated artistic version had once existed.

Although Eisler’s stated intention was to avoid “stealing glances at concert-like effects” while composing the songs,³⁷³ the subsequent production and reception of his *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* blurred the lines between folkloristic practice and artistic music composition in many ways. Published and given their premiere as a unified set within weeks of their composition at the first *Deutschlandtreffen der Jugend* (Conference of the German Youth) in May of 1950, the songs could easily be understood as a song cycle. For this first performance, Eisler arranged the songs for soloist, choir, and chamber orchestra; musicologists and reviewers were quick to draw parallels with the German classical song tradition, comparing Eisler’s cycle to the works of the early Romantics, “but without sentimentality, as the composer expressly emphasizes.”³⁷⁴ Over the years, the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* were often compared to the likes of Schubert, Silcher, Mendelssohn, and Brahms and treated as art songs that bridged the gap between the classical canon and the Volk.³⁷⁵

³⁷² “Alle Lieder sind auf leichte Faßlichkeit angelegt. Jeder kann sie mit wenig Mühe erlernen, deshalb heißen sie Volkslieder. Zur Volkstümlichkeit gehört unbedingt die leichte Faßlichkeit. Die Begleitung stützt das Singen, sie ‘hilft’ dem Sänger. Das bedeutet, daß die Klavierbegleitung in keiner Weise den Text illustriert, wie es im Konzertlied üblich ist, oder psychologische Feinheiten hinzufügt.” Hanns Eisler, “Das neue Volkslied: Gespräch mit Hanns Eisler (1950),” in *Materialien zu einer Dialektik der Musik*, ed. Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: Reclam, 1973), 202.

³⁷³ “Wenn ich mir also zum Beispiel die Aufgabe stelle, zu den so schönen Gedichten von Becher eine volkstümliche Melodie zu finden, so darf ich nicht nach Konzertwirkungen schießen, die ja andere Hörvoraussetzungen haben.” Eisler, “Das neue Volkslied (1950),” 202.

³⁷⁴ “Neue Volkslieder für die Jugend,” *Neues Deutschland*, May 24, 1950, 3.

³⁷⁵ “Unter den gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen der Gegenwart setzt Eisler die klassische deutsche Liedtradition eines Schubert, Silcher, Mendelssohn und Brahms bewußt fort; er

As heard on the 1951 and 1963 recordings, Eisler gave special importance to the inclusion of the harpsichord. According to the notes in the original score, if performers could not find a harpsichord for a performance, a spinet would suffice, but a piano was “only [to be used] in an emergency.”³⁷⁶ The choice to include this cumbersome baroque instrument, the sound of which evokes the music of Handel or Bach, immediately injects a sense of historicism and tradition into the simple tunes. Indeed, the first recording of the set by Ernst Busch was even said to be a kind of cantata.³⁷⁷ The Mahleresque embellishments in the clarinet line of “Die alten Weisen” further demonstrate the continuation of an audible German national tradition.

While the arrangement of the songs and the artistic control that Eisler held over the publication and recordings emphasized that this collection of songs belonged to the classical canon, not necessarily to the oral tradition of the people, the Volkslieder were also intended to satisfy the urgent need for “folksongs of their time.” To satisfy this demand, songs would have to be “truly connected to the people.”³⁷⁸ Certain characteristics of the classical works of the canon could prevent the fulfillment of this aim, e.g., works of music originating from an individual and not from the people. Rather than claiming that the music of the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* communicates their artistic intentions alone, Becher and Eisler

bereichert sie, indem er durch Verbindung von Elementen und Intonationen des deutschen Volks- und Arbeiterliedes einen neuen, unserer sozialistischen Epoche gemäßen Intonationstyp schafft.” Inge Lammell, *Eisler: Neue deutsche Volkslieder (Texte: Becher)*.

³⁷⁶ Eisler, EGW 1/18, 137.

³⁷⁷ Karl Schönwolf, “Deutsche Heimat, Sei Gepriesen: Neue Deutsche Volkslieder von Becher/Eisler,” *Der Sonntag*, May 7, 1950, Eisler 3810, AdK.

³⁷⁸ “Dafür gibt es verschiedene Voraussetzungen. Eine der Voraussetzungen ist selbstverständlich, daß der Dichter und der Musiker solche Volkslieder schaffen, die wirklich mit dem Leben des Volkes verbunden sind, und zwar nicht dadurch, daß sie ab und zu sich unter das Volk mischen oder Betriebe oder MAS besuchen, Damit ist nichts getan. Die Verbundenheit mit dem Volk muß eine solche sein, daß der Dichter und der Komponist so intensiv das Leben des Volkes mitleben, daß jede Regung des Volkes in ihnen mitschwingt und in ihnen seinen künstlerischen, sagbaren und singbaren Ausdruck findet.” Johannes R. Becher, “Interview mit Joh. R. Becher,” *Berliner Zeitung*, February 21, 1950, 3.

maintained in interviews that they simply discovered “what is emerging” among the people and brought it to maturity.³⁷⁹

In announcements and reviews, the songs were repeatedly referred to as a *Volkslieder-sammlung*, a collection of folksongs. Since the set of songs was not a collection of older songs from various sources, but newly composed over a matter of months, this term does not seem to fit. However, the use of the term “collection” nonetheless gives the impression that the songs were already in existence in some emergent form and that Eisler and Becher had collected them from the *Volk*. This made the comparison with Schubert and Brahms even more fitting, since this new musical score would, like songs in the Romantic tradition, act as the fully developed “second existence” of material that was “not yet completely mature” among the people. Just as the *Deutsche Volkslieder* by Brahms and others were understood to be the *Umsetzung* (translation) of the mysterious, uncultivated, authentic voice of the *Volk*, so too could the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* be understood as a composed musical score “translating” the voice of the people.

The “first existence” of these folk songs, that is, outside the concert hall in folk-like musical practices, then had to be made tangible. Eisler quickly produced and published new versions with guitar and accordion accompaniment as alternatives to the (already simplified) piano accompaniment. Early recordings also featured the atmospheric sound of a banjo on numerous tracks, reminding listeners that these songs are art works of, and for, the modern people. VKM members like Rolf Lukowsky and Fritz Höft made choral versions of selected songs for the FDGB’s *Liedblätter*, and these versions made their way into the music textbooks of the school curriculum. This meant that the new *Volkslieder* could retain their artistic legitimacy through the dissemination of formal musical scores and sim-

³⁷⁹ “Eine andere Voraussetzung dafür, um solche wirklichen Volkslieder schaffen zu können, ist, daß man das Neue unserer Zeit entdeckt und auch dort schon wachsen sieht, wo es sich noch nicht in vollkommener Reife darstellt.” Becher, “Interview mit Joh. R. Becher,” 3.

ultaneously be performed outside the concert hall by the wider public. This tension between high and low culture—arguably a unique characteristic of the German Lied³⁸⁰—allowed many of the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* to live up to their title, both as folksongs of their time and as a “song cycle” or “a sort of cantata”³⁸¹ that continued the great German art song tradition.

4.1.2. Dissemination and adaptation

In the process of creating a work-based musical canon, composed works were and are usually disseminated through the publication and availability of scores. This was also an important function of the VKM and other musical institutions like the Akademie der Künste, whose members were appointed editors of countless publications of song collections. For example, new compositions commissioned by the VKM for the annual Arbeiterfestspiele and other events were then published in the FDGB’s *Liedblätter*. Selected songs from the *Liedblätter*, which had gained popularity (or were favorites of the editors) were then reprinted in *Brüder am Werk*, a three-volume, hardback series containing hundreds of songs. *Brüder am Werk* was published by the FDGB and was provided to local workplace-based amateur choirs. Sheet music was also printed in several other periodicals such as the *Neue Chorliederbuch* as well as the series *Unser neues Lied*, which was published by the International Music Library. Song scores also appeared in academic or professional journals like *Volkskunst*, *Musik in der Schule* and *Fröhlich sein und singen*. New scores were also published in national newspapers, schoolbooks, and leaflets, or as official materials for public organizations like the People’s Army (NVA) or the Free German Youth (FDJ). Members of the VKM were almost always involved in these publications as editors or advisors. VKM members like Ludwig Matthies and Joachim Werzlau even complained that songs appeared far too rarely in the association’s own journal *Musik und Gesellschaft*.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ David Robb, ed., *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2007), 2.

³⁸¹ Karl Schönwolf, “Deutsche Heimat, Sei Gepriesen: Neue Deutsche Volkslieder von Becher/Eisler,” *Der Sonntag*, May 7, 1950, Eisler 3810, AdK.

³⁸² Joachim Werzlau, “Ein kritisches Wort zur Diskussion um unser Liedschaffen,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 11 (1961): 209.

Any doubts about the usefulness of commissioning so many songs were put to rest by the guarantee that the scores of songs that were deemed “worthy of publication and dissemination” would be printed with the aim of encouraging musical practice.³⁸³ The strategy of encouraging public singing through wide dissemination of musical scores was also important for the “folksongization” of the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*. Eisler and Becher had written the song “Lied von der Blauen Fahne” (Song of the blue banner) for the *Deutschlandtreffen* in June 1950, when thousands of members of the FDJ were to meet in Berlin. Before its official publication in May of that year, the song had already been mentioned for months in newspaper announcements and interviews about Eisler and Becher’s set of folksongs, due to be published soon after. The score to the song “Deutschland” score was even printed in *Neues Deutschland* to publicize the recital of fifteen songs that was the high point of the convention.

Recognizability and Breitenwirkung for a new Massenlied could not be achieved through documentation and reproduction of a musical score alone. Similarly to an oral tradition, which functions in the absence of a printed text, the practice of folksong also functions without a written version. A score, like a printed novel, can ideally be reproduced exactly as its creator intended. Folksongs, on the other hand, consist of what Walter Benjamin called “the raw material of experience” and must be adapted to its practitioners, whether performers or listeners.³⁸⁴ This means that a folksong must change to fit the purposes of its delivery and must be identifiable even in various non-musical situations.

The entire musical score of a Massenlied might be used as “raw material” and be disseminated out of context to increase and reify the song’s Breitenwirkung, as was the case when the entire score of Paul Dessau’s “Spaniens Himmel” was printed on a postage stamp

³⁸³ “Innerhalb der heutigen Aussprache habe es noch einen Disput über die Anwendbarkeit neuer Lieder und die Situation auf dem Gebiete der Musikerziehung gegeben [...] [Horst Irrgang] selbst wolle sich für die Publizierung solcher Lieder einsetzen, die in unserem Arbeitskreis Lied entstünden, sofern sie als verbreitungs- und publizierungswürdig eingeschätzt würden.” “Kurzprotokoll Sitzung Arbeitskreis Lied vom 3.11.1962,” November 3, 1962, VKM 309, AdK.

³⁸⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston; New York: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 55.

in 1966. However, non-textual elements of Massenlieder were also disseminated through their repetition in many parts of daily public life. Fragments of recognizable musical material appeared in later songs, for example the “Spaniens Himmel” motif in Willi Kaufmann’s march “Die Bereitschaft ist bereit,” and were also incorporated into various other media sources. “Solidaritätslied,” for example, was not only heard at the end of a concert performance or during public demonstrations. For decades, the song’s distinctive two-bar coda could also be heard many times a day on the radio as the interval signal for the main radio station, Deutschlandfunk, later renamed Voice of the GDR (Stimme der DDR). The same strategy of dissemination of condensed “raw song material” was also used for many other songs that embodied socialist ideals, like the national anthem, Eisler’s “Lob des Lernens” or “Wann wir schreiten Seit an Seit” by Michael Englert. The repetition of these melodic snippets throughout the day added to public recognition of the song, making it feel part of everyday life, and thus a marker of identity for the community of East German radio listeners. Apart from the many recordings and reprints of the musical score in countless songbooks, this reiteration of raw song material in the form of recognizable musical elements exemplifies how a song could become a part of community identity and come to define normality in the GDR.

4.1.3. Personality and origins

In terms of how the classical canon functions, the myth of a work’s origin, including the narrative about its creators, forms part of the legitimization of the work. According to Elaine Kelly, creation myths also played a key role under socialism, informing decisions about which pieces were to be studied and performed as part of the classical canon. Narratives of composer’s personalities, their relationship to political struggle, and their great feats of musical achievement became central arguments in discussions of appropriate repertoire. The creation of such narratives was just as important to the newer compositions that were to become embedded in public life and national identity. The national anthem, for example, was said to have been created while Eisler sat at Chopin’s piano in Warsaw, simultaneously providing the song with classical legitimacy and linking it to socialist neighbors to the east. Similarly, another important Massenlied, the “Solidaritätslied,” carried its own

weighty legend. According to Inge Lammel, the first time the song was recorded on film was at a mass public event, involving multiple workers' choirs as well as 4,000 members of sports clubs who "brought to light the solidarity of the workers in the struggle against impoverishment and exploitation."³⁸⁵ The footage was made for the film *Kuble Wampe* which was banned shortly after its 1932 premiere, but according to Lammel, even the act of recording had apparently already had a galvanizing effect.

The origin story of "Solidaritätslied" involves the mass organization of the working class, but also further supports the heroic narrative surrounding the three personalities involved: Brecht, Eisler, and Busch. Even though all three had complicated, turbulent relationships with East German institutions, and often found themselves involved in scandal and exposed to ridicule, the lasting narratives made them into model proletariat heroes. Performers like Ernst Busch, regarded as the voice of the working class, had an effect on the story of the origin of a song and therefore also on the "folksongization" process of a Massenlied.

In the case of folksongs, it is not the specific legends of their origin that contribute to their validity and authenticity. Instead, the anonymity of a folk song makes it possible for it to be accepted as a timeless piece of culture. This helps explain why nineteenth-century composers like Wilhelm von Zuccalmaglio claimed that their own (often nationalistic) compositions were the result of arduous research. The authenticity of a folksong is not something to be proven by answering questions of specific origin, but rather by the very difficulty of finding answers to such questions. In the "folksongization" process, practitioners in the GDR had to find ways of satisfying both tests: A Massenlied should have an origin story that is at once impressive and difficult to pinpoint.

If and how the names of composers and poets were used in printed material depended on the context in which a Massenlied was to be used. The names of composers like Paul Dessau or Hanns Eisler were venerated and frequently included in song books intended for official organizations or for academic or artistic performances. In contrast, the names of the

³⁸⁵ Inge Lammel, *Das Arbeiterlied*, Röderberg-Taschenbuch (Frankfurt am Main: Röderberg Verl, 1973), 240.

composers were mentioned in a side note or completely omitted in other books, where the songs were presented as folksongs or workers' songs. In these cases, the songs gained legitimacy by obscuring the identity of their composers and appearing to have anonymous roots. According to Stefan Weiss, Andre Asriel gladly collaborated with other composers when writing *Massenlieder*.³⁸⁶ This suggests a willingness to forgo the personal and monetary benefits of sole authorship in order to highlight the effectiveness of collective efforts. As the recipient of multiple lucrative prizes, Asriel could afford to share his recognition and even forgo royalties. Well-known and well-off composers could turn a blind eye to unauthorized performances of their compositions, making their songs more like folk songs. Other composers who were financially dependent on royalties had to advocate for recognized authorship whenever their songs appeared in print or in concert. The paperwork that had to be done to ensure royalty payments made songs less accessible as folksongs and more like compositions. In other words, for a song to become truly "of the people," its composer would have to be so well-known and financially secure that they could afford to write anonymously.

Radio programs and the recording

Radio programs and the recording of compositions had played a major role in formalizing the classical canon since the beginning of the twentieth century and continued to do so on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Recordings became vital for the promotion of lesser-known works and for the success of new compositions, making record labels and star performers an integral part of the classical composition business. "Definitive" versions thus added to or redefined the origin story of a work and its legitimacy narrative. This process also occurred with *Massenlieder*. In 1946 Ernst Busch founded his record label with the

³⁸⁶ See Stefan Weiss, "How to Be Useful: The Songs of Andre Asriel," in *The Cold War through the Lens of Music-Making in the GDR: Political Goals, Aesthetic Paradoxes and the Case of Neutral Sweden*, ed. Petra Garberding and Henrik Rosengren (Lund: Universus Academic Press, 2022), 70-71.

fitting title *Lied der Zeit* (Song of the times) and immediately began recording and distributing renditions of songs like “Die Thälmann-Kolonne,” “Die Moorsoldaten,” and “Solidaritätslied.”

As previously described, Eisler made several versions of his *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* in order to increase the performability of the songs, both in and outside the concert hall, so that they could be adapted to several musical practices. At the same time, multiple recordings of songs would have to be produced. The songs of the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* were recorded by Ernst Busch in 1951, featuring Eisler’s arrangements for chamber orchestra, and again after Eisler’s death in 1963, with further tracks reworked and rearranged to include choirs and orchestra. The 1963 recording includes Mahleresque embellishments in the clarinet line and a harpsichord reminiscent of Handel or Bach, recalling the elite aspects of German musical heritage. However, the addition of accordion and banjo clearly evoke folk traditions—one traditionally German, one recently imported—,³⁸⁷ hinting at an allowance for a variety of interpretive possibilities and adaptations.³⁸⁸

Eisler and Busch also adapted “Die alten Weisen” in live performance. In a concert at the Academy of the Arts on January 22, 1960, Busch first sang the original peaceful downward cadence of “*Sie, die gefallen sind*” (the ones who have fallen), then sang the words again while Eisler pounded the piano with forte chords to end in a minor key. Whatever their motivation for the change, it provides one example among many of Busch adapting songs to increase their impact in the moment. Busch also made major changes during his many renditions of “Solidaritätslied” and explained the necessity for such changes in the 1982 documentary *Busch singt: Sechs Filme über die erste Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*.

I could not sing the “Solidaritätslied” at all [while fighting in Spain]. That is, “come out of your hole.” If I had sung that in the trench, “Come out of your hole that is called an apartment. And after a gray week comes a red weekend.” That would have been idiotic. Everything we sing now, we

³⁸⁷ For more on the reception and use of American musical idioms in the GDR, see section “Ami Go Home” in chapter 3.

³⁸⁸ Notes about the recording process also credit the composer Hans Hauska for providing some of the arrangements. “Aufnahmeprotokolle mit Angaben über Ort, Zeit, Inhalt der Aufnahmen, Musiker, Techniker und Kosten,” April 28, 1963, AdK-O 0544, AdK.

changed, created in Spain. This is the “Solidaritätslied,” text inspired by Brecht.³⁸⁹

The lyrics were changed again for Busch’s 1947 recording to match the landscape of post-war Germany, encouraging the people to apply the song to their efforts to rebuild the nation. Busch’s status as “the singing heart of the working class”³⁹⁰ and his legendary relationship with both Brecht and Eisler not only made his changes acceptable, but also reinforced the folksong-like function of his performances. Busch, when understood simply as an artist, could give his stamp of approval to new (and old) songs, but as a model “socialist personality” he was also to be emulated. By recording and performing many versions of composed pieces, Busch brought the work concept of a piece, the permanence of a score, and the timeless genius of its composer into question, demonstrating that these songs could be altered in their own musical practice. On the other hand, Busch’s legacy and its influence on the lasting reception of these songs has achieved the opposite effect. In subsequent years, Busch’s idiosyncratic voice became so synonymous with Arbeiterlieder that his recordings are understood as “authentic” source material that, for some, augment or replace the original score, making it a taboo for singers to even divert from his kind of vocal technique, let alone from the notes on the page.³⁹¹

4.1.4. Audiences and the masses

Audience identity plays an important role in both the inclusion of works in the established canon and for the “folksongization” of Massenlieder in the GDR. In both cases, the

³⁸⁹ “Ich konnte zum Beispiel das Solidaritätslied überhaupt nicht singen da. Das heißt, ‘kommt heraus aus eurem Loche.’ Wenn ich das gesungen hätte im Schützengraben, ‘kommt heraus aus eurem Loche das man eine Wohnung nennt, und nach einer grauen Woche folgt ein rotes Wochenende.’ Das wäre blöd gewesen. Da musste ich mich hinsetzen du wirst lachen. Alles was wir jetzt singen, das haben wir in Spanien geändert, gemacht. Das ist das Solidaritätslied, Text nach Brecht.” Ernst Busch in *Busch singt: Sechs Filme über die erste Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (DEFA, 1982). Italics indicate spoken emphasis.

³⁹⁰ Hanns Eisler, “Das singende Herz der Arbeiterklasse,” *Berliner Zeitung*, January 22, 1960, and EGW 3/2, 455–6.

³⁹¹ See chapter 5. See also Meredith Nicoll and Chanda VanderHart, “‘Ohne sich anzustrengen, junge Frau’: Gendered Vocality in Performance of Eisler’s Songs,” in *Hanns Eislers Musik und Diskurse aus Gender-Perspektiven*, ed. Diego Alonso Tomas and Peter Schweinhardt, vol. 7, *Eisler-Studien* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, forthcoming).

role of the audience, its public identity, and its social norms become part of the nature of the performance. Unlike works of the standard musical canon, performances of folksongs and Massenlieder are not bound to a concert ritual but may require many different modes of performance. The audience of a folksong expands to include anyone who might join in as a performer or compose new versions to fit their own needs, thereby eradicating any division between audience, patron, performer, and composer. In contrast, the concert ritual associated with classical works defines these roles clearly. By separating the audience from the practitioners, concert performance defines the identity of its audience as listeners and patrons. In the nineteenth century, the concert provided opportunities for an elite group to display its power by providing time, space, and finances for musical performances. The works performed through this display of power became a necessary part of the identity of this autonomous group. In Germany, the performance of such works thus became synonymous with the autonomous national identity that developed at the same time. The “great German musical traditions” and the social roles that they required were therefore inseparable from the idea of an autonomous German nation.³⁹²

Practitioners in the GDR attempted to reconcile the ideals of music for the masses with a continued reinforcement of a German national identity and of the rituals that depended on the existence of a powerful, autonomous concert-going audience. Composers like Eisler had to base their creations on “the great German musical traditions” while at the same time entering into “close contact with the working people.”³⁹³ One solution was to alter the concert ritual that defined an elite audience of listener-patrons. Just as luxurious concert halls

³⁹² See, e.g., Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, “Germans as the ‘People of Music’: Genealogy of an Identity,” in *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn’s Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005); “4. Cultural nationalism and German Romanticism” in Richard Taruskin, “Nationalism,” in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed February 3, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.50846>.

³⁹³ “Hanns Eisler ist in den letzten Jahren nur wenig mit großen Werken an die Öffentlichkeit getreten und ist in diesen Werken durch bei ihm vorhandene Unklarheiten in der nationalen Frage nicht frei von formalistischen Elementen (Beispiel: “Triptychon”). Er legte dabei eine Zurückhaltung an den Tag, die typischen Eigenschaften der Erbauer des Sozialismus, nämlich Tatkraft und Begeisterung für die großen Aufgaben unserer Zeit, musikalisch zu gestalten. [...] Die werktätigen Menschen, die Hanns Eisler aus seinem früheren Schaffen gut kennen und ihm vertrauen, erwarten von ihm neue, große realistische Schöpfungen auf der

had glorified their creators, the upper-middle classes of the previous century, GDR practitioners attempted to modify the power dynamics of concerts by performing in venues that displayed the power of the workers' state. Concerts often took place in factories or power plants, altering the demographics of the audience and the role of the composer.

In conjunction with the tenth anniversary of the VKM in 1961, a grand symphony concert entitled "Werke von jungen Komponisten" (Works of young composers) was planned to take place in the carbon graphite plant of VEB Elektrokohle Berlin-Lichtenberg.³⁹⁴ The concert was eventually moved to the Metropol-Theater, but the program still clearly demonstrated an intention to muddle the divisions between audience, patrons, amateurs, and professionals and to unite the masses through music. For one reviewer, one of the works prompted some questions: "For whom was it written? For amateurs, for music students, for public concerts? Good chamber music should serve all purposes. The beautiful, sincere 'Die Moorsoldaten: Music for 4 String Instruments' by Hanning Schröder can do just that."³⁹⁵ Schröder, like many of his compatriots, had been an active proponent of Gebrauchsmusik before the war and, although not part of the performance, the allusion to a Massenlied like "Die Moorsoldaten" served the important function of linking German traditions of composed orchestral music to the idea of mass participation in music making.

Just as folksongs had been integrated into the elite musical practices of the nineteenth century, bringing the ideas of a national folk into the concert realm, so Massenlieder were integrated into that same tradition of composed music. This fulfilled the need for a contin-

Grundlage der großen deutschen musikalischen Traditionen. Jetzt fehlt ihm offenbar noch die wirkliche innere Verschmelzung seines Lebens mit dem Leben des deutschen Volkes. Diese Verschmelzung kann Hanns Eisler nur erreichen, wenn er seine selbstgewählte Isolierung aufgibt und in engen Kontakt mit den werktätigen Menschen tritt." "Arbeitsprogramm der staatlichen Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten," 1953, DR 1, 5846, BAArch, quoted in Klemke, "Die Rolle von DDR-Musikwissenschaftlern," 275.

³⁹⁴ "Aus Anlaß des zehnjährigen Bestehens des Verbandes Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler," 1961, VKM 828, AdK.

³⁹⁵ "Für wen wurde sie geschrieben? Für Laien, für Musikstudierende, für öffentliche Konzerte? Gute Kammermusik sollte allen Zwecken dienen. Die schöne, aufrichtige 'Musik für 4 Streichinstrumente' von Hanning Schröder kann es." "Mut zur Volkstümlichkeit," *Berliner Zeitung*, April 13, 1961, 6.

uous German identity and meant that the concert ritual could be allowed to continue without betraying the importance of the masses or undervaluing the working class. For the anniversary concert on April 7, the VKM commissioned a major orchestral work, *Orchester-Variationen über Hanns Eislers Solidaritätslied*. As a meta-act of solidarity, the commission for this work was not given to a single composer, but instead conceptualized as a *Gemeinschaftsarbeit* (collaborative work) “that—while maintaining all forms of personal expression—strive[d] for a high level of artistic and thus also social commitment.”³⁹⁶ Eisler had arranged an orchestral version of his song which served as the theme, while eight composers used its well-known characteristics as raw material for their variations. All nine movements were premiered as a unified work and presented in the press as an example of collective effort that, “while preserving the will for personal expression, strives toward a high artistic and thus social purpose.”³⁹⁷

Although the critics praised facets of the music, they concentrated on the concept of the “Solidaritätslied”, its role in the making of German cultural history and whether it was well-served by this orchestral work. Despite the strictly instrumental work making no reference to the original text (or any other version of the lyrics), critics often mentioned how this *Gemeinschaftsarbeit* honored the ideas promoted by the text of the song. “The wisdom and succinctness of Bertolt Brecht’s words”³⁹⁸ was mentioned as much as—or in some cases more than—the musical abilities of Eisler or the other composers.

With the exception of Joachim Werzlau, all of the composers involved in this collaborative creation were born between 1924 and 1930 and were therefore part of a generation that had experienced both the Nazi regime and the founding of the GDR. While exhibiting the formal traditions of the classical canon, the variations also showcased the “front row”

³⁹⁶ “So kann doch heute schon gesagt werden, dass der Hörer hier nicht nur mit einer rasch abgetanen Gelegenheitsarbeit konfrontiert wird. Wir haben es vielmehr mit einer schöpferischen Gemeinschaftsarbeit zu tun, die – bei Wahrung jeglichen persönlichen Ausdruckswillens – einer hohen künstlerischen und damit auch gesellschaftlichen Zielsetzung zustrebt.” Siegfried Köhler, “Gemeinschaftsarbeit Junger Komponisten,” *Berliner Zeitung*, April 5, 1961, 6.

³⁹⁷ “Wir haben es vielmehr mit einer schöpferischen Gemeinschaftsarbeit zu tun, die—bei Wahrung jeglichen persönlichen Ausdruckswillens—einer hohen künstlerischen und damit auch gesellschaftlichen Zielsetzung zustrebt.” Köhler.

³⁹⁸ “Mut zur Volkstümlichkeit,” *Berliner Zeitung*, April 13, 1961, 6.

of upcoming socialist artists who possessed the “courage to be popular,”³⁹⁹ namely: Andre Asriel, Fritz Geißler, Herbert Kirmße, Günter Kochan, Siegfried Köhler, Dieter Nowka, and Ruth Zechlin. Günther Kochan also produced a noteworthy quotation of another Massensong. This was “Unsterbliche Opfer” (Undying martyrs), a funeral march with its own rich narrative that connected the Russian revolution with musical activists like Hermann Scherchen, who had also written the German version of the lyrics.

It is highly unlikely that those involved with the commissioning, creation, and performance of the *Orchester-Variationen* used the term “performative” to describe their endeavors. However, publicized as a “musical proclamation of commitment to the here and now,”⁴⁰⁰ the project demonstrates a kind of performative understanding of socialist realism: Art should not only reflect, but also define the current reality.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ “Mut zur Volkstümlichkeit.”

⁴⁰⁰ Hansjürgen Schaefer, “Verbunden mit unserem Leben,” *Neues Deutschland*, April 12, 1961, 4.

⁴⁰¹ “Solidaritätslied” continued to have significance as conspicuous inspiration for later generations of orchestral composers, for example in Reiner Bredemeyer’s *Serenade 3 (für H. E.)* from 1972. See Nina Noeske, *Musikalische Dekonstruktion: Neue Instrumentalmusik in der DDR*, *KlangZeiten: Musik, Politik und Gesellschaft 3* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 203-11.

4.2. Case study: “Das Lied der Siebenmeilenstiefel”

As we have seen, songs like the “Solidaritätslied” went through various processes to become the “folksongs” of their time. The importance of these recognized Massenlieder created an expectation that songs would support both the musical traditions of German identity and socialist values. However, while practitioners in the GDR recognized the need to bolster a canon of recognizable Massenlieder, they also saw the need to write new songs that could be developed into Massenlieder. The VKM and other organizations commissioned hundreds of songs for a multitude of musical projects, and by the early 1960s the repertoire of politically acceptable songs in a popular idiom was enormous. In addition to developing ways to encourage public singing of these new songs, the Liedkommission of the VKM set out to identify the characteristics of potentially successful Massenlieder.

One example, “Das Lied der Siebenmeilenstiefel,” as mentioned several times in documents including “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes” (Current situation in the area of the mass song)⁴⁰² and “Thesen über die Entwicklung des Liedschaffens” (Theses on the development of song production)⁴⁰³ was a song with great potential. Its popularity with youth and amateur choirs was apparent, and the message of the lyrics was at once traditionally German and undeniably socialist. The legend tells the story of the seven-league boots that allow the person wearing them to take strides of seven leagues, resulting in great speed. Several versions of the Siebenmeilenstiefel myth exist, and it had already been given a “second existence” in plays by Lessing and Goethe. In the myths, the boots are often the gift of a magical character, intended to help the protagonist in the completion of a significant task. The Siebenmeilenstiefel were often referenced as a metaphor for the Aufbau period and the great strides that would need to be taken in order to achieve socialism. Folktale metaphors are thus mixed with modernist ideology in what feels like a perfect representation of a new German folk identity.

⁴⁰² “Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes,” 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

⁴⁰³ “Thesen über die Entwicklung des Liedschaffens,” September 23, 1961, VKM 101, AdK.

<p>1. [...] Her die Siebenmeilenstiefel, daß es schneller, immer schneller vor- wärts geht und das Rad der Weltgeschichte sich nie wieder rückwärts dreht!</p>	<p>1. Give us the seven-league boots, to go faster and faster forward and so the wheel of world history never turns backwards again!</p>
<p>2. [...] bis die Erde, neu bemessen, uns als Meisterstück gerät!</p>	<p>2. [...] until the earth, newly measured, has become our masterpiece!</p>
<p>4. Das Ziel, das wir uns stecken, ist näher als ihr meint. Laßt uns die Glieder recken, daß wir die Müden wecken im Schritt, der uns vereint. [...] Kürzer wird der Weg uns allen, wenn der Kompass ostwärts dreht.</p>	<p>4. The goal we set ourselves, is closer than you think. Let us stretch our limbs, so we wake up the tired in a stride that unites us. [...] The way gets shorter for all when the compass turns eastwards.</p>

To the members of the VKM, the song's Wirkung was its most important attribute, and details of its composition and the identity of its composer seem to have been forgotten. The document "Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes" falsely claimed that "Das Lied von den Siebenmeilenstiefeln" arose out of the "movement, starting from Bitterfeld, from which new songs also originated from amateurs."⁴⁰⁴ The "Siebenmeilenstiefel" song did not, however, spring from the indeterminate masses of the proletariat. Apparently inspired by the author-collective of the state radio, it was nevertheless composed by the established composer Otto Hilliger.⁴⁰⁵ The lyrics were by Hildegard-Maria Rauchfuss, a known author and poet from Leipzig, who was an honored member of the literary

⁴⁰⁴ "Schließlich gibt es eine Bewegung, ausgehend von Bitterfeld, aus der neue Lieder auch von Laien entstanden sind. Beispiele: Lied von den Siebenmeilenstiefeln [...]." "Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes," 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

⁴⁰⁵ "Siebenmeilenstiefel" is correctly listed elsewhere as a product of the Authors' Collective of the National Radio: "Wenn man die ganze Arbeit der Autorenkollektive übersieht, so kann man trotz vieler Experimente feststellen, daß ihre Anstrengungen nicht umsonst waren. Immerhin sind zahlreiche Lieder aus dieser Arbeit bekannt geworden." Werner Busch, "Das Lied unserer Tage im Rundfunk," *Musik und Gesellschaft* 12 (1962): 157.

counterpart of the VKM, the *Deutscher Schriftstellerverband* or DSV (Association of Writers).

The document did not explicitly explain the background or address the apparently broad acceptance of the myth of the song's anonymous creation. It praised the musical qualities of the song but failed to describe them. In fact, the composition has similarities to what the document bemoans as "the truncated, current form of the *Song* [...] not always satisfying and whose effectiveness is short-lived."⁴⁰⁶ "Siebenmeilenstiefel" is fun and cheerful, but musically speaking, it is unmistakably based on American pop idioms.

For its main compositional attributes, the song depends heavily on syncopation and blue notes. The long whole note entry of the melody and the alternation between the F# and F-natural blue note can be directly compared to the clarinet introduction to Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* or "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," which show a similar use of dominant seventh chords with a raised ninth. The half-tone leading embellishments seen in the piano accompaniment allude to "scooping" and pitch-bending as used in Black American vocal traditions, which had long since been appropriated into the Tin Pan Alley and Broadway singing styles by figures like George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and Jerome Kern, and into the general American pop sound thereafter.

While instrumentation and jazz-like composition techniques remained indicators of Western (capitalist) uses of music and were therefore often met with suspicion, a Massenlied could also contain these elements, as long as it had a purpose that fit with sanctioned ideals, appealed to the public at large, and functioned as a tool in the struggle against elitist musical constraints. Despite its obvious allusions to American music, "Siebenmeilenstiefel" was praised by members of the VKM as a potential Massenlied and steps were taken to promote its "folksongization." Otto Hilliger had printed the song half a decade before in the FDGB's *Liedblätter*, a regular publication of newly composed songs for mixed choir of

⁴⁰⁶ "Es wird auch vielfach noch die knappere und aktuellere Form des Songs gewählt. Das sind oft schnelle Reaktionen, deren musikalische Ergebnisse nicht immer befriedigend sind und deren Wirksamkeit vielfach sehr kurzlebig ist. "Gegenwärtige Situation auf dem Gebiet des Massenliedes," 1963, VKM 309, AdK.

which he himself was the editor, before including it in the second volume of *Brüder am Werk* in 1959.

The song was also to be performed at a concert during the tenth anniversary festival of the VKM on April 9, 1961, eight days after the performance of the “Solidaritätslied” variations.⁴⁰⁷ The concert, “Fröhlich sein und Singen: Eine musikalische Matinee für Klein und Groß” (Be cheerful and sing: A matinee of music for young and old), took place at the Maxim Gorki Theater and featured several children’s choirs and an amateur instrumental ensemble from Leipzig. It was scheduled to be televised nationally and was intended not only for the performers and a limited number of festival-goers, but for a nationwide audience.

However, the “Siebenmeilenstiefel” was apparently cut from the program at the last minute. Like hundreds of other songs composed during this period, “Das Lied der Siebenmeilenstiefel” failed to live up to its supposed potential to become a “folksong of its time,” and largely disappeared from the discourse. Efforts to disseminate new musical scores for the original song or to inject its “raw song material” into general public life seem to have been limited to those of the composer himself. Versions for other ensembles or other instruments, if these were created, do not seem to have made the song more popular. The song was recorded several times for radio broadcast, by the FDGB-Chor Groß-Berlin in 1960,⁴⁰⁸ by the GDR Radio Children’s Choir in 1961,⁴⁰⁹ and by another unnamed ensemble the same year.⁴¹⁰ However, it was never released by the Eterna label and failed to maintain a place in the Massenlieder canon.

⁴⁰⁷ “Aus Anlaß des zehnjährigen Bestehens des Verbandes Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler,” 1961, Berlin, AdK.

⁴⁰⁸ Chor des FDGB Groß-Berlin and Orchester des Wachregiments Berlin, *Her die Siebenmeilenstiefel (Lied für den Siebenjahrplan)* (Berlin, 1960), ZMV8057, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv.

⁴⁰⁹ Großer Radio DDR-Kinderchor, *Lied vom Siebenmeilenstiefel* (Berlin, 1961), ZMJ1679, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv.

⁴¹⁰ *Her, die Siebenmeilenstiefel* (Berlin, 1961), MDRA888, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv.

4.3. Solidification of the Cold War and the end of “folksongization”

The fate of “Das Lied der Siebenmeilenstiefel” was shared by thousands of songs from this period. Only a select handful became part of what could be considered a canon of the “folksongs” of the day. In retrospect, it is easy to see that the conditions under which these songs were written differ greatly from those under which previous *Massenlieder* took shape. A look at these differences helps clarify many reasons for the relative obscurity of these songs.

The East German view of song, folksong, and their relationship to art music differed greatly from the mainstream view of their predecessors and from the views of their Western peers. The act of communal singing and the use of song in daily life were obvious influences on musical production in the GDR, with widespread effect on generations of citizens. New traditions, like festivals, clubs, and school activities, shaped how East Germans interacted with music and each other. Nevertheless, the leaders of the musical institutions of the GDR were subject to the paradoxes of socialist realism as well as to their own role as inheritors of the great German musical tradition, both of which were rooted in the work-based ideals of the nineteenth century. *Massenlieder* like “Solidaritätslied” and some of the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* seemed to have bridged the gap between the elitist concert world, on which the production of art music depended, and the new popular practices. These songs existed in the form of musical scores created by well-known composers, were accepted by the academic world and disseminated by powerful institutions and star performers, qualifying them to function as works within a canon. However, they also functioned as folksongs, in that they served a purpose in society, were used as inspiration for academic and artistic activity, and had been adapted to be part of the performance of various activities in daily life.

However, changes and modifications to these songs became less and less acceptable in public performance over time. A canon of definitive songs became solidified, and soon, reinvention and innovation were no longer tolerated. The struggle to define a new musical national identity made it necessary to influence the activities of individual composers and

performers. Thus, in a departure from the ideas of folksong practice, censorship of the individual also required composers to exercise more control over their musical scores. The system of censorship relied on the expectation that performers would limit themselves to pre-approved musical works. In their fixed and approved versions, song texts that celebrated the struggles of defeating fascism or the *Aufbau* (post-war reconstruction) left younger generations feeling alienated and misunderstood. At the same time these songs, presented as songs of the people and as “life itself in its new form,” had little value in the canon of venerated historical literature. These new songs therefore represented neither the novelty, genius, or elitism of classical works nor the inherent aspects of anonymity, flexibility, or communal performativity of folk practice.

More work is needed to fully understand the immense role that song production played in the GDR. It would be a grave mistake to give in to the temptation to disregard East German song practices as failed or quaint. Such a choice would propagate assumptions about hierarchies in music, about the universality of Western musical works and about the insignificance of song and singing in society. By shifting the focus away from such assumptions, we have an opportunity to explore the broader implications of the role that vocal music plays in the political sphere and also to learn more about our own musical lives.

5. “Hier ist oratorischer Schöngesang fehl am Platz”: On Historiography of Vocal Performances in the GDR

The following chapter explores the reception and legacy of Eisler’s *Hollywood Songbook* through performance and recordings. Beginning with the noteworthy GDR-era recording by soprano Irmgard Arnold, I explore what experts have had to say about performances of these works and how singers today are expected to perform them. Good performances, according to many Eisler experts, rely on their authenticity. The question of what it means to sing authentically, however, opens up not only new problems of Eisler’s stylistic legacy in the realm of art-song performance but also historiological complications of how to deal with “useful” music of the GDR.

Among the composer’s most enduring compositions, Hanns Eisler’s *Hollywood Songbook* has been recorded several times outside the context of the GDR, either as a self-contained song cycle or as selections for a compilation. Famed Lieder and opera singers such as Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (1988), Mitsuko Shirai (1994), Matthias Goerne (1998), and Anna Prohaska (2014 and 2020) have recorded these songs with the original piano accompaniment, included them in their recitals, contributing to making the songs some of Eisler’s most widely performed pieces. Although these singers demonstrate a range of articulation

and declamatory techniques on their recordings, they adhere to a vocal technique that would be appropriate for most art-song repertoire. Of course, there are also recordings by “non-classical” singers that depart from classical music standards, both in instrumentation and vocal style.⁴¹¹ However, in contrast to other re-interpretations of standard “classical” repertoire, where actors or pop singers perform as a conscious juxtaposition to the norm (like Charly Hübner’s *Winterreise*, for example), “non-classical” interpretations of Eisler’s songs fit effortlessly into another, separate tradition of performing theatrical texts. In other words, actors and *diseuses* are not appropriating classical music by singing the *Hollywood Songbook*, but understanding the Hollywood songs as part of the well-established tradition of music-theater songs to which much of the rest of Eisler’s vocal repertoire belongs.

5.1. Irmgard Arnold’s Ambiguity of Voice

The Hollywood songs therefore pose a special challenge for contemporary performers who wish to interpret and perform them as art songs. I encountered the *Hollywood Songbook* for the first time as a classical voice student in Los Angeles while preparing for examinations. I was already aware of the expectation that songs with texts by Bertolt Brecht were supposed to be performed differently than standard Lied repertoire, so I went searching for a model of how to sing them correctly. Aside from Fischer-Dieskau and Matthias Goerne’s recordings, Irmgard Arnold’s from 1958 stood out to me as promising, not only because it was the oldest, but also because it was the only recording of a classical female singer available to me at the time. Similar to the expectations of many art-song audiences, my professors were evaluating my performance within the standards of classical vocal performance, i.e., in terms of a vocal technique that could be heard on any modern, commercial recording of Lieder. Indeed, the criteria for what can be deemed an “art song” often relies not only on whether it fits the compositional norms of a poem set for solo voice and piano but also on whether it is sung with a “classical” technique. In this context, singers are expected to perform with the technical ideals of what is often called *bel canto*: flawless legato, i.e., an uninterrupted “liquid” production of pitched tones; balanced overtones throughout all vocal

⁴¹¹ See, e.g., Dagmar Krause, *Angebot & Nachfrage (Lieder Von Brecht / Weill & Eisler)*, Hannibal Records HNBL 1317D, 1986, LP Vinyl.

registers and dynamics; regular and ever-present vibrato; and clear declamation of text that does not distract from a smooth chain of vowels. I checked out the CD of Arnold's recording from the library, but I returned it after listening to only a few seconds of her nasal, coarse, non-legato tone. I knew that if I sang like her, I would surely fail my exams.

Arnold's recording of Eisler songs is a shock to any art-song listener, especially to those who are familiar with her stellar biography as a classically trained singer. Looking back, it is difficult to reconcile the fact that she was one of the most successful and popular opera singers of her generation with her nasal, pinched, *knödely* tone,⁴¹² exaggerated portamenti, overly enunciated, choppy diction and irregular breathing. However, she had a long career as a lyric soprano at the Komische and Berlin State Operas and was a darling of impresario Walter Felsenstein. Arnold was granted the title of *Kammersängerin* in 1956 and received the National Award of the GDR in 1957 for her acclaimed portrayals of the roles Musetta (*La Bohème* Puccini), Violetta (*La Traviata* Verdi), Aminta (*Die Schweigsame Frau* R. Strauss) and the title role in *Cunning Little Vixen* (Janáček). The newspapers of the time lauded her as a "singer with charm and reason,"⁴¹³ "vocal brilliance"⁴¹⁴ and a "magnificently sweet sound."⁴¹⁵

Among her many recordings, Arnold's interpretations of Hanns Eisler's songs are by far the easiest to find, but other audio recordings provide audible proof of her exceptional ability. On the recording of Puccini's *Il Tabarro* in German from 1960,⁴¹⁶ for example, apart from a slight idiosyncratic "knödel," she demonstrates a mastery of "normal" operatic singing. Since her Eisler recording was made around the same time as her biggest successes, it does not stand to reason that she had perhaps "aged out" of her ability to sing, nor is it

⁴¹² Also known as "potato singing" or "Kermit-the-Frog singing," a *Knödel*, (German for "dumpling") describes the sound of a singer who has a "dumpling in the throat". Produced by singing with a relatively small space between the back of the tongue and the back of the throat, it may amplify vocal overtones but can also be perceived as sounding strange or artificial.

⁴¹³ "Sängerin mit Charme und Verstand," *Neues Deutschland*, January 15, 1956, 10.

⁴¹⁴ "Wie Eiskalt ist dies Händchen...," *Neue Zeit*, February 2, 1954, 4.

⁴¹⁵ "Eine bezaubernde Musikkomödie," *Neue Zeit*, April 1, 1955, 4.

⁴¹⁶ *Giacomo Puccini: Il Tabarro (Der Mantel)*, with Kurt Rehm, Irmgard Arnold, Hermin Esser, et al. Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, originally recorded in 1960, Profil Edition Günter Hänssler PH12064, 2012, CD.

likely that she had any lack of ability as a song recitalist. Her 1958 tour throughout the USSR with songs by Schumann and Wolf and international folksongs was (at least reported as) a massive success. One of the only relatively negative reviews that Arnold received was for a recital in 1959 in Berlin at the end of her USSR tour:

“Schumann’s dry Maria Stuart songs and international folk songs did not make a very gratifying program. [...] But then came the Eisler songs and, thanks to her inimitable characterization and the complete fusion of vocal artistry and performance realism, the artist was so truly in her element that the audience boisterously demanded encores.”⁴¹⁷

Particularly because of her 1958 recording, Arnold’s voice remained fondly associated with Eisler’s songs for decades. One must conclude that Arnold’s peculiar sound on the Eisler-recording was not due to a want of ability but rather to an artistic choice. In the GDR, this choice of a modified performance technique was also expected of other professional singers, even when singing Eisler’s “non-Brecht” songs. At the Johannes R. Becher memorial concert in 1963, for example, a young Peter Schreier was thusly reviewed in an issue of *Gesellschaft und Musik*:

“Peter Schreier’s lyrical tenor is extraordinarily suitable for Ernst Hermann Meyer’s songs [...]. Eisler, on the other hand, appears to sit less well with him. [...] There is no place for oratorical beautiful singing [*oratorischer Schöngesang*] here. [...] As much as it is to be welcomed that young interpreters turn to Eisler’s songs, it is important that they strive for the special style of this music.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ “Kammersängerin Irmgard Arnold, dem Schlaun Füchslein, der schweigsamen Frau und der Liu unserer Komischen Oper als Liedgestalterin zu begegnen, hatte seine Reize, wengleich im ersten Teil Schumanns trockene Maria-Stuart-Lieder und internationale Volkslieder kein sehr dankbares Programm abgaben und erst die Hugo-Wolf-Gesänge aus dem Spanischen Liederbuch zündeten. Aber dann gab es Eisler, und da war die Künstlerin dank unnachahmlicher Charakterisierung, dank völliger Verschmelzung von Stimmkunst und Vortragsrealistik erst richtig in ihrem Element, so daß die Zuhörer stürmisch Zugaben forderten.” Heino Lüdicke, “Zwischen Ausdruck und Virtuosität: Berliner Orchester- und Solistenkonzerte,” *Neue Zeit*, October 31, 1959, 5.

⁴¹⁸ “Peter Schreiers lyrischer Tenor ist für Ernst Hermann Meyers Lieder [...] außerordentlich geeignet. [...] Eisler dagegen scheint ihm weniger zu liegen. [...] Hier ist oratorischer Schöngesang fehl am Platz [...]. So sehr es zu begrüßen ist, dass junge Interpreten sich den Liedern Eislers zuwenden, so wichtig ist es, dass sie sich um den besonderen Stil dieser Musik bemühen.” Liesel Markowski, “Rezension der Becher-Ehrung (II. Berliner Festtage 11.9.1963),” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 733.

Schreier, apparently, never integrated Eisler into his repertoire after this performance in 1963, and his inclination for “Schöngesang” paid off, making him the world’s premier tenor for standard Lieder. Measured against the norms of bel canto, a lack of “Schöngesang” can sound strange if not outright bad to unready ears, so it is understandable that such a choice is nearly unthinkable for most classically trained singers. Arnold herself later stated in an interview in 2011 that singers who possess a powerful voice are reluctant to sing without demonstrating such ownership,⁴¹⁹ and she even chose to stop touring as a recitalist of Eisler’s songs a few years after she made her recording, opting instead to concentrate on her opera career. Yet for many Eisler-experts today, Arnold’s recording remains a model for performance, setting a divergent standard for the performance of Eisler’s art songs among the standard repertoire of the piano Lied. Indeed, for many Eisler-traditionalists, a classical-sounding voice has even become a marker of bad interpretation.

5.2. Arnold’s Legacy of Authenticity

As both a musicologist and a classically trained singer who has dedicated much time and energy to Eisler’s songs, I have encountered this opinion in forms that range from frustrated audience members at masterclasses to angry YouTube commentary. Recently, I attended a conference in Berlin that focused on the works of Eisler; after a doctoral candidate had delivered a solid presentation that analyzed the gendered components of *Wiegenlieder einer Arbeitermutter*, a member of the audience complained that the speaker had used audio examples that were too beautifully, too classically, sung. He was so incensed that he rose from his seat and belted several lines from “Solidaritätslied” at high volume to demonstrate the difference. My experiences are not unique; Heidi Hart reports witnessing a similarly heated discussion at the Hanns Eisler Symposium at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 2016, where colleagues pejoratively likened Matthias Goerne’s tone to “a warm bath.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ Irmgard Arnold, “‘Er hatte ja so recht...’ Irmgard Arnold im Interview mit Manfred Grabs,” *Eisler-Mitteilungen* 18 (April 2011): 12.

⁴²⁰ Heidi Hart, *Hanns Eisler’s Art Songs: Arguing with Beauty*, 1st ed. (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer Limited, 2018), 66.

Although the contemporary debate about vocal traditions of Eisler's art songs is lively, recent decades have produced few academic texts that deal specifically with this subject, as most scholars, at least on paper, seem more interested in the score than in performance practice.⁴²¹ Fritz Hennenberg, the musicologist and long-time accompanist to Roswitha Trexler, dedicated the final chapter of his Eisler monograph from 2016 to "Suggestions on how to sing Eisler"; however, he does not mention the art songs specifically, concentrating instead on a "number of rules—and unusual ones, especially for singing—[that] run through" all of Eisler's vocal repertoire, no matter what genre.⁴²² Hennenberg's most concrete suggestion comes from conductor Karl Rankl: "most exaggerated syllable division, most exact distribution of vowels and consonants, overemphasis of syllables unstressed in ordinary speech, [...] sharpest juxtaposition (without transition) of dynamic contrasts [...] always let it be sung 'non legato'."⁴²³ This description pertains specifically to singing choral *Arbeiterlieder*, but Hennenberg argues it is part of a *Schönklang neuer Art* (new kind of beautiful sound), that should be applied to any genre.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ See, e.g., Markus Roth, *Der Gesang Als Asyl: Analytische Studien Zu Hanns Eislers Hollywood-Liederbuch*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Hofheim: Wolke, 2007); Claudia Albert, *Das schwierige Handwerk des Hoffens: Hanns Eislers "Hollywooder Liederbuch"* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1991); Stanley E. Workman Jr., "Hanns Eisler and His 'Hollywood Songbook': A Survey of the Five Elegies (Fuenf Elegien) and the 'Hoelderlin Fragments' ('Hoelderlin Fragmente')," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (DMA Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2010).

⁴²² Fritz Hennenberg, *Hanns Eisler: konzis* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2017), 159.

⁴²³ Quoted in Hennenberg, 159.

⁴²⁴ This "New kind of beautiful singing" is understood as a departure from the "'beautiful singing' [that] comes from the foulest waste product, the worst kitchen leftovers of the great Romantic music of the last century, namely the petty-bourgeois *Liedertafel* music of Hegar, Silcher and their ilk." "Woher kommt nun eigentlich dieses 'schöne Singen,' nach dem man immer wieder Sänger und Dirigenten seufzen hört, wenn die Rede auf unsere neue Musik kommt? Gewiß, die romantische Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts mit ihrer alles beherrschenden, weit ausschwingenden Melodie, verlangte nach getragenen, ausdrucksvollem Gesang: aber sie verlangte niemals nach dem 'schönen Singen,' das unsere Männerchöre meinen. Dieses 'schöne Singen' kommt von dem letzten Abfallprodukt, den schlechtesten Küchenresten der großen romantischen Musik des vorigen Jahrhunderts, nämlich: von der kleinbürgerlichen Liedertafelmusik der Hegar, Silcher und Konsorten." Karl Rankl, "Über den musikalischen Vortrag unserer neuen Chormusik," *Kampfmusik*, no. 4 (1932): 4, quoted in Jürgen Elsner, *Zur vokalsolistischen Vortragsweise der Kampfmusik Hanns Eisler* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971), 36.

Stathis Gourgouris has focused on the changing ways in which listeners can interpret Eisler's music as historical "musical instances" and argues that Brecht's poems and Eisler's scores "require a singer who forges a sense of alienation from sentimental expression."⁴²⁵ However, Gourgouris says little about the specific ways in which the singer uses their voice in performance. The conclusion to Heidi Hart's book, *Hanns Eisler's Art Songs. Arguing with Beauty*, includes commentary on concert performance of Eisler's art songs, yet the composition's history and the inspiration for Eisler's art songs remain the main topics. Notwithstanding, Hart often cites recordings and performance as an aid in her analysis, presenting many elements of Eisler's songs that "depend on the performance."⁴²⁶ In adopting this neutral approach, she refrains from acknowledging Arnold's specific departure from a bel canto norm but confirms the existence of the "conventional Brecht-Eisler wisdom [that] requires more precision and contradiction than operatic overlay."⁴²⁷

This "conventional wisdom" is reflected clearly in the few scholarly articles I could find that deal directly with the singing of Eisler's art songs – since Germany's reunification, that is. In his article "Wie soll man Eisler singen? [How Should Eisler Be Sung?]" Karoly Csipák clearly prefers Arnold's "authentic" recording with her "screechy" and "witchlike shrillness" to Fischer-Dieskau's "traditional," "lyrical," and "sentimental" sound.⁴²⁸ The critical discography of the *Hollywood Songbook* that Christoph Keller wrote for the *Eisler Mitteilungen* in 2011 reiterates this preference, adding many recordings which had appeared in the 20 years since Csipák's article.⁴²⁹ Like Csipák, Keller categorizes the reviewed recordings

⁴²⁵ Stathis Gourgouris, "The Lyric in Exile (Meditations on the Hollywooder Liederbuch)," *Qui Parle* 14, no. 2 (2004): 164.

⁴²⁶ Hart, *Hanns Eisler's Art Songs*, 88.

⁴²⁷ Hart, 173.

⁴²⁸ Károly Csipák, "Wie Soll Man Hanns Eislers Lieder Singen?," *Dissonanz*, no. 26 (November 1990): 18-26.

⁴²⁹ Christoph Keller, "Das Hollywooder Liederbuch: Eine kritische Diskographie," *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, Eisler und die Sänger, 18, no. 51 (April 2011): 13-16.

into two general groups and pits the “emanations of the *Stimmbesitzer*”⁴³⁰ against the “authentic” recordings.⁴³¹ The *Stimmbesitzer*, i.e., all singers who use “the emotive aesthetic still dominant in classical Lieder singing,”⁴³² are more or less panned as fatigued, artificial, pretentious, and *bieder*, a word that can be loosely translated as “fusty.” The 1996 recording by the Belgian singer Marianne Pousseur, demonstrating a “tender voice that wouldn’t make it over the edge of the stage without a microphone,” is at least “in a certain sense more authentic than the emanations of the *Stimmbesitzer*” who “always penetratingly shove the singer-ego to the forefront.”⁴³³ Roswitha Trexler’s recording from 1978 “comes closest to Arnold” in authenticity, while Arnold’s recording is held as the standard to be met.

These articles exemplify the vehemence with which Eisler scholars often judge and discuss performances, stemming mainly from an especially strong desire for authenticity. In a later article, Csipák gives one possible definition of an “authentic performance (*Aufführung*)” as “the attempt to realize the inner idea of the author.”⁴³⁴ Since one of the main drivers of the field of musicology is to study the motivations behind compositions so that performers and practitioners can give informed performances, descriptions of musical quality and authenticity are interchangeable for some scholars. Indeed, if these articles are an indication of the discourse about the performance of Eisler’s art songs, authenticity seems

⁴³⁰ “*Stimmbesitzer*” is used in reference to an interview with Irmgard Arnold in the same issue of the *Eisler Mitteilungen* where she states that singers in possession (*Besitz*) of a powerful voice (*Stimme*) are reluctant to sing without demonstrating that ownership in performance. Arnold, “Er hatte ja so recht...,” 12.

⁴³¹ Interestingly, Stathis Gourgouris’ opinions of recordings, as poet, essayist and sound artist, lies in stark contrast to the opinions of his more “classical” peers: “The crucial recording is Hanns Eisler, *Hollywooder Liederbuch* with baritone Wolfgang Holzmair and Peter Stamm at the piano (KOCH International CD, 1996). A much looser and not quite precise anthology is the collection performed by the inimitable Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau with Albert Reimann at the piano in the CD Hanns Eisler, *Lieder* (Warner Classics, 1988). These recordings follow the original arrangements. Versions of some of these songs for soprano were recorded under the direction of Eisler himself during his years in East Berlin by the great theater singers Irmgard Arnold and Gisela May. But to my mind, the consummate interpretations of Eisler’s songs generally belong to Dagmar Krause in two recordings: *Tank Battles. The Songs of Hanns Eisler* (Island, 1988) and *Supply and Demand* (Hannibal, 1986), which also includes certain settings of Brecht poems by Kurt Weill.” Gourgouris, “The Lyric in Exile (Meditations on the *Hollywooder Liederbuch*),” 174.

⁴³² Keller, “Das *Hollywooder Liederbuch*,” 16.

⁴³³ Keller, 15.

⁴³⁴ Károly Csipák, “11 Thesen zur Eisler-Rezeption,” in *Hanns Eisler*, ed. Albrecht Dümmling, Querstand (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2010), 239.

to be the only factor worth discussing. Csipák articulates his reasoning for this, starting from the theory that “the authenticity of musical performances is something to strive for because the composer’s intention naturally corresponds best to the actual musical facts (*Sachverhalte*) [and because] composers are usually more musically experienced than the performing musicians.”⁴³⁵ Thus, for him, composers are the productive musicians while performers merely reproduce the composer’s intentions for a passive audience. He argues that this mindset is necessary to understand Eisler’s music, citing Eisler’s roots in the Second Viennese school and his tutelage under Schönberg.⁴³⁶ Here, the score is seen as the ultimate representation of the music, whereas the performance acts as a mere translation. The performer has no business adding their own interpretation, because the path to authenticity is fidelity to the written page. The performer should do “nothing more than to lend his voice to the music [...]. The more he withdraws himself, the stronger its expression becomes.”⁴³⁷ This infers that the application of the normal standards of performance practice is inherently destructive to the work, and it explains why the sound of an overtly “classical” voice might distract from the music.

Keller agrees with this standpoint and complains that Matthias Goerne sang *Ostersonntag* one tone lower than Eisler had written in order to facilitate a more beautiful sound. “Good songs don’t need to be shaped [by the singer] because they already have a shape, which simply needs to be reproduced.”⁴³⁸ Faithfulness to the score does not, however, explain the disfavor shown toward a classical vocal tone in itself. Even if Eisler had, as Keller claims, wanted a sound of vocal strain in the passages alluded to, it would mean that singers who do not have difficulty in those ranges would have to feign it, or sing in a different key

⁴³⁵ Csipák, “Wie soll man Hanns Eislers Lieder singen?” 20.

⁴³⁶ This view seems, in actuality, farther from the *espressivo* view of interpretation that is often associated with the Second Viennese School and closer to the view of Igor Stravinsky in, “e.g., “Some Ideas about my Octuor,” first published in *The Arts*, Jan. 1924, reprinted in Igor Stravinsky, “Some Ideas about My Octuor,” in *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*, by Eric Walter White (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 574–77.

⁴³⁷ Csipák, “11 Thesen zur Eisler-Rezeption,” 246.

⁴³⁸ “Gute Lieder brauchen keine Gestaltung, weil sie bereits eine Gestalt haben, die lediglich wiedergegeben zu werden braucht.” Christoph Keller, “Das Hollywooder Liederbuch: Eine kritische Diskographie,” *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, Eisler und die Sänger, 18, no. 51 (April 2011): 15.

to get the desired effect, changing again the “shape” of the original score. Furthermore, if the convention of changing the key of an art song to suit the singer counts as defying the written score, so must the convention of singing in a completely different octave than written, as most male singers do. The massive shift in tonal relationship that results between the piano and voice is never discussed, nor are the inevitable implications of which bodies are suitable for “reproducing” which pieces.⁴³⁹

Moreover, of the recordings reviewed in these articles, the most extreme departures from the score, e.g., changed words, bent pitches and even altered rhythms, are heard on Arnold’s. One must conclude then that her authenticity is safe from reproach, not because of her faithful reproduction of the score but due to the knowledge that Eisler was present at her recording. Csipák and Keller point out that Eisler had personally approached Arnold to sing his songs and had coached her intensively. Both authors refer to the recordings of some of the sessions where Eisler can be heard demonstrating his desired technique to Arnold in his own singing voice, which she “translates” into her professionally trained voice. Knowledge of Eisler’s involvement in the studio allows Arnold’s idiosyncrasies (vocally and otherwise) to be interpreted not as examples of infidelity or a bad “reproduction” but as a corrective to the written score.

For Csipák, this means that Eisler’s score is insufficient, often lacking tempo markings and “correct” editorial notes and making it much too easy for a “traditional” Lieder-singer to “misunderstand” what he intended. Relying only on the score, contemporary singers are likely to “sing them the way Schubert, Brahms, and others from the German tradition are heard today.”⁴⁴⁰ “Luckily,” writes Keller, “we have the recordings with Irmgard Arnold, which prove that such blandness is due solely to the misunderstanding of the performers.”⁴⁴¹ Essentially this means that the Hollywood Songs can be understood as art songs,

⁴³⁹ In contrast to today, where the majority of popular recordings were recorded by baritones, Eisler exclusively chose women’s voices. Before Eisler met Arnold, the high lyric soprano, Chlöe Owen, sang the first known performance of some of the Hollywood Songs in New York in 1948. Eisler’s first wife, mezzo-soprano Charlotte Eisler, sang the European premier of five of the songs in Vienna later that year.

⁴⁴⁰ Csipák, “Wie soll man Hanns Eislers Lieder singen?” 20.

⁴⁴¹ Keller, “Das Hollywooder Liederbuch,” 14.

partially because Eisler's score can be sung "traditionally" if taken at face value (just as, apparently, my singing professors, Matthias Goerne, and many others have done). However, Arnold's recording is essential proof that the score is insufficient for good, i.e., authentic, performances. Her recording can then be viewed as more than a corrective, and rather as an extension of the written score.

Both authors insist, however, that a singer should not copy Arnold's performance but take it only as a stylistic model. While his score indicates what to sing, Eisler's direct influence over Arnold's recording is seen as proof that he intended to dictate *how* to sing it as well. Thus, for contemporary performers, authenticity becomes a question of adhering to Eisler's pre-determined style as exemplified on Arnold's recording. However, a definition of this style in any sort of detail is elusive. Singers are left with no tools that tell them how to perform Eisler's art songs in a way that would befit a contemporary recital. Although Eisler was well-acquainted with singers, he did not – or perhaps could not – elaborate on exact elements of vocal technique in his writings and interviews. Many of the commonly cited descriptions come from an interview with Hans Bunge, where Eisler is critiquing his *own* singing of "An die Nachgeborenen."⁴⁴² Scholars and practitioners are left with vague descriptions in his scores, writings, and interviews that compel singers to sing "politely," "in a friendly way" and, perhaps most importantly, "vom Wort ausgehend" (starting from the text). Eisler's (often humorous) descriptions of how singers should *not* sing are even more commonly cited: not barked like a sickly Dachshund, not with "*Schmalz*," not with unhealthy vibrato, not bombastically, not with too much ego. However, singers are also given contradictory instructions: not to sing with total objectivity, not to be emotionally cold, and not to parody themselves. From a performer's perspective, there is little to glean about this style except for what it should *not* be, and the singer is left searching for other existing stylistic frameworks.

The performance theories of Bertolt Brecht, the lyricist of many of the Hollywood songs and Eisler's longtime collaborator, are an obvious resource for deciding how to perform Eisler's songs for singers who are looking for stylistic traditions outside of the bel canto

⁴⁴² Eisler, EGW 3/7, 145-147.

norm. Even contemporary accounts make the connection to a “Brechtian vernacular”; in a review of Charlotte Eisler’s performance of five of the *Hollywood* songs in Vienna in 1948, the author attributed the relinquishment of “cantability” in favor of “sharp declamation” as “appropriate for the political poetry of Brecht.”⁴⁴³ Arnold said herself that, when she sang for Eisler for the first time, she sang “not like opera, but rather like Brecht, drier and more from the text.”⁴⁴⁴ Arnold’s instincts had apparently been correct since, according to her, Eisler enthusiastically accepted her interpretations without corrections.⁴⁴⁵ Eisler is quoted as saying that “singers urgently need to learn theory and practice from Brecht’s theater. Namely, gestures, moderation, clarity, not identifying with something but presenting it, neither weepiness nor bellowing.”⁴⁴⁶ Furthermore, Eisler’s preference for singers who can “*referieren*” (recite or report) the text and music rather than empathizing and depicting a character is analogous to Brecht’s wishes for actors to “show a man singing.”⁴⁴⁷

Decades later, musicologists continue to use understandings of a “Brechtian vernacular” to analyze Eisler’s songs. Heidi Hart relies heavily on Brecht’s theories of estrangement to explain Eisler’s score and performative possibilities. If one can rely on Brecht as a stylistic source for Eisler’s songs, one must also contend that, like Eisler, Brecht did not address different styles of vocal technique *per se* in his writings. However, Brecht’s life-long simultaneous fascination with and disdain for the sound of an operatic voice are well-documented. According to Albrecht Dümling, the fact that Brecht was in love with an opera singer, his first wife Marianne Zoff, is significant. In their courtship Brecht had “never heard more beautiful singing,”⁴⁴⁸ but his attraction to Zoff’s beauty and voice intermingled with his

⁴⁴³ “Die gesangliche Linie ist—der politischen Lyrik Brechts entsprechend—mehr auf scharfe Deklamation als auf Kantabilität bedacht. Bei besonders exponierten Textstellen nähern sich Gesang und Klaviersatz in ihrer Diktion einander oder verschmelzen gerade durch den Dualismus von betont lyrischer Begleitung und einer der Brechtschen Alltagssprache angeglichenen Melodik zu einer höheren Einheit.” H.W.H., “Neue Kammermusik von Hanns Eisler,” *Österreichische Zeitung*, May 13, 1948.

⁴⁴⁴ Irmgard Arnold, “Drei Fragen an Irmgard Arnold,” *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, Eisler und die Sänger, 18, no. 51 (April 2011): 3.

⁴⁴⁵ Arnold, 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Eisler, EGW 3/2, 416.

⁴⁴⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 44–45.

⁴⁴⁸ Brecht’s diary entry for 22.3.21 quoted in Albrecht Dümling, *Lasst euch nicht verführen: Brecht und die Musik* (München: Kindler, 1985), 110.

admiration for her acting talent, which set her apart from the “disgusting” operatic practice that he hated so vehemently.⁴⁴⁹

Brecht was keenly aware of what the sound of a voice could do in performance. He was known for dictating form and melodies to his composers and wrote his lyrics with the end result in mind, i.e., the sound of the specific voices, or at least tone of voice, in performance.⁴⁵⁰ After the disastrous premier of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in Leipzig, Brecht exchanged all operatic voices for actors, including the famed cabaret-star Trude Hesterberg as well as the stars from *Dreigroschenoper*, Harald Paulsen and Lotte Lenya. The proof of the pudding – as John Willet translates⁴⁵¹ – is in the eating, and Brecht chose few, if any, classically trained singers for this task. The sound of an operatic voice, like the sound of violins, was something that Brecht avoided for the rest of his career.⁴⁵²

One may be tempted to present Paul Dessau’s opera, *Das Verbör des Lukullus*, as an obvious counterexample. However, as Calico and Rienäcker point out, Brecht’s abhorrence for operatic voices, especially the tenor voice, is apparent in the score. Dessau reserves “gratuitous vocal display,” “traditional operatic forms,” and “high, virtuosic music” for “the class enemy,” while the audience is meant to side with characters with no arias, who sing in their middle range, conveying “inner human maturity, sorrow and resoluteness that in no way need explaining through lavish noise.”⁴⁵³

Although, Eisler rejected claims that opera itself was antiquated or inappropriate for contemporary composers, his arguments about operatic singing (especially the “pitiful” tenor voice) reflect his work with Brecht. He claims it would have been atrocious (*scheußlich*) to make the suggestion to Brecht that any sympathetic role to be sung by an

⁴⁴⁹ The first drafts of the *Mahagonny* Opera were in fact meant for Zoff, yet Brecht’s resistance to a bourgeois existence meant the end to their relationship.

⁴⁵⁰ See Kim H. Kowalke, “Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5, no. 1 (1993): 55–78.

⁴⁵¹ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, Frontispiece.

⁴⁵² Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2019), 128, 134–7.

⁴⁵³ Gerd Rienäcker, “Zu einigen Gestaltungsproblemen im Operschaffen von Paul Dessau,” ed. Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, vol. 2, *Sammelbände zur Musikgeschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Verl. Neue Musik, 1971), 112; quoted in Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 128.

operatic tenor⁴⁵⁴. For Eisler, while operatic singing has its place, singing technique needed an overhaul, and newly composed music must be in adaptable forms to “ensure appropriate vocal performance on stage.”⁴⁵⁵

The question remains as to how much a singer should emulate Brechtian actors in performance, or—conversely—to what degree they should utilize their own professional, “classical” training when singing Eisler’s art songs. Firstly, it is important to keep in mind that all three of Brecht’s famous collaborations with composers resulted in debates so complex and multifaceted on the relationship of text and music that they have influenced entire scholarly careers. The well-established style that performers use for Brecht’s theatrical texts cannot therefore be assumed to be exactly the same style expected by Eisler for his Hollywood songs. Secondly, as Calico has pointed out, the aesthetic style of “Brechtian” theater, if attempted without its attendant method, is less a distinct style and more a vague rejection of traditional naturalism.⁴⁵⁶ In terms of vocal technique, without the methodological reasoning behind a “conventional wisdom,” even if singers choose to “sing like Brecht,” they are left only with an indeterminate directive, namely, “don’t [sing] opera! That’s disgusting!”⁴⁵⁷ In a contemporary concert setting, confusion is bound to ensue, especially with an

⁴⁵⁴ “Ich [stelle] es mir ganz grauslich [vor], wenn ein Quetschtenor [...] einen Parteisekretär singt—also in der Art “Lache, Bajazzo!”; das wäre komisch. Das halte ich aufrecht. Ich glaube schon, daß ein zeitgenössischer Stoff auf der Oper möglich ist—aber nicht mit den alten Mitteln der Oper und vor allem nicht mit den alten Mitteln des Musizierens, die geradezu jammervoll sind. Hier müßte sich die Oper bei einem zeitgenössischen Stoff (wir brauchen das sicher dringend) gefälligst darum kümmern, aus dem Stoff, aus dem Inhalt andere Formen (die müssen nicht völlig neu sein, aber adaptierbare Formen) zu entwickeln und vor allem auch für das Singen auf der Bühne Sorge zu tragen. Schauen Sie: Bei mir zum Beispiel (in meiner Musik zur *Mutter*) singt ein Parteisekretär—da habe ich mich gar nicht aufgeregt, das fand ich völlig in Ordnung. Aber ich hätte mir selbstverständlich nicht erlaubt, einen Operntenor dem Brecht vorgeschlagen zu haben, der das Lob des Revolutionärs singt. Das ist scheußlich.” Hanns Eisler, “Inhalt und Form: Vortrag und Aussprache im Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler Berlin (Auszüge),” in *Materialien zu einer Dialektik der Musik*, ed. Manfred Grabs (Leipzig: Reclam, 1973), 318–9. An abridged version was also printed as “Inhalt und Form,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 12 (1962): 541–4, and reprinted in Eisler, *EGW* 3/2, 570–9.

⁴⁵⁵ Eisler, “Inhalt und Form,” 319.

⁴⁵⁶ Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* 144.

⁴⁵⁷ “Reden Sie doch keine Oper! Das ist ja ekelhaft!” Bertolt Brecht, “Trommeln in der Nacht,” in *Die Stücke von Bertolt Brecht in einem Band* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 48.

audience who is either “familiar only with the operatic canon and not with Brecht’s challenge to it”⁴⁵⁸ or familiar only with the style of “Brechtian vernacular” and not with Brecht’s political reasons for challenging opera in the first place.

In our scholarly examples on how to sing Eisler’s art songs, “Brechtian” influence is hardly mentioned. Keller refrains from mentioning Brecht’s theories directly, yet references “*Gestus*,” a term with which Brecht is so often credited. Keller’s use of the term *Gestus* might serve as a nod to connections with Brecht, but this definition is far from Brecht’s definition of a method of performance that is “designed to reveal the socially constructed nature of human interaction.”⁴⁵⁹ For Keller, Arnold sings with the correct *Gestus* because her articulation, tempo, and phrasing reproduce the notated score correctly. *Gestus*, in this way, resides not in the performance but in the written score of Eisler’s works, since it is there that the stylized behavior of the singer is defined.⁴⁶⁰

Csipák goes further and explicitly dismisses the idea that Eisler’s art song style was influenced by Brecht “in any noteworthy” way.⁴⁶¹ For him, the desire for clear declamation and departure from a *bel-canto*-like legato comes not from a desire to subjugate the music to the text, as Brecht would want, but from the tradition of Schubertian art song and its continuation through Arnold Schönberg and Second Viennese School aesthetics. Just as Schubert did with Goethe, Eisler has supposedly taken the commendable step from “music that serves the text to absolute or autonomous music, which has never been understood by many singers.”⁴⁶² Ascribing the quote “text should be preserved like a fly in amber” to Brecht,⁴⁶³ Csipák claims that “in terms of the German Lied-aesthetic, this picture would

⁴⁵⁸ As was the case with *Lucullus*. See Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 134.

⁴⁵⁹ Calico, 8.

⁴⁶⁰ Arnold’s departure from a “classical” vocal tone not only allows these citations to be presented clearly, but also allows her to embody a certain social attitude. Her vocal tone is gestic in itself as it reveals and criticizes her own vocal abilities for the listener. Thus, similar to a “Brechtian” aesthetic style that is void of performative methods, a focus on Arnold’s repetition of the score and on a stylistic standard rather than a method for social performance truncates the term *Gestus* in its meaning, highlighting a static “correct” style and ignoring how it might impact an audience.

⁴⁶¹ Csipák, “Wie soll man Hanns Eislers Lieder singen?,” 21.

⁴⁶² Csipák, 21.

⁴⁶³ Eisler attributed this metaphor to Brecht, but he often used it to describe his own methods of preserving poetic ideas within a musical score.

need to be corrected: The fly [...] is dissolved and only present as a particular hue.”⁴⁶⁴ Since Eisler himself repeatedly used this analogy to describe his own work as a composer, it is doubtful that he would have welcomed Csipák’s correction. Furthermore, Csipák admits that, when he spoke to Irmgard Arnold and tried to complement her performance by pointing out that it elevated the music above the text, she was shocked and offended.⁴⁶⁵ Csipák brushes this off and claims that Eisler must have momentarily forgotten his own musical foundations in order “to come to terms with Brecht’s rather anti-musical aesthetic whenever he worked with singers.”⁴⁶⁶

5.3. Eisler’s Authenticity

Confused by this explanation, I had planned to dedicate a large portion of this chapter to this understanding of Eisler’s “foundations” and to how it contradicts Eisler’s own words. However, Gerd Rienäcker’s paper “Hanns Eisler über Intelligenz und Dummheit in der musikalischen Interpretation. Ansätze zu einer Interpretationsästhetik?” (Hanns Eisler on intelligence and stupidity in musical interpretation: Approaches to an aesthetics of interpretation?), although it does not deal with vocal technique exclusively, provides ample argumentation on this point.⁴⁶⁷ Seemingly in direct response to Csipák’s manuscript from 1998, “Zur Wiedergabe von Eislers Liedern” (On the reproduction of Eisler’s songs),⁴⁶⁸ Rienäcker argues that, over time, scholars have misunderstood Eisler’s requests to sing with a “lighter, friendlier, brighter, almost humorous sound” as a demand to follow the score. According to Rienäcker, Eisler knowingly left complex and sometimes contradictory instructions that force the singer to consider their own interpretation:

⁴⁶⁴ “Im Hinblick auf die deutsche Liedästhetik müsste man das Bild korrigieren: die Fliege ist nicht als Struktur aufbewahrt, sondern sie ist aufgelöst und nur noch als besonderer Farbton im Bernstein vorhanden.” Csipák, 21.

⁴⁶⁵ Csipák, 21.

⁴⁶⁶ Csipák, 21.

⁴⁶⁷ Gerd Rienäcker, “Hanns Eisler über Intelligenz und Dummheit in der musikalischen Interpretation. Ansätze zu einer Interpretationsästhetik?,” in *Hanns Eisler*, ed. Albrecht Dümmling, Querstand (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2010), 250–64.

⁴⁶⁸ Rienäcker’s bibliography cites “Karoly Czipak [sic]: *Zur Wiedergabe von Eislers Liedern*. Ms. Berlin 1998.”

"[The demand to reproduce a score] is not only uncomfortable but, upon closer examination, unrealistic and fatal for any performer because it denies them their innate attitudes to the given material and requires them to reveal their own highly complex relationship with reality, their own engagement with very diverse circumstances (not just with musical scores!) in favor of an empathy that not only pretends to eliminate the personal, but exposes itself to sheer self-deception. [...] Precision [...] cannot be equated with slavish compliance; it does not help the interpreter to eliminate their individuality, but rather to extend its [own] reproduction."⁴⁶⁹

In other words, partially because Eisler's instructions are paradoxical, one cannot achieve an authentic reconstruction of Eisler's work through musical accuracy and the "withdrawal" of the performer. Instead, such contradictions force the performer to confront their own relationship to the musical material. Unlike the conventional understanding of "musical interpretation," this sort of performance is not a reproduction of what Eisler heard in his head while composing, but rather the result of how a singer interacts with the musical score in front of a listening audience. Eisler pointed out this split between notated material and performance in his original score of *In den Weiden*: "This is very difficult to perform. Once the notes have been met, only then the work starts, namely: to bring out *the New Unknown*."⁴⁷⁰

In this sense, Eisler's abhorrence for the "singer ego" is not a rejection of the singer, nor of the singer's personhood but rather of what Carolyn Abbate has dubbed the voice-object,

⁴⁶⁹ "Solche Aufforderung einzulösen jedoch ist nicht nur unbequem, sondern bei genauem Hinsehen unreal, für jegliche Interpreten tödlich, weil sie ihnen ihr Wesentliches verweigert, nämlich ihr eigenes Verhalten zum Vorgegebenen, und weil sie ihnen zumutet, ihr eigenes, überaus vielschichtiges Verhältnis zur Wirklichkeit, ihre eigene Auseinandersetzung mit ganz unterschiedlichen Gegebenheiten (also nicht nur mit Notentexten!) preiszugeben. Und dies zugunsten einer Einfühlung, die nicht nur das Eigene auszuschalten vorgibt, sondern sich der blanken Selbsttäuschung überführt. Eisler meint denn auch Anderes: Nicht die Repetition des Vorhandenen – es läßt sich ohnehin nicht repetieren –, wohl aber dessen genaue (oder wenigstens genauere!) Kenntnisnahme; sie allerdings ist Prämisse triftiger, d. h. fundierter Auseinandersetzung. Genauigkeit im Lesen, Sehen, Hören, Wahrnehmen läßt sich mit sklavischer Verfallenheit nicht identifizieren; sie verhilft dem Interpreten nicht zur Ausschaltung seiner Individualität, sondern zu deren erweiterter Reproduktion." Rienäcker, 253.

⁴⁷⁰ Eisler, EGW 1/16, 224. Emphasis original.

“a radical autonomization of the human voice,” which distracts audiences from the “words, plot, character, and even from music” as “the sole center for the listener’s attention.”⁴⁷¹ In this sense, the operatic voice is the fetishized object of any vocal work, a sort of non-human virtuosity, distinct from the virtual utterance of the composer. The voice-object, however, is also distinct from the person singing, a phenomenon of their skill. Eisler’s paradoxical instructions allow the singer (as well as the words and music) to overcome the voice-object, restoring the singer’s presence as a central aspect of performance.⁴⁷²

Eisler, likewise, rarely praised Arnold for her voice or technical skill. Instead, “everything [he] desperately need[ed] for [his] music” was reflected in her personality: “levity, intelligence, kindness, rigor, grace and toughness, fun and seriousness [...], real diligence and the will to do better and better, good ambition[...]. In addition, our charming Arnold is kind and modest.”⁴⁷³ Eisler’s directives for friendliness and politeness, therefore, could be understood not for how a singer should sing but for how the singer should be.⁴⁷⁴ In this way, the “unbearable singer-ego” to which Eisler often refers is not the same as the singer themselves. Instead, the singer’s personality, embodied by their voice, represents a distinct attitude (*Haltung*) that interacts with the music in performance. The contradictions in the score, therefore, enable a dialectic not only within the score itself but also between the score and its interpreter. Thus, Eisler’s *New Unknown* is that which cannot be contained in the score; it is the ephemeral, fluid relationship of the singer’s own identity to the composition at a certain point in time.

⁴⁷¹ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10.

⁴⁷² Joy Calico remarks that “Abbate’s accounts of individual voices in specific performances frequently have the quality of estrangement, as she describes the unexpected awareness of a singer’s physicality through extremes of virtuosity or vocal distress.” Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 157.

⁴⁷³ Eisler, EGW 3/2, 386.

⁴⁷⁴ For the gendered aspects of singing Eisler’s songs, see Meredith Nicoll and Chanda VanderHart, “Ohne sich anzustrengen, junge Frau’: Gendered Vocality in Performance of Eisler’s Songs,” in *Hanns Eislers Musik und Diskurse aus Gender-Perspektiven*, ed. Diego Alonso Tomas and Peter Schweinhardt, vol. 7, *Eisler-Studien* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, forthcoming).

This is not to say that Eisler did not try to influence performances of his music. After returning from exile, Eisler's choice in singers reflects his thoughts not only about which voices he preferred but also which personality and biography were attached to them. The singers chosen by Eisler for performances and recordings of his works were known for their personalities and for their history of political engagement. Eisler had worked with Ernst Busch since his first collaborations with Walter Mehring in 1929, continuing as Busch went on to gain legendary status as an anti-fascist fighter in Spain. By the time Eisler chose Busch to premier the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* in 1950, his beautifully powerful voice was synonymous with his role as a socialist icon.⁴⁷⁵ His role as "the singing heart of the working class"⁴⁷⁶ set a standard for Eisler's explicitly political *Kampflieder*, *Agitprop*, and *Massenlieder*.⁴⁷⁷

Eisler subsequently sought out Hermann Hähnel to sing similar, newer *Massenlieder* and youth songs.⁴⁷⁸ Hähnel, a member of leftist performance groups like the Stephan-Hermlin-Ensemble and an early participant in what would become the *Singbewegung*, also had formal training as a baritone, making him an ideal representation of a new generation within the GDR that could bridge the gap between the working class and the arts. Gisela May, a later member of the Berlin Ensemble and a youthful colleague of Ernst Busch, was tapped as the ultimate performer for recitals and recordings of Eisler's theatrical songs. Irmgard Arnold was the only classical singer with whom Eisler worked intensively, even though

⁴⁷⁵ Busch's idiosyncratic voice (and its silence) continued to define the "good" socialist cause decades later, as exemplified in Reinhold Andert's song "Ernst Busch" from 1979: "Seine Stimme war sauber, ehrlich und rau, / ohne falsches Gefühl und Grimasse. / Sie traf den Ton unsrer Herzen genau, / gab Mut der Arbeiterklasse."

⁴⁷⁶ Hanns Eisler, "Das singende Herz der Arbeiterklasse," *Berliner Zeitung*, January 22, 1960, 5.

⁴⁷⁷ Busch's voice was so synonymous with Eisler's *Kampflieder*, that it was the solitary object used for Jürgen Elsner's dissertation: Jürgen Elsner, *Zur vokalsolistischen Vortragsweise der Kampfmusik Hanns Eisler (On the Vocal Soloistic Performance Style of Hanns Eisler's Kampfmusik)* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971).

⁴⁷⁸ Hähnel recounted Eisler's specific repertoire choices in an interview in 1974: "Spartakus 1919, Deutsches Lied 1937, Hammer und Sichel, Ballade vom Soldaten, Lenin, Ändere die Welt, sie braucht es, Bankenlied, Kantate auf den Tod eines Genossen, Streiklied, In Sturmnacht and Deutsche Miserere." Hermann Hähnel, "Interviews mit Interpreten," in *Hanns Eisler heute: Berichte, Probleme, Beobachtungen*, ed. Manfred Grabs, *Arbeitshefte* (Berlin: AdK, 1974), 175.

he wrote the orchestral *Ernste Gesänge* for the successful Lieder-singer Günther Leib. However, Leib himself was surprised that Eisler had chosen him for the premiere, since he had only coached Leib once and had chastised him severely for singing Schumann songs in the “regular way.”⁴⁷⁹ After premiering the pieces shortly after Eisler’s death, Leib never performed any other pieces by Eisler but rather joined Peter Schreier as one of the GDR’s most famous singers of Romantic Lieder.

Eisler’s relationship to the classically trained voice is just one part of Eisler’s complicated relationship with the traditions of concert music and the German cultural heritage. Many prominent German artists of the time were compelled to grapple with how to handle Germany’s cultural Erbe in the aftermath of Nazism; for artists returning to the GDR, the cultural implications of bourgeois elitism complicated things further. Eisler’s projects around this period center around the paradox of protecting, honoring and continuing the traditions of the great German heritage while simultaneously criticizing it. His *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, for example, present a continuation of the German folksong tradition with simplistic musical and poetic idioms, allowing musicians and listeners to sing in the old ways (“Die alten Weisen”) while at the same time demanding that they change the world (“Die Welt verändern wir”). In 1950, Ernst Busch premiered and recorded the Volkslieder as a sort of cantata, for which Eisler created a chamber orchestra arrangement that included harpsichord and banjo, giving the songs a simultaneous feeling of elitist tradition and modern folksiness. The simplistic form of the Volkslieder allowed Eisler to present them in myriad ways and instrumentations, depending on the situation and desired political function.⁴⁸⁰

Two years later, Eisler published his libretto for his planned opera, *Johann Faustus*, which presents a simultaneous affirmation and negation of the German cultural heritage,

⁴⁷⁹ Günther Leib, “Interviews mit Interpreten,” in *Hanns Eisler heute: Berichte, Probleme, Beobachtungen*, ed. Manfred Grabs, Arbeitshefte (Berlin: AdK, 1974), 187.

⁴⁸⁰ The concept of creating folksongs played an important yet contradictory role for most East German composers in the wake of Nazi Germany. For more on this subject, see chapter 4.

using the Faust legend to present authoritarianism as Germany's predestined fate.⁴⁸¹ In contrast to the glowing reception that the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder* had received, Eisler was harshly and publicly criticized by the East German policy makers for *Johann Faustus*, and a musical score was never completed. Had he been allowed, it is likely that Eisler's score would have continued in a similarly paradoxical, proto-postmodern fashion, simultaneously propagating and criticizing the German Romantic opera.

While conceptualizing *Johann Faustus* in exile, Eisler had already taken on the traditions of the Romantic German Lied in the *Hollywood Songbook*. According to James Parsons, the songs, both in text and music, critically cites the "freighted conventions of the Lied," thereby "simultaneously evoking yet distancing himself from genre and aesthetic wholeness."⁴⁸² Following this argument, the *Hollywood Songbook* is similar to *Faustus*, in that it uses a traditional German musical form, the German Kunstlied, as a vehicle to explore and critique Germany's role in political history. By utilizing Romantic idioms and the chamber-music form of solo voice and piano, Eisler ironically connects the wretchedness of exile, war and desolation to German musical heritage.

Later, while publishing the Hollywood songs in the GDR, Eisler followed the advice of his peers at the Akademie der Künste and refrained from publishing the *Hollywood Songbook* as a self-contained collection. Thus, the critique they carry as a montage – at least on paper – could be diluted among Eisler's earlier works, and the Hollywood songs, unlike the *Faustus* libretto, never came close to being a perceived political threat to the German identity.

5.4. Performance and Performativity in Singing Eisler

After recovering from the *Faustus* debacle, Eisler returned to Berlin from Vienna in 1954 and immediately began to seek out singers to perform his songs. In Irmgard Arnold,

⁴⁸¹ See Peter Davies, "Hanns Eisler's 'Faustus' Libretto and the Problem of East German National Identity," *Music and Letters* 81, no. 4 (November 1, 2000): 585-98.

⁴⁸² James Parsons, "Hanns Eisler's Hollywooder Liederbuch or What an Austro-German Émigré Did in Tinseltown During World War II," in *Legacies of Power in American Music: Essays in Honor of Michael J. Budds*, ed. Judith A. Mabary (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2022): 139-52.

Eisler found a singer who could, in person and in voice, embody the paradoxes he had written into the score of the Hollywood songs. Her training, reputation, and capabilities reflected a continuation of elitist singing traditions, while her wit and acting abilities allowed her to demonstratively cast them aside in performance. According to Roswitha Trexler, the singer who became Arnold's successor as the premiere interpreter of Eisler's art songs in the GDR, Eisler "rejects the idolization of bel canto but demands vocal qualification" for his art songs.⁴⁸³ This demand for vocal qualification, to which Trexler refers, is not merely a reassurance of quality, since Eisler himself said a singer does not "need a voice" to sing his songs well.⁴⁸⁴ Rather, it is a performative tool that reifies the idolization of bel canto, making it viable for examination. Just as one has to be familiar with Faustian traditions in order to understand the critique in Eisler's *Faustus*, the listener of Eisler's songs must have preconceived ideas about how a singer performs a Romantic Lied. When Arnold deviates from tradition, deviating also from her operatic training, the sound of the classically trained voice becomes one of many legitimate options that the singer has at her disposal. By playing with the standards of bel canto, which Arnold had mastered, she undermines the imperative of vocal beauty, exposing a limit to bel canto's expressive range.

This critique of classical vocal technique, however, only functions if the listener can imagine how the singer *could* sing and understands that they are choosing not to do so.⁴⁸⁵ Once the listener knows that they are hearing a trained and capable opera singer, this positionality regarding art-song norms can become clear. In other words, for the performative choice to be apparent, the singer must not only perform the music as a sort of instrument but must also perform herself as a singer. As Brecht put it, "it is important that [s]he who

⁴⁸³ "Er lehnt die Vergötzung des Belcanto ab, fordert aber sehr wohl stimmliche Qualifikation." Roswitha Trexler, "Wie ich Eislers 'Hölderlin-Fragmente' singe," *Melos NZ* 4, no. 2 (1978), 108.

⁴⁸⁴ "Ein Mensch [...] wird es gut singen, eventuell auch ohne Stimme." Eisler, EGW 3/7 148.

⁴⁸⁵ A few short years later, singer Cathy Berberian would publish her philosophy of a "new vocality," which similarly questioned the legitimacy of bel canto's artistic universality, while also championing it. See Cathy Berberian, "The New Vocality in Contemporary Music (1966)," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, ed. Pamela Karantonis, trans. Francesca Placanica (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 47–59.

is showing should [her]self be shown.”⁴⁸⁶ Thus, Eisler’s critique of musical traditions appears in written form in his score and, through the audience’s understanding of Arnold’s performance, is reiterated on a performative level. Eisler, Arnold and the audience get to have the proverbial cake of continuing elitist music traditions while critiquing them too. If the audience is not receptive to having their expectations dashed, however, the critique is lost. According to Eberhard Rebling, at a performance of Eisler’s *Weißbrotkantate* in Coburg in 1955, West German audience members were so furious about Arnold’s singing “in the style of a worker song” that a few of them had to be escorted out of the concert hall.⁴⁸⁷

Eisler also recruited and coached non-singers for performances of his chansons and theater songs. Before singing for him in 1954, Lin Jaldati confessed that she wasn’t “actually a singer at all in the usual sense.”⁴⁸⁸ Eisler replied, “Thank God, finally a singer without a voice. That’s exactly what I need.”⁴⁸⁹ Jaldati later cited Eisler’s indifference to a specific style as long as the performer had an impact upon the listeners, saying that one “can sing one way or the other, but it has to be honest, friendly, so that people really listen and reflect.”⁴⁹⁰ Other non-singers, like Gisela May, often performed his songs with altered instrumentation to fit the circumstances and changed the key (or the octave) to suit her highly trained, yet unmistakably non-classical, voice. Far from being understood as a musical instrument, May’s voice has a different relationship to the written score and therefore cannot be described or analyzed in the same way a classical voice can. Whereas Irmgard Arnold or Roswitha Trexler’s concert programs and albums name the composer or the composition, the focus of May’s performances, as a non-singer, remains on the lyrics. Programs by singing actors rarely highlight the composition and, instead, carry titles like “Gisela May sings Brecht and Tucholsky.” This performative divide between the singer/actor categories can also be clearly seen in the liner notes of the compilation albums on which May appeared.

⁴⁸⁶ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 45.

⁴⁸⁷ Lin Jaldati and Eberhard Rebling, *Sag nie, du gehst den letzten Weg: Lebenserinnerungen; 1911 bis 1988*, Sammlung 1 (Marburg: BdWi-Verlag, 1995), 472.

⁴⁸⁸ “‘Hanns, Du musst es wissen, ich bin eigentlich gar keine Sängerin im üblichen Sinne, denn ich habe gar keine richtige Stimme.’ ‘Gottseidank,’ antwortete er, ‘endlich eine Sängerin ohne Stimme, das ist genau das was ich brauche!’” Lin Jaldati, “Das, was ich brauche,” in: *Musik und Gesellschaft* 13 (1963): 422.

⁴⁸⁹ Jaldati, 422.

⁴⁹⁰ Jaldati and Rebling, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 464.

Classical singers are listed as their classical *Fach* (e.g., soprano or baritone), whereas actors or chanson singers like May are exclusively listed as “Gesang” (vocals).

May’s voice also served, however, as a critique of elitist traditions in a different, less subtle way. In April of 1958, the same year that Arnold’s recording was released, May gave a concert of Eisler songs at the “Forum for New Music and Socialist Musical Life.” The forum, organized by the city of Halle, was one of many initiatives in the area that paved the way for what would be known as the Bitterfelder Weg, the cultural policy that sought to “conquer the heights of culture.”⁴⁹¹ Most important musical functionaries were in attendance to answer questions about how to best promote new musical practices that would integrate the arts and the working class. May’s performance, accompanied by Andre Asriel, exemplified this ideal mixture, presenting Eisler’s compositional skill with a non-classical voice. A central goal of the Bitterfeld Way was to encourage musicians to focus on vocal music, across a variety of genres. May’s performance, mentioned in *Musik und Gesellschaft* as a practical part of the forum’s discussion,⁴⁹² signaled part of this plan to accept other forms of singing as musicological subject matter and non-classical singers as serious interpreters of music.

A background as a classical singer has however remained a qualifier for today’s categorization of which performances are discussed in musicological articles and discussions of Eisler’s vocal music. Even though May made a life-long career of singing and teaching Eisler’s songs, she “was consciously excluded” from the “Eisler and the Singers” *Eisler-Mitteilungen* issue for the simple reason that she “saw herself explicitly not as a singer.”⁴⁹³ In Christoph Keller’s discography of the Hollywood songs in the same issue, actress Sylvia An-

⁴⁹¹ “In Staat und Wirtschaft ist die Arbeiterklasse der DDR bereits der Herr. Jetzt muß sie auch die Höhen der Kultur stürmen und von ihnen Besitz ergreifen.” Walter Ulbricht, quoted in “Referat des Genossen Walter Ulbricht auf dem V. Parteitag,” *Neues Deutschland*, July 12, 1958, 5.

⁴⁹² Ernst Hermann Meyer, “Echte Revolutionäre auch in der Kunst sein,” *Musik und Gesellschaft* 14 (1964): 259.

⁴⁹³ Albrecht Dümling, “Die unmögliche Art des Singens,” *Eisler-Mitteilungen*, Eisler und die Sänger, 18, no. 51 (April 2011): 3. A large portion of the *Eisler-Mitteilungen* 63 (2017) was dedicated to May after her death in 2016.

Anders' West-German recording of the *Hollywood Elegies* from 1979 is also conspicuously absent.⁴⁹⁴ Both Anders' parents, as well as both her siblings, were successful opera singers, and she had been trained classically, as the impressive range and lyricism heard on her recordings demonstrate. Indeed, her vocal technique is often more lyrical – that is “traditional” – than any of the recordings which Keller deemed “authentic.”

It is certainly possible that Keller was simply not aware of her recording; however, a choice to exclude her would have made sense. Firstly, for some tracks the piano part is played on an electric piano, perhaps disqualifying the whole recording from the realm of art song performance. More importantly, though, despite the fact that her vocal technique fits in with the other classical singers on Keller's list, Anders' status as an actress would have made her the absolute outlier among the reviewed recordings. Like Gisela May, Silvia Anders was performing as an actress, not as a singer. Thus, even if she mastered a so-called Eisler style, she would still be unable to achieve the performative critique of musical elitism that a famed opera singer, like Irmgard Arnold, could. Authenticity, therefore, extends beyond *how* a performer sings Eisler's score, encompassing also how a singer performs their ownership of a “voice.”

In two articles published in 1978, Roswitha Trexler underlines the importance of individual interpretation in performing Eisler's songs. She explains her artistic choices with evidence from Eisler's own writing but refrains from claiming that they follow a correct or authentic style. Instead, she presents her choices as “a concept developed through studies and comparisons, as a suggestion, not as a directive, which may find approval, but which may also elicit disagreement.”⁴⁹⁵ For Trexler, Eisler had “wished for attention to the model and at the same time for an examination of it: not a copy, but creative application, variable

⁴⁹⁴ Anders' reputation as an interpreter of Eisler's songs, however, earned her a slot in the same *Eisler-Mitteilungen* issue. Anders' short text appears in the less academic section, alongside many personal accounts by other actors and classical singers. Albrecht Dümling, ed., “Sänger und Sängerinnen über ihre Erfahrungen mit Eisler,” *Eisler und die Sänger, Eisler-Mitteilungen*, 18 (April 2011): 18.

⁴⁹⁵ “Die Beschreibung der ‘Hölderlin-Fragmente’ [...] möchte als ein Modell verstanden werden: als eine durch Studien und Vergleiche erarbeitete Konzeption, als ein Vorschlag, keine Anweisung, der Bestätigung finden, womöglich aber auch Widerspruch herausfordern mag.” Trexler, “Wie ich Eislers ‘Hölderlin-Fragmente’ singe,” 108.

especially according to the changing historical view.” Therefore, the model that Irmgard Arnold had created with Eisler should not be “followed blindly, without critical examination with regard to the demands of the time and one’s own individuality.”⁴⁹⁶ In this way, the end of Eisler’s often cited preface to the *Ernste Gesänge* – “auf den Sänger kommt es schließlich an (in the end, it depends on the singer)” – does not pertain to how well each singer adheres to a prescribed style but to how inevitable – and necessary – variations between each individual singer are.

Jürgen Elsner’s dissertation *Zum vokalsolistischen Vortrag der Eislerschen Kampfmusik* (The solo-voice performance of Eisler’s struggle-music) also emphasizes the link between individual performance and composition within Eisler’s work of art. Although Elsner, like others, concentrate exclusively on performances of Eisler’s *Kampflieder*, he explicitly presents the meaning of Eisler’s compositions through the lens of musical practice, rejecting the notion of an “authentic” Eisler-style. Musical notation, he writes, is inadequate at capturing the full essence of a musical work. To make up for this, Musicologists and performers often rely on standards of performance techniques that “seem to provide secure, universally applicable methods for the realization of a musical text.”⁴⁹⁷ However, these types of rules, “apart from their usually inadequate quantitative and qualitative definition,” are insufficient for musical practice because they do not replace the artist’s own individual engagement with the content of the work itself.⁴⁹⁸

To Jürgen Elsner, the the meaning of Eisler’s music is dependent on “differentiated systems” of social *Erkenntnis*, social forms of knowledge, cognition or insight. These systems “exist as an interrelationship between historically and socially conditioned individual

⁴⁹⁶ “Schallplatte und Tonband halten Interpretationen fest, und oft genug gelten diese, zumal wenn Autoritäten dahinterstehen, als Modelle, die blind befolgt werden, ohne kritische Prüfung im Hinblick auf die Ansprüche der Zeit und der eigenen Individualität.” Trexler, 108.

⁴⁹⁷ Jürgen Elsner, *Zur vokalsolistischen Vortragsweise der Kampfmusik Hanns Eisler* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1971), 8.

⁴⁹⁸ Elsner, 8.

knowledge and the social mediation and utilization of knowledge.”⁴⁹⁹ In other words, music’s meaning cannot be derived from scores and performance styles alone but depends on the understanding of music among individuals in a given historical and social environment.

5.5. Singing Eisler, Now and Again

Trexler’s view is similar to Rienäcker’s: Eisler believed that the performer’s relationship to the music depends on their relationship to reality and to the audience. Text might be preserved in his score like a fly in amber; however, the meaning each line carries will change with time. In Eisler’s speech for the Composers’ Collective of New York in 1935, he states that “music not only serves certain social functions, but allows of a change in these functions, so that it is then made to serve an aim different than that for which it was written.”⁵⁰⁰ Again, shortly before his death, Eisler alluded to this phenomenon in a talk with Hans Bunge, discussing his setting of Berthold Viertel’s poem *Wer Traurig sein will*: “If you read it today ... Berthold Viertel wrote the poem, I think, in 1936. He means the dates of the Hitler dictatorship. Now, I composed it – and now everyone may choose the year dates about which he wants to be sad.”⁵⁰¹ When asked what kind of music is necessary, Eisler

⁴⁹⁹ “Die musikalische Praxis im weitesten Sinne ist als eine Form der gesellschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit einer spezifischen Seite der Wirklichkeit aufzufassen, Sie dient der gesellschaftlichen Erkenntnis, die als Wechselbeziehung von historisch-sozial bedingter, individueller Erkenntnis und gesellschaftlicher Erkenntnisvermittlung und -verwertung bzw. als gesellschaftlicher Austausch und Ausgleich von historisch-sozial bedingten, individuellen Erkenntnissen existiert. Die musikalische Praxis ist mit der Entwicklung der menschlichen Gesellschaft verbunden, sie steht unter ihrem Einfluß, wie sie diese ihrerseits beeinflusst. Den wirklichkeitsbezogenen, gesellschaftlich-historischen Charakter der musikalischen Praxis zu betonen ist insofern wichtig, als jeder Faktor dieser gesellschaftlich-musikalischen Erkenntnistätigkeit, die konkret in jeweils mehr oder weniger differenzierten Systemen abläuft, durch ihn bestimmt ist bzw. ohne diesen Bezug nicht voll verstanden werden kann, Sie installiert sich also nicht in autonomen, abgeschlossenen, sich selbst genügenden Systemen, sondern ist in allen ihren Erscheinungsformen und deren Details funktionell mit der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit verknüpft.” Elsner, 10.

⁵⁰⁰ Hanns Eisler, “The Crisis in Modern Music (1935),” in *A Rebel in Music: Selected Writings*, ed. Manfred Grabs (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 116.

⁵⁰¹ “Wenn man es heute liest ... Berthold Viertel hat das Gedicht, glaube ich, geschrieben 1936. Er meint die Jahresdaten der Hitlerdiktatur. Nun, ich habe es komponiert – und jetzt mag sich jeder die Jahresdaten aussuchen, über die er traurig sein will.” Eisler, EGW 3/7, 263.

replied, “I can’t describe to you what is necessary. It’s different every week.”⁵⁰² Eisler, therefore, was aware that his music would eventually serve different uses, depending on the social circumstances under which it was performed.

This explains why a distinct, authentic style for the Hollywood songs remains elusive. It is not because Eisler’s score or descriptions are insufficient, but because the historical context in which the songs were “authentically” performed is not taken into account as a defining element of this authenticity.⁵⁰³ Famously, Eisler vehemently rejected the idea of static autonomous music, insisting that “Music is made for people by people. This doesn’t take place in a vacuum. [...] Whoever does not understand this is—however clever he may be—a fool.”⁵⁰⁴ In terms of “rigid aesthetic norms and standards,” Jürgen Elsner argues that Eisler was “explicitly opposed to the pursuit of style.”⁵⁰⁵ Instead, Eisler’s work has style in “that it gets to the root of phenomena, that in it the new social idea and reality is found in its essence,”⁵⁰⁶ i.e., any style that can be observed in Eisler’s works is dictated by the function they serve in an ever-changing society. For Eisler, the fissure between “the sharply divided spheres of social reality and aesthetic appearance” is a false one.⁵⁰⁷ The continued search for a static or “authentic” style for the sake of preserving an aesthetic past was simple political escapism into music history, “because it tries to gloss over reality, which is much more complicated and from which it is impossible to camouflage oneself.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰² “Das Notwendige kann ich Ihnen nicht beschreiben. Es ist jede Woche anders.” Eisler, EGW 3/7, 266.

⁵⁰³ The idea was also shared by Ernst Hermann Meyer in 1951: “It would be a mistake for the re-creator, when performing music from the past, to start from the form, from formal outward appearances which he wishes to capture—nothing is gained if he does not bring the main thing, the social message, the content to life.” “Es wäre ein Fehler, wenn der Nachschaffende bei Aufführungen von Musik der Vergangenheit nur von der Form, von formalen Äußerlichkeiten ausginge, die er festhalten möchte – damit ist noch gar nichts gewonnen, wenn er nicht die Hauptsache, die gesellschaftliche Aussage, den Inhalt zum Leben bringt.” Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, 1st ed. (Berlin: AdK / Bruno Henschel und Sohn, 1952), 86.

⁵⁰⁴ Eisler, EGW 3/1, 396.

⁵⁰⁵ Jürgen Elsner, “Zum Problem des Stils bei Hanns Eisler,” in *Hanns Eisler heute: Berichte, Probleme, Beobachtungen*, ed. Manfred Grabs, Arbeitshefte (Berlin: AdK, 1974), 133.

⁵⁰⁶ Elsner, 133.

⁵⁰⁷ Eisler, EGW 3/1, 400.

⁵⁰⁸ “Barockstil heute ist die Flucht in die Musikgeschichte. Komponisten dieses Stils glauben, damit die verfeinerte, allerdings auch überhitzte Subjektivität der alten Avantgarde

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These arguments point toward more complex ways of understanding performances of Eisler's music today. In searching for authenticity in performing Eisler's works, one must also consider what Eisler intended, not only in terms of notes and articulation but also in terms of music-making as an ever-changing social phenomenon. Understandably, this is difficult for experts like Keller and Csipák, who insist that "real music" (the musical material) is found exclusively in the static score, not only because it is not easily understood in terms of traditional Western musicology but also because it requires a confrontation with Eisler's methods, i.e., his political ideology. Eisler's intentions for variance in performance and for a musical aesthetic that depends on varying social contexts are easily dismissed; in the dominant methodological framework of autonomous works and a narrative of modernist progression, Eisler's compositional prowess alone legitimizes him as an important figure in music history. The vehement insistence on a correct style of interpretation for his songs is perhaps the only way to defend Eisler's legacy within a logocentric historiography. As a result, just as classical singers might uncritically look at Eisler's scores and "mistakenly" perform them in the style of a standard Romantic Liederabend, so critics take his scores out of context, examining his songs through a standard musicological lens that does not take performances, i.e., the interplay between the "material" and the audience, into account. It is in fact this "misunderstanding" of the Hollywood songs that has preserved them as a part of the great German Lied tradition, both as a musicological subject and as concert repertoire.

The question of "How to sing Eisler's songs" then remains open: Singers can "misunderstand" and sing them as traditional art songs or attempt to sing in an "authentic" style while finding stylistic ways to betray their own classical training. In either case, their performance is unlikely to fulfill what Eisler had intended with the Arnold recording in the early days of the GDR. In the wider context of Eisler's aesthetic program, in which the societal and emotional interplay of audience and performers dictates the vocal aesthetic, the vocal choices the singers make – how classically, how lyrically, how non-traditionally they sing –

überwunden zu haben und sich, sozial' zu benehmen. Ich halte das für dumm, weil es die Wirklichkeit, die viel komplizierter ist und aus der man sich nicht wegeskamotieren kann, durch Barocksequenzen zu verkleistern versucht." Eisler, EGW 3/2, 388.

must be motivated by the social critique they want to ignite amongst their listeners, and not through adherence to perceived authenticity.

6. Conclusion

Endeavors in *Liedschaffen* were essential in shaping the cultural and political fabric of the GDR by attempting to create a new socialist identity through song and collective singing. However, this effort was marked by the tension between two conflicting ideals. On the one hand, the socialist realist doctrine, which emphasized accessibility, functionality, and ideological clarity. On the other, the German musical *Erbe* of the nineteenth century, which included the Romantic tradition of composed art songs. Folk songs, with their perceived simplicity, communal nature, and connection to everyday life, were seen as ideal vehicles for promoting socialist values while also maintaining ties to German traditions. *Liedschaffen* was thus an approach aimed at reconciling the state's ideological goals with the need to root new cultural expressions in familiar and historically resonant forms.

With *Liedschaffen*, functionaries attempted to blend these various elements—socialist realism, the Romantic *Erbe*, and the folk tradition—into a coherent song culture. Professionally trained composers were tasked with creating “folk songs of their time” that would simultaneously evoke the compositional excellence of art song composers like Schubert and Brahms while achieving the social impact of *Massenlieder*. This effort led to a proliferation

of new song compositions that were gathered, published, and distributed by the VKM, resulting in a diverse and sometimes contradictory cultural landscape complicated by differing understandings of these ideals among individual stakeholders.

The political and generational shifts of the 1950s and 60s significantly influenced the development and implementation of *Liedschaffen*, as composers, performers, and cultural policymakers navigated changing directives and attitudes. After the death of Stalin in 1953, a period of relative liberalization gave way to a more rigid cultural policy with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee in 1965.

Amid these changes, the policies of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, introduced in 1959, played a crucial role in promoting the active participation of workers and amateurs in the creation and performance of songs. Aiming to bridge the gap between the intelligentsia and the working class, this policy encouraged a collaborative approach to song production between professionals and amateurs. The goal was to create songs that were both ideologically sound and accessible to a broad audience, but balancing socialist realism, the folk tradition, and the Romantic *Erbe* proved challenging. Functionaries were often divided over the roles of the professional composer versus the layperson in this process.

Meanwhile, the first generation of native East Germans came of age, increasingly influenced by international trends and seeking a form of folk song production centered on personal expression and political action, distinct from the state-directed *Massenlieder*. Leveraging the infrastructure provided by the *Kulturhäuser* and the policies of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, the subsequent *Singebewegung* of the 1960s emerged from newly founded *Singeklubs*, further emphasizing political song and collective musical creation as core elements of the GDR's cultural identity.

Thus, the efforts of *Liedschaffen*, shaped by these shifting political and generational contexts, resulted in a song culture that was dynamic and contested. While the state aimed to use songs to reinforce socialist ideals and cultivate a unified cultural identity, the actual practices of song production and performance often reflected a more complex reality. Songs became sites of negotiation where different ideological, generational, and aesthetic

values intersected, embodying both the state's aspirations and the evolving cultural landscape of East German society.

By exploring song in the 1950s and early 1960s, this dissertation has also presented the integral role of this period in GDR historiography, both for East German musicologists and for today's music historians. Departing from traditional German historical musicology, which often focused on individual composers and the aesthetic qualities of their works, Marxist musicologists focused on the social, political, and economic functions of music and called for methods from history, sociology, economics, psychology, analysis, esthetics of music (and others) to analyze music's impact on society.⁵⁰⁹ At its core was a recognition that objectivity is not the key to understanding history, that subjectivity is inherent to constructing historical narratives. In this way, historians were seen, not only as mediators of an objective truth, but also as actors in class struggle. Therefore, seeing music history as a vital component of social consciousness and political education, historical narratives revolved around cultural expressions of the proletariat.

As the manifestation of the music of the working class, song earns special attention within this framework. This approach is particularly evident in the work of Wolfgang Steinitz and Inge Lammel, who played pivotal roles in reshaping the historiography of music in the GDR. Steinitz's research on German folk songs sought to reinterpret these songs as expressions of class struggle and resistance, connecting the working class to its historical roots and reinforcing a shared cultural identity. His work was not about preserving cultural artifacts in a traditional sense; it was a political act aimed at empowering the proletariat by reclaiming and repurposing its musical heritage. Similarly, Inge Lammel's focus on *Arbeiterlieder* emphasized these songs as authentic expressions of proletarian experience and ideology. By highlighting the importance of these cultural forms, Steinitz and Lammel constructed a historical narrative that foregrounded the voices and experiences of ordinary people, positioning these songs as dynamic tools that reflected and shaped social consciousness.

⁵⁰⁹ See Georg Knepler, "Music Historiography in Eastern Europe," in *Perspectives in Musicology: The Inaugural Lectures of the Ph. D. Program in Music at the City University of New York*, ed. Barry S Brook (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), e.g., 236.

The emphasis on songs associated with the working class also reflects a broader methodological shift within Marxist musicology toward a more interdisciplinary analysis of music's social functions and effects. This shift was encapsulated in the concept of *Wirkung*—the effect or impact of music. Rather than viewing songs as static texts or aesthetic objects, GDR musicologists were interested in how these songs functioned within society, how they could mobilize, educate, and inspire the masses. This concept of *Wirkung* aligns closely with contemporary ideas of performativity in cultural studies, where the meaning of cultural expressions is seen as being created and negotiated through performance and social practice. In both frameworks, the focus is on music as an active, performative process that engages with and influences social realities.

The parallels between the GDR's concept of *Wirkung* and contemporary theories of performativity highlight the innovative nature of East German musicology during this period. Both approaches recognize that songs are not merely composed artifacts but dynamic entities whose meanings are shaped by their performance and reception in specific social contexts. In the GDR, this understanding meant that the true significance of a song lay in its ability to function as a tool for social engagement—whether by reinforcing state ideology, fostering a sense of collective identity, or providing a platform for critique and resistance. This dynamic view of music challenged traditional notions of musical works as fixed or timeless, emphasizing instead their role as fluid and adaptable instruments of social action. Thus, songs during the *Aufbau* period became key tools for both documenting and shaping the historical consciousness of East German society.

What effect did East German understandings of song and *Wirkung* have on performance practice?

An exploration of performances of Hanns Eisler's art songs has shown that these aspects of GDR music historiography were reflected in vocal performance. This approach to performance reflected the GDR's belief that songs were not fixed objects with a singular, unchanging interpretation. Instead, they were seen as dynamic tools for engaging with contemporary social realities. Unlike conventional Western notions of authenticity, which often emphasize exact adherence to the composer's intentions or the performance practices

of the time, GDR music historiography suggests that the true authenticity of a performance lies in its ability to engage listeners and provoke a social or political response.

In the case of Hanns Eisler, a committed Marxist composer, songs were designed not just as aesthetic objects but as active agents of ideological communication, critique, and engagement. Focusing on the social function of music, the singers he chose, like Irmgard Arnold, Gisela May, and Ernst Busch, had to contend with the *Wirkung*, not only of the words and notes in the score but also of the sound of their voices upon their audience. As the premier performer of Eisler's art songs, Arnold presents an interesting case. Her "screechy," nasal tone demonstrates a conscious choice to foreground impact over conventional standards of beauty. In this way, Arnold performs a rejection of traditional bel canto singing, resonating with her intended audience's rejection of bourgeois ideals of art while compelling them to consider the ideological content of the composition.

This emphasis on *Wirkung* transformed performance practice in the GDR, making it an active, performative process that aimed to respond to the specific social and political needs of the time. Performers were not just presenting a musical work but were engaging in a dialogue with their audience, using their voices as instruments to provoke thought, evoke emotion, and inspire action. By focusing on the social function of music rather than its technical or historical aspects, East German understandings of song and *Wirkung* created a distinct performance culture that valued adaptability and relevance over conventional standards of beauty or historical accuracy. This approach has left a lasting impact, challenging contemporary performers to consider not just how they sing Eisler's songs, but why—and what effect their performance can have on today's audiences.

This dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on GDR music historiography by examining the dynamic role of song during the *Aufbau* period, highlighting the state's *Liedschaffen* efforts as a lens through which the complexities of cultural production in a socialist context can be understood. Through the integration of traditional musicological approaches with the frameworks of performativity and *Wirkung*, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how songs were not merely musical artifacts but were intended as active practices that could shape socialist identity and foster collective consciousness.

This approach challenges a tendency to categorize East German songs solely as instruments of propaganda or resistance, instead presenting them as sites of negotiation within the inherent contradictions of life in the GDR.

By focusing on the state's attempts to balance socialist realism, the German musical *Erbe*, and folk traditions, this dissertation reveals the complexities underlying the idea of a coherent song culture. It uncovers how various stakeholders—composers, musicologists, and cultural functionaries—sought to reconcile these often-conflicting ideals, resulting in a diverse and, at times, contradictory cultural landscape. This exploration not only deepens our understanding of East German music culture but also encourages further investigation into other underexplored aspects of this period.

Future research could benefit from a closer examination of figures like Inge Lammel, whose work with the Arbeiterlied Archive represents a critical yet underexplored dimension of how songs were used to construct and sustain proletarian identities and how they intersected with broader cultural policies. Likewise, the scope of this dissertation unfortunately excluded any mention of Doris Stockmann's contributions to the development of methodological conceptions of folk song and ethnomusicology in the GDR, which would be imperative for further investigation into the conceptualization of folksongs in GDR musicology. Further studies could also explore the adaptation and contestation of ideas like those of Johann Gottfried Herder in the discourse of the GDR to gain more insight into how these specific ideas of *Volkslied* and nation influenced East German policies and, perhaps, how this compares with Herder's reception under Hitler. Research might also focus on the role of vocal music within Socialist Realism, particularly in relation to solo concerts, where repertoire choices, gender dynamics, and the reception of various singing styles could reveal more about the cultural currents of the time.

By encouraging these new avenues of research, this dissertation sets the stage for a more comprehensive understanding of the role of song in the GDR. It underscores the need for continued interdisciplinary inquiry, bringing together perspectives from musicology, history, sociology, and cultural studies to explore the intricate ways in which music functioned in East German society. In doing so, it advocates for an approach that acknowledges the

fluidity and adaptability of songs as social and political tools, reflecting their capacity to shape, as much as they are shaped by, the contexts in which they are performed.

Ultimately, this work calls for a reassessment of how we understand music in its historical context. By situating songs as performative acts with the power to influence and reflect social realities, it challenges the notion of music as a static or purely aesthetic object. This perspective not only contributes to a deeper understanding of GDR musical culture but also invites us to reconsider the value systems that inform our own practices as scholars and performers. As we continue to explore the legacies of the GDR, it is essential to remain open to the multiple meanings and possibilities that these songs offer, ensuring that their relevance endures beyond the immediate historical moment.

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