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Chapter 5

Censorship, Dissent and the Metaphorical Language of GDR Rock

David Robb

The development of rock and pop in the GDR was constantly impacted upon by two poles of influence which were to a large extent irreconcilable with one another, but which made GDR rock into the distinctive phenomenon that it became. These two factors were the irrepressible rise in popularity of pop and rock music and the constant constraints of the regime which tried to shape it to suit its ideological aims. A problem from the outset lay in the fact that GDR viewed pop and rock culture as western decadence, constantly threatening to undermine the socialist way of life. Forced to accommodate it due to public demand, however, the state facilitated a pop and rock industry intended on one hand to meet the needs, but at the same time to help mould the socialist consciousness of the population. The contradiction which emerged here – the rebellious *Geste* of rock music did not rest easily with social and political conformity – reflected wider inherent contradictions of the system which were to contribute to its ultimate demise. It is significant that the lifespan of the GDR, from 1949 to 1990, corresponds with the first four decades of pop and rock music, the phenomenon that came to dominate popular culture internationally, as we know today. In other words, the GDR state, almost from its onset, was faced with an ideological battle with a new youth culture it did not understand and which Marxist-Leninist philosophy had no explanation for.

The chapter will firstly look at the infrastructure of the GDR music industry, the political conditions that the artists worked under and the compromises they had to endure. Alongside this it will observe case studies of the lyrics of prominent groups and artists from the 1970s and 1980s – the decades in which GDR rock came into its own – illustrating the difficulties, complexities and ambiguities of navigating a career within the GDR music industry. These groups will include Renft, Puhdys, City, Karat, and Stern Combo Meißen in the 1970s and Silly and Pankow in the years leading up to the fall of the Wall in 1989. As well as looking at the music, it will observe how, as a result of political circumstances, a distinctive practice of metaphorical lyric writing emerged. This was firstly as a result of the need to circumvent censorship (of the various institutions such as GDR Radio and the state record label Amiga which vetted all outputs) but secondly to satisfy a public thirst for

critically challenging art in the face of the dearth of any oppositional culture in the public arena. Key recurring themes in songs of GDR groups will be examined here. These will include: the GDR's sense of historical mission, the division of Germany (linked to the torn inner-self), and the urge to travel and experience a greater life than was possible within the confines of the state. Singers and groups who tackled delicate political subjects head-on, without sufficient recourse to poetic or metaphorical disguise, were banned or, worse still, ended up in jail where they could be pushed off to the West via a prisoner exchange system. Many others were worn down to the point of submitting an application to leave. The history of GDR pop, rock and protest song is consequently littered with examples of prominent musicians – from Veronika Fischer and Nina Hagen to Pannach and Kunert, Wolf Biermann, Bettina Wegner and many more – who left for a new life in West Germany. But this chapter is also about the groups and performers who remained until the bitter end, honing the lyrical writing and hybrid rock musical form that made GDR rock a distinctive category. From the mid-1980s onwards, coinciding with the Gorbachev period, it will be examined how pop and rock artists such as Pankow and Silly increasingly abandoned self-censorship – leaving behind the excessive use of metaphor which characterised the 1970s – and began to address the problems as they were.

The infrastructure of GDR rock and pop

Since 1989 many books and academic articles have appeared on the subject of the GDR's pop and rock music industry. Peter Wicke and John Shepherd's article "‘The Cabaret is Dead’: Rock culture as state enterprise – the political organization of rock in East Germany" (1993) deals with the manifold contradictions of making rock music in the GDR. Unlike in the West, its rock music did not have to be economically self-sufficient, but only had to be ideologically accountable to the state. The contradiction here, however, lay in the fact that rock music – due to mass popularity – had to be accountable to the wider GDR population, who did not wish to see it as politically conformist. And despite attempts by the institutions to determine what became popular, it was actually the people, with their word-of-mouth culture and radio charts based on fan ratings, who had the final say in this. And herein lies a further contradiction: the successful rock artists, largely chosen by the people, also sat on the committees of the official institutions who steered the development of GDR rock music. An example was Toni Krahl, singer of the band City, a former dissident who had been imprisoned for protesting against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, who

later became president of the Rock Music branch of the Committee for Entertainment Art. Such ambiguities challenged customary perceptions in the West after the *Wende* (turning point) which tended to divide GDR artists into stark oppositional or conformist categories. In reality the division was blurred, mirroring a contradiction which existed throughout the whole system. The artists were 'the people', yet they were often party to the implementation of policy which the people no longer trusted or could live with. The inertia which emerged from this stalemate spelled the death knell of the state (Wicke and Shepherd 1993: 35). The above thesis was further confirmed in the years after 1993 when the full extent of rock musicians' collaborations with the Stasi secret police was revealed. Examples included Wolf Rudiger Raschke from Karussell and Manual von Senden from Electra, or others who, in a common scenario, became entangled with the Stasi involuntarily, such as Peter 'Cäsar' Gläser from Renft (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 53-55) and Jürgen Ehle from Pankow (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 79).

The impossibility of performing music in the GDR independently of state supervision becomes clear when one considers the apparatus specifically put in place to monitor the groups. As the 1974 Youth Law stated, young musicians and bands could not simply exist independently of supervision of the Socialist Unity Party (SED)-led district councils and the Free German Youth (FDJ). Reflecting an inherent distrust of popular culture, all music firstly has to be positively evaluated by a panel which should include classically trained judges (GDR Youth Law 1974: Point 30). All musicians, amateur and professional, had to possess this official evaluation which functioned as a licence to perform and determined one's fee. Over and above this, career musicians were required to have a music school diploma, although several managed to study for this while simultaneously working with a professional band (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 107-108). As well as artistic quality and political suitability, another criteria for passing the evaluation was that all repertoires had to contain at least 60% of songs from the GDR or other countries of the Eastern bloc, thus limiting the quota of British and American music to a maximum of 40%. This 'Programme Structuring Order for Entertainment and Dance Music' from 1958 was often used by the authorities as a pretext to ban undesirable bands (Wicke 1996: 28). In reality however, bands would circumvent this by presenting the prescribed quota at their auditions then proceeding to play a majority of songs in English at their gigs (Winter 2009: 17-18). The law could also be used as a tool of repression in the context of the purchasing of musical equipment. Decent quality instruments and PA systems (as well as transport vans) were extremely hard to obtain in the GDR. As a

result, groups frequently tried to smuggle instruments in from the West at exorbitant prices whereby one had to exchange GDR money for the D-Mark at inflated black market rates. If one was caught doing this, as well as having equipment confiscated, musicians could receive excessive fines for not having paid tax on the original purchase (see Winter 2009: 19-22).

In the course of a career, singers and groups had to deal with a myriad of political institutions who vetted who was allowed to perform, record, or be heard. The aforementioned Committee for Entertainment Art, formed in 1973, was the state artist development agency directly answerable to the Ministerial Council of the GDR (Hintze 1999: 74) and responsible for ensuring implementation of GDR cultural policy. Due to pressure from musicians, it increasingly took over the function of a performers association after 1984, when it was re-structured into various departments for each musical genre (jazz, rock, chanson, political song etc.). The Committee's Head Office took a proactive role in monitoring the ideological development of the artists, and could issue directives to the other music sector organisations regarding how artists were to be treated. These included the Directory for Concerts and Guest Performances (KGD) which organised inland concerts, and the Artists' Agency, which decided – in conjunction with the Central Committee of the SED – which GDR acts obtained authorisation to play abroad. The Agency also negotiated all concerts of foreign acts (Hintze 1999: 181-82). Most artists had a subservient relationship towards these institutions. While groups such as the Puhdys, Karat, Elefant and Karussell obtained gigs in the West, the cult group Klosterbrüder was an example of many others who were restricted to playing in the GDR, their successor group Magdeburg only being permitted to play in Eastern Bloc countries after years of applying (Winter 2009: 42-4).

Radio, television, and the state record label Amiga, too, had a complete monopoly over what music the public could listen to. According to the Youth Law of 1974, they were expected to disseminate new works of art which would 'correspond to the youth's growing interest in and needs for socialist culture, art, entertainment and sociability' (GDR Youth Law 1974: Point 32, 2). The editorial committee of Radio GDR, which vetted all potential broadcasts, stood directly under the notorious Department of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the SED (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 85). It included prominent writers, loyal to the state, such as Gisela Steineckert. She had previously been cultural editor of the satirical magazine *Eulenspiegel* and a mentor for the Oktoberklub, and became the last president of the Committee for Entertainment Art from 1984-1990. Steineckert also wrote

texts for pop and rock groups including Karussell's 1987 hit *Als ich fortging* (*As I went forth*). This unaccountable editorial committee sniffed out any ideological ambiguities and repeatedly sent texts back to groups for revisions or rejected them entirely (Larkey 2007: 63; Winter 2009: 46-63). The stakes for bands could not have been higher. Listening figures for the pop programmes were very high. The youth station DT64 (which ran from 1964 to 1993) broadcast *Duett-Musik für den Recorder* (*Duet Music for The Tape Recorder*) which was one of several radio shows which actively encouraged listeners to record the songs at home. This fulfilled a vital gap in the market given the chronic shortage of records in the shops. The DJs even played whole sides of albums, from the West as well as from the GDR, and never spoke over the music thus allowing for a clean recording (Beatmusik und Bruce Springsteen 2014). Other pop shows included 'Beatkiste' and 'Tip Parade', which both compiled record charts based on fan ratings (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 16-17).

Amiga was the subsidiary popular music label of VEB German Records. With its task to implement the GDR's planned economy in music, it manufactured records according to fixed quotas for genres. These were 25% Schlager (light entertainment songs), 15% blues and jazz, 15% song chanson and folk, 10% children's songs, 10% musical and operetta, and 25% rock and pop. It also licensed limited editions of records from highly popular western bands such as Eric Clapton, Deep Purple and Abba, which were always snapped up quickly. In terms of GDR acts, Amiga prioritised song-based rock. This was due to the importance attached to high quality texts, which the authorities saw as a characteristic attribute of GDR rock, distinguishing it from its Western counterpart (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 84-85). A band's readiness to compromise was essential. As Renft guitarist Cäsar remembered, up to 80% of the texts of their two mid-1970s albums were revised versions (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 116). Winter cites the example of a third verse of the Renft song *Kinder ich bin nicht der Sandmann* (*Children I'm Not the Sandman*), a critique of conformism in the GDR, which was cut by the censors (Winter 2009: 51-52). It was easier, however, to circumvent the censors in Amiga, which was answerable to the more lenient Ministry of Culture, than those in GDR Radio, which, as stated, stood directly under the Central Committee of the SED. The Renft song *Besinnung* (*Reflection*), for example, after popular response to initial radio airplay, was banned in 1975, and never played again, while Amiga were happy to release the same song for Cäsar's subsequent group Karussell in 1979 (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 117).

Amiga's chief editor, the former Oktoberklub stalwart Dr. René Büttner, was faced with the dilemma of having to sell records while at the same time implement government policy, knowing that conformist-sounding GDR acts would be rejected by the public. While in the 1980s, Amiga increasingly released records with critical texts by bands such as Silly, City and Pankow, the latter's concept album *Paule Panke* (1982), which portrayed a social delinquent, was banned. By the time it was finally released in 1989, its critical impact had been lost. Another policy discrepancy could be seen in the case of acts like Klosterbrüder, who had no. 1 hits on the radio chart shows, but still were denied the possibility of making LPs (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 66-67).

Two contrasting faces of the GDR: the singing movement and GDR rock

The irresolvable contradiction between rock and GDR cultural policy was inherent in the prescriptive guidelines set by the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED). Particular emphasis was put on the need to educate 'socialist personalities' among the youth. The first paragraph of the Youth Law of 1974 indicates the role culture in general was expected to play 'to educate all young people to become [...] loyal to the ideas of socialism, think and act as patriots and internationalists, strengthen socialism and defend it reliably against all enemies' (1974: Point 1, 1). Art and culture was understood in GDR policy primarily in terms of high culture with an emphasis – particularly in the first decades of the state – on the classical literary *Erbe* (heritage) of Goethe and Schiller. Newly written literature had to reflect the dictates of socialist realism, which, amongst other things, entailed portraying the model development of a GDR citizen. In terms of more 'popular' culture, the type of music which was promoted in the GDR was the historical workers and revolutionary songs, which were viewed as the state's socialist inheritance. As well as appearing on the records of celebrated singer Ernst Busch these were published in songbooks of the Free German Youth (FDJ) such as *Leben Singen Kämpfen. Liederbuch der FDJ* from 1949 onwards. These had an educational function and were sung in the FDJ, in schools and in the army. This repertoire would later include international songs of freedom, as popularised by the American folk singer Pete Seeger and promoted in East Berlin from the late 1950s onwards by the resident Canadian Perry Friedman (Kirchenwitz 1993: 31-35; Böning 2004: 201). This culminated in the formation of the state-sponsored singing club movement in 1967 symbolised by the Oktoberklub. Originally popular, this movement fell into disrepute as it was perceived by the youth as an instrument of state propaganda (Robb 2007: 229-235). Its popular anthem was *Sag mir wo du*

stehst (Tell Me Where You Stand) written by Oktoberklub member Hartmut König, who was also in the beat group Team 4, and later served as Secretary of the Central Committee of the FDJ from 1976-1988. The song openly called for youths to back the GDR's policies as opposed to being tempted by western ideology. Lines in the text reflected the SED Party's Marxist belief that the GDR was forging a historically predestined path in creating a model socialist state: 'Backwards or forwards, you have to decide / We're making history step by step! / You can't indulge yourself with us as well as with them / For if you go round in circles you'll just stay behind' (Oktoberklub 1968). As a result of such blatant manipulation, youths increasingly turned away from the singing club movement. This was particularly so after the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students hosted by East Berlin in 1973, at which many poor quality GDR groups were perceived as an embarrassment (Kirchenwitz 1993: 63-66). Despite notoriety, the singing movement was the breeding ground for many well-known rock performers of the 1980s and beyond, including Tamara Danz from Silly, originally from the Oktoberklub,ⁱ and Gerhard Gundermann, originally from the Singeclub Hoyerswerda. It was also synonymous with the annual Festival of the Political Song in Berlin, which was founded by the Oktoberklub in 1970 and organised by the Central Committee of the FDJ. It featured renowned international folk and world music acts over the years such as Pete Seeger, Mikis Theodorakis, Miriam Makeba, Bruce Cockburn, Michelle Shocked and Billy Bragg.

Although there were dissident singers, too, such as Wolf Biermann, Bettina Wegner and Stephan Krawczyk (Robb: 2007), political song, due to its associations with the regime, was never as popular a genre as rock, which was considered more rebellious. The history of rock in the GDR was always fraught with conflict. From the late 1950s onwards musicians had been copying the new sounds of American and British pop, blues and jazz, which they listened to illegally on West German radio. However, after the GDR sealed its borders to the West in August 1961 with the building of the Berlin Wall, the state felt empowered to display a more liberal attitude towards the arts. In this period, a host of beat groups came into being, including the Butlers from Leipzig, who were later to evolve into the legendary Renft. This cultural thaw lasted until the infamous 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in December 1965, which heralded a renewed clampdown. From the spring of that year, Stasi surveillance of young musicians had increased, culminating in the complete ban of 'guitar groups' in Leipzig in the autumn. On 31 October 1965, a 'cautious demonstration' against this ban was 'ruthlessly suppressed' (Wicke 1996: 29). Cäsar, the then 16 year-old

apprentice, later-to-be guitarist with Renft, gives an eye-witness account of this in his autobiography (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 29-34).

But attempts to ban these beat groups ultimately failed. Many of them re-emerged in the early 1970s in the wake of a renewed cultural thaw, when Erich Honecker replaced the aging Walter Ulbricht as leader of the GDR in 1971. With the 8th Party Congress of that year, a shift in policy occurred whereby rock and pop came to be seen as an aspect of the socialist entertainment industry which was to be integrated, monitored and steered. In a major drive to bring artists onto the side of the state, art no longer had to conform rigidly to the principles of socialist realism. Laws became more lax towards long hair as well as western radio and TV. In this thaw period, a host of new pop and rock bands emerged. Initially these had an 'Ersatz' function in their covering of songs by British bands whom GDR fans could never see live. For example, Electra from Dresden were famed for their rendition of Jethro Tull's 'Thick as a Brick', Thomas 'Monster' Schoppe of Renft for his vocal performance of Deep Purple's 'Child in Time', and Stern Combo Meißen for their covers of Colloseum and ELP (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 12). The Puhdys covered Uriah Heep at live gigs, but were also known to 'borrow' tunes from Western groups for their own songs. For example, the melody of their 1973 single 'Geh zu ihr' (Go to her) was taken, note for note, from Slade's 1972 UK hit 'Look wot you done'. Increasingly, the above bands wrote their own German texts as this was a precondition for making a record or being played on the radio. In the years 1973-1974, the Puhdys, Renft, Panta Rhei and Electra released the first rock albums of the state and laid the foundation for GDR rock.

The Lyricists of GDR Rock

Because of the onus on high quality original material and the political sensitivity surrounding the written word, GDR rock group members were not simply given carte blanche to write their own lyrics. On the contrary, specially anointed lyricists were commissioned to provide texts. For example, Wolfgang Tilgner wrote for the Puhdys, Kurt Demmler or Gerulf Pannach for Renft, Gisela Steineckert for various acts, Werner Karma for Silly, Alfred Roesler for City, and Frauke Klauke (aka Wolfgang Herzberg) for Pankow. This practice contributed to the distinctiveness of GDR rock. On one hand, it resulted in a somewhat high-brow, almost literary level of rock lyric, which could sound stiff in comparison to English rock, often associated with youth language, slang and vernaculars since the advent of blues

and rock n' roll. In the GDR of the 1970s, there was certainly nothing comparable with the delinquent sounding anarcho rock of West Berlin's Ton Steine Scherben. At the same time, GDR rock lyrics were often unique in containing metaphorical allusions to political issues. A practice reflecting the anticipation of censorship, such 'Verschlüsselung' (codification) led to a culture of reading between the lines, cultivated by fans and committee lectors alike. The tendency to couch a particular problem within a more universal picture can be seen in the Puhdys' *Wenn ein Mensch lebt* (*When a Person Lives*). This was the theme song for Heiner Carow's *Die Legend von Paul und Paula* (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*) from 1973, a film which reflected the initial open and upbeat feeling of the Honecker period in tackling a sensitive subject: a young couple's problems in attempting to break out of the pre-ordained structures of life in the GDR. The song *Wenn ein Mensch lebt* also alludes to this in talking about the short time one has to live a full life on earth: 'Each person has their time, / To gather stones, / To throw stones, / To plant trees, / To cut down trees, / For living, dying and fighting' (Puhdys 1973). If this veiled allusion to GDR reality was rather indirect, it none the less marked a departure in addressing this sensitive subject at all in a pop song. The line 'Each person has their time' must be seen in connection with the official claim of the GDR state that – historically speaking – its time had come, corresponding with its Marxist self-image as 'Sieger der Geschichte' (champion of history). This was particularly acute in the early 1970s where the economy was expanding and visibly providing a basic living standard for its workers.

A far more direct and controversial treatment of the issue, however, came in the form of the song *Nach der Schlacht* (*After the Battle*) written by Kurt Demmler for Renft in 1973. In the GDR, these rebellious, hard-drinking rockers from Leipzig were frequently seen as the antidote to the clean-cut Puhdys from Berlin. With associations to the 1910 expressionist poem of the same name by Georg Heym, *Nach der Schlacht* uses the metaphor of the premature celebration of the victorious revolution without taking stock of the sacrifices: 'Much blood spilled, but we've won power / And the battle for power was the final battle./ Now people will be nice and humane. / Comrade don't worry about your leg, / It had to be so, comrade.' Furthermore, the supposedly 'new people' of the new society are depicted as not being any different from the old: 'The new people, the new man / [...] looks just how he used to be / On the outside and inside [...]' The song concludes, somewhat pessimistically, that utopia is still far away, implying that the working class cannot simply assume the mantle of power overnight: 'After the victory the green meadows were red. / After the victory many

comrades were dead. / And we're standing on the remaining leg, / Because the battle will last much longer' (Renft 1973). Demmler's text, while critical, is ambiguous as it does not reject the continuation of the struggle to create a genuine socialism. In this respect Henry Kreikenbom sees *Nach der Schlacht* as one of the last GDR rock songs to express the hope that reform of the political system was still possible from within (1997: 167-168). Such texts, however, earned the group condemnation from both sides of the political spectrum: the Party only saw the expression of hostility towards the state, while dissidents criticised the group as 'roter Renft' (red Renft) for having embraced the system at all (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 118).

With the image of the amputated leg, *Nach der Schlacht* is also reminiscent of GDR dissident political singer Wolf Biermann's *Ballade vom Mann, der sich eigenhändig beide Füße abhackte* (*Ballad of the man who cuts off both feet of his own accord*). This mocking parable of the SED party's tendency to score own goals was to contribute to Biermann performance ban in 1965, a ban which was to last for 11 years. His expatriation from the GDR in November 1976, after being refused re-entry after a short tour of West Germany, unleashed a storm of protest among musicians and writers in the GDR. These included members of Renft, whose lyrics, increasingly written by Gerulf Pannach, had become more radical, with songs such as *Rockballade vom kleinen Otto* (*Rock Ballad of Little Otto*) dealing with the taboo subject of fleeing the GDR, and *Glaubensfragen* (*Questions of Faith*) about refusing military service. On 22 September 1975, the group were finally told by the evaluation committee that they 'no longer existed' as a band and had to give up their work permits. The reason given was that their lyrics had 'no correspondence with socialist reality' (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 119-121). Many of the group members subsequently ended up in the West: Klaus Renft leaving in 1976 and Thomas 'Monster' Schoppe in 1978. After demonstrating solidarity with Wolf Biermann, Christian Kunert and lyricist Pannach spent nine months in jail before being pushed out to the West on 26 August 1977 (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 25-26).ⁱⁱ Another of the many artists who left for the West in this period was Nina Hagen, the daughter of actress Eva-Maria Hagen and step daughter of Wolf Biermann. She was already known in the GDR for her pop song *Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen* (*You Forgot the Colour Film*) (1974) and went on to enjoy international stardom with an exotic mixture of punk rock and cabaret.

Another group of the 1970s who implicitly addressed the theme of the GDR's place in history was Stern Combo Meissen. Their *Kampf um den Südpol* (*Battle for the South Pole*) represented a break-through for the band in 1976, achieving the no. 1 position for 8 weeks on the radio show Beatkiste (Winter 2009: 48). The Kurt Demmler text was influenced by Stephan Zweig's 1927 novella about Scott and Amundsen's race for the Antarctic. At first glance, the text is politically harmless in questioning the sense of the pursuit of fame (see Balitzki 2001: 257). On second glance, however, it invites analogies with the GDR's historical mission and the role of the individual within that: 'What remains after death, / when the name no longer remains? / And what becomes of the name, / when history is made? / How is history made, / when we discover [...] / what was previously / hidden from our view?' (Stern Combo Meissen 1976).

Two further famous GDR rock songs, from the groups Karat and City respectively, also contain the introspective reflections on the possibilities and limitations of individual action. One of these is Karat's *Über sieben Brücken musst du gehn* (*You Have to Cross Seven Bridges*) from 1978. With its universally applicable text by Helmut Richter, it was covered by Peter Maffay in West Germany, where it became a big hit in 1980. Viewed through a GDR lens, however, it also alludes to the ideas of wasted time, travel restrictions, and the deficit of experience: 'Sometimes life's clock seems to stand still, / sometimes we seem to go round in circles / Sometimes it's like we are ill from wanderlust, / sometimes we sit quietly on a bench' (Karat 1978). City's *Am Fenster* (*At the Window*) from 1978, likewise a hit in the West, also conveys the sense of longing. Sung by Toni Krahl, the song, with its folk-rock arrangement by Bulgarian violinist Georgi Gogow, became legendary in the GDR. The text by poet Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß, with its perspective from inside a window looking out, conveys the hope that the experience of a night of bliss will not be transitory. In the final lines the poetic subject, inviting analogies with the restrictions of life in the GDR, compares herself to a bird with its wings weighed down by the rain, attempting to fly through the world: 'To capture once, to feel deep in the bloodstream / This is mine, and it's only through you; / A bird laments, but, oh, my plumage too / Is wet by the rain; I fly through the world' (City 1978). Not least due to the presence of the Berlin Wall, the theme of flying was not unusual in GDR lyrics. Dissident *Liedermacher* (singer/songwriters) Biermann (1976) and Bettina Wegner (1979) both had songs featuring the mythological figure of Icarus, which they used as a symbol of political impotence and crushed ideals (Robb 2007: 88). In 1988, Arno Schmidt released an album on Amiga entitled *Aber Fliegen* (*But Flying*).

GDR Rock in the 1980s

The final decade of the GDR was marked by developments in rock music which were a wider reflection of the population's increasing dissatisfaction with the state. The Biermann affair of 1976 had resulted in a renewed clampdown on the arts. However, the sense of injustice and the exodus of leading artists had also tested the patience to the limit of many who remained. Except for the cases of City and two new elite bands, Silly and Pankow, the popularity of GDR bands – reflected in the sales of Amiga – was waning by the late 1980s. The authorities responded by initiating the FDJ Rock Summer Festivals, which invited western acts, including big names such as Bob Dylan (1987) and Bruce Springsteen, the latter playing a legendary concert in Berlin Weißensee in 1988 (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 151-152). Musical style was also changing: the hard rock sound of the 1970s, still popular, was now combined with influences from New German Wave. Like Puhdys and Karat before them, Silly and Pankow enjoyed recording profiles in both West Germany and the GDR. Indeed Silly had a record contract with a West German label in 1981 before they were even noticed by Amiga (Hentschel and Matzke 2007: 185). While Silly were musically and stylistically a combination of hard rock and the New Romantics, singer Tamara Dance additionally brought vocal inflexions from cabaret and chanson. Having sung with the Oktoberklub, she had also completed a three-year course at the Music School of Friedrichshain in Berlin, which alongside the Carl Maria von Weber Music School in Dresden produced many of the GDR's professional rock musicians. Pankow on the other hand, often called 'the Rolling Stones of the GDR', modelled their guitar riffs on Keith Richards, while also incorporating influences from New German Wave.

In 1982, at the start of their career, Pankow performed the rock spectacle *Paule Panke* about a disaffected young apprentice fitter, played by singer Andre Herzberg. His brother Wolfgang Herzberg (alias Frauke Klauke) wrote the lyrics. Albeit a full decade later, this concept piece was the rock equivalent of Ulrich Plenzdorf's ground-breaking literary parody from 1972 *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (The New Sorrows of Young W.) about assimilation problems of a young worker in the GDR. Written with slang expressions, the songs of *Paule Panke* displayed the same longing for testing the boundaries of life in the GDR. In *Nach der Arbeit* (After Work) the central character sings: 'Oh if only I knew where

it's going, / this trip somewhere. / When will I ever find proper happiness.' In *Sitzung* (*Meeting*) there is unconcealed contempt for the communist party ideology which permeates working life. Despite being recorded, Amiga refused to bring the album out due to its controversial lyrics, and delayed release until 1989. The irony is that the critical content of *Paule Panke* compared to its successor album *Hans im Glück* (*Hans in Luck*) which Amiga released in 1985, was relatively tame. It even finished with the conformist statement: *Komm aus'm Arsch* (*Move Your Arse*), a rousing call to disenchanted GDR workers to make the best of the situation: 'because moaning makes you dumber, / moaning makes it worse / than it is in reality.' If this was a ploy to appease censors, it certainly was not enough to satisfy those in Amiga.

Hans im Glück, Pankow's 'rock fairy tale' of 1985 was more uniformly critical. Hans's opportunity – as in the original Grimm brothers' parable – to try out different roles in life enabled Herzberg to parody different social types in the GDR. The ironic call in *Festrede* (*Speech*) for the school leavers to develop their 'socialist personalities' anticipates the contrary direction in which Hans will develop. In *Die Schule ist aus* (*School's Out*), he sings: 'My head is as heavy as a lump of gold / I'm sick of the theory / Now reality will be interrogated / I want to experience Spanish tango and nothing / that makes me give up my dreams.' The song *Familienpapa* (*Family Daddy*) is a dark parody of petit-bourgeois comforts in the GDR. With music and text reminiscent of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, it alludes to the unofficial, private world of the GDR, closeted away from the interference of state and Stasi: 'Within my own four walls / I want my peace / I see the world comfortably / Through my colour television / In my own four walls / I curse the state.' The criticism culminates in *Hans Negativ* (*Hans Negative*) which, while intended as an extreme parody of the 'total negation' attitude common amongst dissidents, conveys certain truths about the widespread discontent and perceived stagnation in the GDR: 'The air is poisoned / The canals filthy / The land sucked dry / [...] Heading for downfall.'

From 1985 onwards, with the ascendancy of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and the GDR government's rejection of his reformist policies, musicians increasingly turned against the ageing politicians in the Politburo. Rock lyrics reflect this: where in the 1970s, songs such as *Wenn ein Mensch lebt* cautiously raised the question 'what about my time on earth' in relation to the GDR's grand historical goals, now there was a shift towards the

subject taking matters into his/her own hands. This is reflected in Silly's *Großer Träumer* (*Big Dreamer*) written by lyricist Werner Karma: 'Nobody can tell me what is still to come / Nobody knows if I'll win or lose / Somewhere a new chance is waiting for me / And somehow I'm going to find it.' But the optimistic will to change the course of one's life is also countered by despondency. Indeed, albums released in the GDR's final years have a distinctly dark feel. *Liedermacher* Hans-Eckardt Wenzel, who won a Golden Amiga for his 1987 album *Komm Stirb mit mir ein Stück* (*Come Die with Me a Little*), was one of several writers to exploit the 'waiting' motif, a controversial symbol of the GDR's failure to fulfil its self-proclaimed historical destiny. Leeder writes: 'What had been [...] the sheer enthusiasm of *Aufbau* ("erwarten"), becomes in the texts of the 1980s, a passive and alienated waiting ("Warten")'. This was true in other literary spheres: the playwright Heiner Müller, for instance, equates contemporary life with 'ein großer Wartesaal' (a big waiting room) (Leeder 1996: 53). The motif also featured in rock and *Liedermacher* texts: in *Lancelot* Gerhard Gundermann sang: 'I don't know if I can wait to be counted by the world' (1988). Wenzel's *Die Wartung eines Landes* (*The Maintenance of a Country*) uses a pun playing on the similarity of the German words for 'waiting' and 'maintenance' to present the GDR as a land in waiting: 'The girl waits for the letter / The speaker waits for the speech / The boy in the park waits for the void / The country waits for the golden age' (Wenzel 1989). The motif also crops up in the Pankow song *Langeweile* (*Boredom*) from the album *Aufruhr in den Augen* (*Riot in Your Eyes*): 'Seen the same country too long / Heard the same language too long. / Waited too long, hoped too long / worshipped the old men too long' (Pankow 1988). Werner Karma's text *Die alten Männer* (*The Old Men*) from Silly's album *Liebeswälzer* (*Love Waltzes*) even depicts the Politbüro as waiting. The ageing leaders are portrayed sitting around at a dance, out of step with the new times, waiting for the old times to return: 'The old men don't dance anymore / [...] The old men, they've got time / A beer will last them a while / The new wave doesn't drive them away / They're just waiting for Johann Strauß' (Silly 1985).

Another popular motif for the rock bands and *Liedermacher* was that of the divided Germany, resulting – in terms of perspectives and senses of loyalty – in the individual being split in two. On their album *Casablanca*, City sang a song called *Halb und Halb* (*Half and Half*) with a text written by Kuno Kleinfelt und Titti Flanellⁱⁱⁱ, which reflects this torn state: 'In the half-country and city cut in two / half-happy with what you have' (City 1987). At a concert in Berlin Weißensee in 1988 Toni Krahl was told by FDJ Secretary Hartmut König

not to play this song because Politbüro member Egon Krenz was in the audience. Krahle initially complied with the instruction, but then defiantly recited it as a poem. Years later, watching the performance on video, Krahle noticed the fear in his eyes and recalled that City never dared perform the song live again (Zeit-Online 2014). Another song of the same name was recorded by Hans-Eckardt Wenzel on his album *Reise Bilder (Travel Images)*. ‘Only ever the middle / Only ever half-content / Half anger, half-hearted request, / Only half a piece from life. / [...] The city where I earn / Is only half fenced-in’ (Wenzel 1989). The sense of constantly having two perspectives on life is also expressed by Werner Karma in the Silly song *Die Ferne (Far Away)*: ‘I love to look / Far away / With my double binoculars / [...] / I love to go / Far away / With my double shoes’ (Silly 1985).

In the final year of the GDR, the albums *Aufbruch in den Augen* by Pankow and *Februar* by Silly sum up the sense of endgame as the disaffected increasingly apply to leave the GDR. The message of Pankow’s *Der Ausreißer (The Runaway)* is: ‘There is no way back, / It’s over’, while *Du kriegst mich nicht (You won’t get me)* states categorically: ‘Listen I’ve got no desire / to hang around with you here any longer’ (Pankow 1988). Silly’s *Februar* marked a new development in that most of the texts were written by Tamara Danz in collaboration with Gerhard Gundermann. *SOS* uses the metaphor of a ‘Narrenschiff’ (Ship of Fools) sailing to its doom, while *Ein Gespenst geht um (A Ghost is Going Round)* parodies the famous quotation from Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*: ‘There’s a ghost going round / In the Mitropa / It spits / On the cemetery of dreams.’ The fury of the 1989 generation is most explicit in the song *Traumteufel (Dream Devil)*, which, with its metaphor of winter and the dying forest, expresses the perception that the GDR is a sick land beyond healing: ‘I dreamt / The winter had passed / And the minister who yesterday was still laughing, / Hanged himself / At his desk, / Because the forest no longer know how to make leaves’ (Silly 1989).

Figure 1

Silly in the 1980s. Copyright Ute Mahler. Ostkreuz-Agentur

In September 1989, GDR rock musicians and *Liedermacher* came out in support of the newly formed civil rights organization New Forum. A resolution with a list of demands was drafted by musicians, who included Hans-Eckardt Wenzel, Steffen Mensching, André Herzberg, Tamara Danz, Toni Krahle and many others. Performers from all over the state read it out before concerts, not knowing how the secret police would respond. On 7 October, the

fortieth anniversary of the GDR, police reacted heavy-handedly to counter-demonstrations in Berlin. On 4 November half a million people demonstrated on the Alexanderplatz in Berlin, where *Liedermacher* including Kurt Demmler, Jürgen Eger and Wenzel and Mensching sang songs to demonstrate solidarity with the protesters. Five nights later the Wall fell (Robb 2007: 247-48).

Conclusions

This chapter has given an account of the history of GDR rock, the cultural policy which governed it, and the political infrastructure in which it operated. In doing so, it has demonstrated how GDR rock was subject to a particular set of conditions which resulted in a distinctive style of rock in its own right. Between the constraints of censorship and the need to express a critical voice, lyricists developed an original rock language of their own. The highly metaphorical treatments of political themes in the 1970s gave way to a greater directness from the mid-1980s onwards, as GDR musicians lost patience with their government's refusal to embrace reform.

During the *Wende* (the turn period) these rock bands and *Liedermacher* of the GDR were in the right place at the right time, reflecting the unheard critical voices of the people in their songs. As it turned out, the results of autumn 1989, that is, the fall from power of the Politbüro and the Stasi, meant that lyricists quickly had to look around for new themes to write about. After an initial period in the early 1990s when East German fans rejected their own bands, preferring to 'catch up' with the Western live acts which had previously been withheld from them, ex-GDR groups gradually regained their profile as fans rediscovered their sense of East German identity (Gläser and Pötzsch 2007: 176). Many capitalized on the 'Ostalgie' (nostalgia for the East) which has been a feature of East German society since the mid-1990s. Despite exceptions such as Nina Hagen or Silly, most successful ex-GDR rock acts have generally not made big inroads in the West German market since unification. This is in no small part due to the strong sense of East German cultural identity which such groups emanate: it is shared with their audience and finds expression in the lyrical themes of their songs, and is something which West German audiences find difficult to relate to.

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ⁱ Danz can be seen in the middle of the picture as one of the lead singers on the video 'Oktoberklub ist das klar!' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjaq5elkRXU>

ⁱⁱ Kurt Demmler was also amongst the signatories of an open letter of protest to the government against Biermann's expatriation. In 2009, Demmler hanged himself in prison awaiting trial for child sexual abuse offences.

ⁱⁱⁱ These were pseudonyms for the Berlin writing duo Alfred Roesler and Scarlett Kleint.