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ARTICLE

Parables, Fairy Tales, and the Stasi: The *Liedertheater* of Gerhard Gundermann's Brigade Feuerstein

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Introduction

The East German protest singer, dramatist, and coal miner Gerhard Gundermann came to international attention in 2018 with the release of Andreas Dresen's film *Gundermann*. This coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the artist's premature death in 1998. While the film concentrates on Gundermann's personal life, his complex relationship with the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) hierarchy in the coal mine, and his controversial entanglement with the Stasi secret police, it glosses over his work as a singer-songwriter and playwright. It says nothing about the numerous productions he wrote and performed with the *Liedertheater* (song-theatre) group Brigade Feuerstein between 1978 and 1988, nor the extent to which he himself was an object of Stasi persecution.[1] Their quite distinctive form of agitprop theatre has been virtually ignored in academia.[2] While never published, the written manuscripts and audio recordings of shows such as *Geschichten aus dem Koraktor* [Tales from the Koraktor], *Das große Match* [The big match], *Eine Sehfahrt, die ist lustig* [A sightseeing trip that is fun], *Lebensläufe* [Paths of life], and *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*[3] [Remembering the future] were collected and stored in the archives of the Akademie der Künste in East Berlin, where they are still available for consultation.[4] This article assesses these productions in terms of their use of fairy tales and parables to voice political criticism of dominant SED practice. It observes how, in a climate of censorship, these parables became increasingly direct in their criticism, as Gundermann's stance gradually changed from that of a loyal singing club member in 1976 to one of a vociferous political critic. Using interviews and Stasi reports, it presents the story of Brigade Feuerstein as an example of the tenacity, cunning, and networking necessary for critical artists to survive in East Germany (i.e., German Democratic Republic [GDR]).

Liedertheater emerged in the mid- to late 1970s as an experimental offshoot of the GDR youth singing movement. As an agitprop form, its nearest well-known equivalent in the English-speaking world from that period could be said to be the British socialist music theatre company 7:84.[5] As distinct from the term *Musiktheater*, which

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has been used as an umbrella category for "theatrical genres in which music plays a significant role," such as opera, operetta, or the musical,[6] *Liedertheater* had its roots in the proletarian review of the Weimar Republic and the work of Bertolt Brecht. In this respect it is a further chapter in the story of East German artists who critically appropriated the inherited traditions of workers' song and theatre. In the field of political song, Wolf Biermann famously adapted the plebeian, antiauthoritarian lyrical tradition of Bertolt Brecht to apply it directly against the ruling Socialist Unity Party.[7] Such subversion was not tolerated. Banned from performing between 1965 and 1976, he was refused reentry to the GDR after being allowed out to play a concert in Cologne. The resulting controversy caused many top artists to leave the GDR in what became known as the Biermann Affair.[8] In the world of theatre, where Brecht was feted as a socialist classic after his death in 1956, the use of Brechtian techniques to criticize the state was likewise frowned upon, resulting in a backlash from dramatists such as Volker Braun and Heiner Müller. They understood how "Brecht's oeuvre provided tools that could be used to recuperate the aspirations of socialism from the political reality of the GDR state."[9] But while directors and playwrights were constantly under the full gaze of the SED bureaucracy, their work always one step away from prohibition, a theatrical development occurred elsewhere—in a gray area between theatre and song performance—in which groups exploited their relative inconspicuousness to play creatively with the revolutionary theatrical heritage.

In the mid- to late 1970s the groups Karls Enkel, Schicht, and Brigade Feuerstein broke out of their respective singing clubs and began embracing a new form known as *Liedertheater*. All were elite *Kader-Gruppen* (cadre groups) who had previously been nurtured and promoted by the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ). Karls Enkel was a singing group from the Humboldt University Berlin, led by Hans-Eckardt Wenzel and Steffen Mensching; Schicht, whose main writers were Bernd Rump and Jürgen Magister, came from the Song Gruppe of the Technical University Dresden; while Brigade Feuerstein, with its main original members Gerhard "Gundi" Gundermann, Heiko Brumma, Ingo "Hugo" Dietrich, Alfons Förster, Elke Förster, Bernd Nitzsche, Conny Schickor (later Gundermann), Werner "Wenni" Schickor, Udo Seidel, and Rainer "Wespe" Westphal, emerged out of the Singeklub Hoyerswerda.[10] Musically these groups were influenced by the international freedom song, world music, and agitprop artists (such as Floh de Cologne) who appeared at the annual Festival of Political Song in East Berlin. While Karls Enkel remained chiefly in the folk, *Liedermacher* (singer-songwriter), and chanson musical sphere, Schicht and Brigade Feuerstein updated the German political song by setting it within a full electric rock band format. From a theatrical perspective, the embracing of dramatical techniques was a means to escape the narrow confines of purely text-based political song performance that could be so easily censored in the GDR.[11]

The subject of *Liedertheater* has remained largely ignored in GDR theatre research.[12] This is partly because it was not recognized as "official" theatre. The shows were often put on in student clubs, youth clubs, and music venues as opposed to theatres. The groups primarily comprised singers and musicians rather than professional actors. Structurally, it operated in between not only the officially recognized genres, but also in between the state institutions that supervised all performance art.[13] As such, it was not regarded in the same light as the GDR state theatres with their acclaimed writers and directors such as Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Peter Hacks, Christoph Schroth, and Frank Castorf. But whereas the latter's plays were constantly caught up in energy-sapping ideological debates about the

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extent to which they complied with the tenets of socialist realism or embraced the enemy of formalism,[14] *Liedertheater* was, to a much greater extent, allowed to carve a niche for itself relatively out of the spotlight.

The *Liedertheater* groups, however, did also react to impulses coming from the state theatres. Karls Enkel's *Goethe-Programm* of 1982 was highly influenced by the carnivalesque features of Schroth's staging of *Faust* in Schwerin in 1979.[15] Similarly, it is probably not a coincidence that Brigade Feuerstein's "Franziska" character from "Geschichten aus dem Koraktor" in autumn 1978 was created amid a climate of reception of Brigitte Reimann's novel *Franziska Linkerhand* that included a dramatization by Schroth in the spring of that year.[16] Despite its relative marginalization, *Liedertheater* did have significance for the GDR theatrical scene. Looking back, the well-known East German actress of stage and screen Petra Kelling regretted its lack of acknowledgment as "it was such an important piece of [GDR performance] history."[17] In 2015 Holger Teschke put the "song theatres" in context, explaining they were a grassroots response to a deficit of contemporary plays, caused by a general reluctance to write and perform new plays because of state interference. The *Liedertheater* groups, as well as independent revues and puppet theatres, filled this gap, attempting to fall "under the radar screen of the state-controlled and state-subsidized city theatre system in order to escape political and aesthetic censorship."[18] For these groups, however, existing in an artistic and political no man's land was not exactly straightforward. The popular annual *Lieder & Theater* workshops in Dresden organized by Schicht during 1980–3 were discontinued after FDJ funding was withdrawn.[19] The workshops had gained a reputation for their critical level of discussion and had become a magnet for academics, journalists, and artists in general.[20] The break with FDJ supervision that was obligatory in the singing club movement meant the three main groups had to find new allies. One of these was the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, which promoted workshops and events. Karin Wolf, who curated the *Liedertheater* archive in the Liedzentrum of the Akademie, meticulously collected the manuscripts and audio files of the concerts. Karls Enkel also received mentorship and support from the Kulturbund der DDR (Cultural Association of the GDR), in which they had influential friends such as the philosopher Professor Wolfgang Heise. Although embedded in the state, these institutions enjoyed a certain autonomy due to their reputations as patrons of socialist art and culture. Colleagues such as Heise and Wolf were prepared to take risks to enable politically contentious projects to go ahead.[21] The Akademie der Künste was known to be a particularly ardent supporter of Brigade Feuerstein. For example, its president, Konrad Wolf, invited the group to perform at the eightieth birthday celebrations of Akademie member and legendary Brecht singer Ernst Busch in Berlin in 1980.[22] Gundermann and a contingent of the group even sang at Busch's funeral later that same year.[23]

To some degree these groups became pet projects of these institutions.[24] Richard Engel, in an interview, shed light on the Akademie members' admiration for solo Gundermann. They could see in him the spirit of Busch, who had sung for the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Busch's artistic output embodied a unity between life and art to which Gundermann also aspired.[25] The latter's art required him to be rooted in the workplace, where he not only encountered the life stories of those around him but was also constantly face-to-face with the contradiction between party ideology and socialist reality. As a result, Gundermann never gave up his day job as an excavator driver in the open-cast mine in Spreetal, even when he later earned enough from his music to support himself and his family easily. In this way Brigade Feuerstein was viewed by supporters within the Akademie der Künste,

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according to Klaus-Peter Schwarz, as "one of the most important projects of modern, socialist art, one which dissolved . . . the division of labor between work, art and politics."[26]

Engel, as a respected film director in the state-owned studio Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA), was another visible example of someone in the industry who was prepared to take a risk with Gundermann. He was so impressed that he broke off work on a commissioned project to do a TV documentary about the singer in 1982. Engel's own origins help to explain his fascination: he was the son of a communist exile, Rudolf Engel, who had fought for the French Resistance in WWII and later had been a director of the Akademie der Künste in the early 1950s. On hearing a tape of Gundermann singing battle songs of Ernst Busch in 1980, Richard Engel was reminded of the untamed, independent spirit of Busch and the exiles he had known as a child in his father's circle of friends. Such a spirit, Engel felt, was absent from the GDR youth singing movement. There was a melancholic aspect to Gundermann's delivery that acknowledged "the defeat," which contrasted with the reverence given to the international brigades in the GDR, which celebrated their struggle against Franco as if it were a victory. The GDR saw itself as the "Sieger der Geschichte" (victor of history), where, as Engel stated, "the [communist] future was already a given." Engel also saw a "plebeian" aspect in Gundermann's delivery, the force of which Brecht had known how to utilize in his poetry and plays, but which, too, was missing in the deferential singing movement.[27] Precisely for that reason, it was never going to be easy for Engel's proposed documentary to circumvent the censors. While Gundermann, albeit with constant interference from the monitoring bodies, was mostly allowed to perform his *Liedertheater* shows within their small sphere of influence, it was a different matter introducing him to a mass public on GDR state television. Engel brought his documentary to the TV station management and was initially given the go-ahead under the pretext that it was to be "a portrait of a worker." In the end, however, the project was beset with antagonism from the management, who were terrified of Gundermann's anarchic, utopian view of socialism and could only see in him "an enemy." They requested seventy changes, and the film was shown only once on GDR TV in 1983.[28]

While the support of people such as Engel in the arts scene was indispensable, the survival of the groups was also often dependent on the interventions of cultural bureaucrats favorably disposed toward them. Luckily for Brigade Feuerstein, one of its members was Bernd Nitzsche, who was the town councillor for culture in Hoyerswerda and often intervened on behalf of his controversial group leader.[29] As is discussed later in this article, even in Gundermann's Stasi files—which between 1976 and 1989 consistently expressed concern and, at times, outrage at his behavior and political attacks on the party—there was also evidence of supporters who clearly helped him avoid an outright ban. The latters' endorsements tended to focus on his artistic approach, emphasizing its rigor, utopianism, and grounding in revolutionary ideology, and tradition.

Parable, *Lehrstück*, and the Revolutionary Brechtian Tradition

Although the actors of *Liedertheater* were in the first instance songwriters and musicians, it should be said that the dramaturgical dimension of their performances was taken highly seriously. Based in the Kulturpalast in Dresden, the group Schicht

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advanced under the theatrical direction of Karin Wolf;[30] Karls Enkel was assisted from 1978 onward by Heiner Maaß, who had previously worked with Heiner Müller[31] and Christoph Schroth;[32] Brigade Feuerstein operated under the autodidact theatrical director Gundermann. Like the singer Wolf Biermann before them, the *Liedertheater* groups used Brechtian techniques to uncover the assumptions, dogmas, and taboos of the state in which they lived. One of the main features of Brigade Feuerstein was their incorporation of parables. Corresponding to a Brechtian montage aesthetic,[33] these would frequently be self-contained units, interspersed between songs and other sketches, serving as illustrations of the theme being explored in the production, which often was a creative modern take on a *Lehrstück* (learning play). What began often as a parable, couched within a fairy tale, would then morph into a realistic scene from GDR industry. These scenes invariably focused on typical conflicts of the GDR workplace, the rigid hierarchical structure of which was a perennial bone of contention for Gundermann. Throughout his career, in the most stubborn fashion, he held the ruling SED Party to account for its claim, as stated in the GDR constitution,[34] that the worker was an equal stakeholder in the sharing of power.

Gundermann's choice of the parable form is significant against the backdrop of GDR theatre history. Working on his adaptation of Brecht's *Happiness God* in 1958, Heiner Müller had rejected Brecht's parable as a valid device in the *Aufbau* (construction) period of the GDR, because the reality was changing too quickly. As he argued, the stationary characters of parable could work only in a situation of entrenched social relationships, as in the "rounded-off matter"[35] of capitalism in which Brecht had previously worked. However, by the end of the construction phase of the GDR—and certainly by the late 1970s—the top-down hierarchical structures of socialism had become entrenched and recognizable to all. In Brigitte Reimann's novel *Franziska Linkerhand*, for example, a major reference point for Gundermann, this is apparent in the frequent use of the metaphor of "the stone" to denote ossified political practice and ideological dogma.[36] It is against this background of fixed and unyielding structures of power that Gundermann's use of the parable had direct relevance. As we shall see, he used recognizable character types from GDR society, such as the naive idealist, the conformist bureaucrat, and the skeptical workers in *Geschichten aus dem Koraktor*. Similarly, Gundermann's chosen themes are inspired by the shared experience of GDR citizens. These include the theme of *waiting*—for the promised utopia or for individual fulfillment—or the fear of speaking openly about taboo political subjects. We see how Gundermann constructs allegorical sketches around these themes, for example, in Hans's lost time and Angelina's lost words in *Nachrichten aus dem Glücksland.*

In the Brigade Feuerstein productions such parables—alongside the songs and other sketches—are couched within a form often close to that of a *Lehrstück.* This, too, is significant in terms of its historical uses in the GDR. Heiner Müller saw the *Lehrstück* not as a device of indoctrination but rather as a "morally neutral and extremely malleable" form.[37] Here he was picking up on Brecht's preference for the term "learning" rather than "didactical" play. Brecht had conceived this form in the first instance to educate the players rather than the audience: "The *Lehrstück* teaches by being played, not by being seen. In principle, spectators are not needed for the *Lehrstück*, although they can of course be utilized."[38] There are similarities between this theory and Gundermann's approach to Brigade Feuerstein's theatre workshops. He reflected in 1995 on how the group members had explored the material onstage to

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educate themselves as much as the audience: "We saw ourselves not as dressed up teachers with red noses but as activists, protagonists in a game that we wanted to enjoy and learn from equally."[39] Having witnessed agitprop groups at Communist Party press festivals on his travels in Italy and France with the Singeklub Hoyerswerda,[40] he had been struck by the combination of music, clowning, socializing, and politics, which removed "the division between instruction and enjoyment."[41] In this way, the theatre workshops that Brigade Feuerstein staged between 1978 and 1988 in their resident youth club, informally known as Feuersteins Musik Palast (FMP), were intended as both ideal social and learning environments—for themselves as well as for the audience. How they tested out political ideas using fairy tales and parables as part of their theatre workshop approach is examined in this article.

"Fairy-tale thinking"

In reading the theatrical scenes and song lyrics of Brigade Feuerstein, one is struck by the frequent use of the parable. Often these would be fairy stories, of which a strong tradition already existed in GDR theatre and literature as a means of codification of sensitive political issues.[42] While fairy tales had often had a didactic function in the state's construction period between the 1950s and 1970s, authors in the 1980s like Helga Königsdorf, Bernd Schirmer, Helga Schubert, and Manfred Pieske used the fairy-tale form to address themes such as corruption, exploitation of the environment, access to information, censorship, and oppression.[43] As Krause writes, the fairy-tale form was "a relatively safe vehicle for social criticism," providing "an alien background against which contemporary issues [could] be subtly highlighted and cloaked in ambiguity."[44] Fairy-tale parables were also used in the GDR theatre world. A famous example was Benno Besson's Berlin production of the Soviet dramatist Evgeny Schwartz's *Der Drache* (*The Dragon*) in March 1966, staged in the aftermath of Walter Ulbricht's infamous 11th Plenum of 1965 that had heralded a systematic clampdown on the arts. In this play, Schwartz couches his criticism of Stalinism within the legend of Lancelot. It has been described as an "exploration of autocracy and its corrupting effects on the human soul" and "a trenchant political and philosophical parable in the guise of a fairytale."[45] Such use of fairy tales in the GDR as a means of avoiding conflict was later bemoaned by Heiner Müller, who by the 1960s had himself taken refuge in the myths of Greek antiquity. In his memoir from 1992, Müller called Besson's production the "end of political theatre in the GDR"[46] in that the fairy-tale motifs "had come to replace the real theatrical confrontation with the present."[47]

Faced with prohibition, however, it is difficult to imagine an alternative. After a relative thaw in the 1970s during the early years of Erich Honecker's leadership, a renewed clampdown following the Wolf Biermann affair made a direct confrontation with GDR reality in song or theatre virtually impossible. Gundermann, too, would express his critique of the GDR's undemocratic power structure in parables involving fairies and fantasy.[48] His songs and plays are dotted with images of cosmonauts in spaceships,[49] magic mountains, flying horses, magic carpets,[50] magic mountains and dragon slayers,[51] all incorporated in his utopian vision of a better world. While, on one hand, there is a naive optimism on display, the sheer creativity of Gundermann's artistic approach—the setting of his narrative persona within a wider cosmos of

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literary, fantastical, and historical reference[52]—propelled him out of the narrow ideological and philosophical confines of the GDR singing movement and gave his work a more universal credibility. In this respect Engel stated that Gundermann's first parable could be said to be his excavator, or *Bagger*.[53] Together they formed a unity as if it was an extension of his human self. Later in his career the relationship to machines became a branding device, as evident in the title of his first album, *Männer, Frauen und Maschinen* from 1988. In this regard we see how his creative, tangential thinking blurs the divide between art and life and takes him into a world of science fiction. Talking about the human traits of his excavator, he stated:

> The driver's cabin is its head, and when I climb in, I'm its brain for eight hours a day. And when we part at the end of the day, we've experienced something, worked well together or hurt one another. . . . And the excavator too—you might well laugh!—must have a place in the machine room where it can store such things. Its soul. And it develops its own behavior that differentiates it from other machines. And the older it gets, the more distinctive it becomes. And the more it has to tell. Like old trees and, of course, old people.[54]

In an interview shortly before his death, Gundermann stated how he was greatly impressed by the Russian science fiction writers the Strugatsky brothers, whose novels have often been described as critical allegories of the Soviet Union.[55] Gundermann agreed with the Strugatskys' sentiment that "[w]e have to get back to a fairy-tale way of thinking that takes no account of the narrowness of the brain."[56] Elucidating this further, he stated:

> Fairy-tale thinking is no more than the attempt to see beyond the foreground and to recognize—from that which moves—the person that's moving it. And it's the attempt to trust not only one's eyes. With every unambiguous thought about the world, every thought that is devoid of secret, we distance ourselves from the world. I find it simply wonderful that everything is possible in our brain. That's freedom for me. You can find that in the Strugatsky brothers, Stanislaw Lem, in films of [Andrei] Tarkovsky and in all fairy storytellers.[57]

In Red Schuhart, the morally ambiguous, social misfit from the Strugatskys' novel *Roadside Picnic*,[58] one can see traits of the alternative heroes with whom Gundermann identifies in his scenes and songs. In his human relatability and fallibility, Red is a far cry from the distant "Socialist Man" from Soviet literature.[59] Red is on a quest to find the Golden Sphere that will grant people's innermost wishes. To do this he must venture through "the Zone," a hazardous dumping ground of scientifically unquantifiable objects left behind on Earth by aliens. As a "stalker," it is his job to retrieve these and sell them to the scientific community. Faced with ultimate failure, he sees that he has been a pawn in the game of higher powers—but defiantly concludes that he will not leave the Zone until he has figured things out. Though the chances of his success are dubious, he is an example of the fairy-tale hero who "mediate[s] for humanity, acting as the agent of its transformation from powerlessness . . . to empowerment."[60] In the novel's debates on hierarchy and accessibility to knowledge, one is reminded of the dilemmas of an array of Gundermann characters, such as Krabat, Franziska, Hans the Dragon Slayer, and Little Klaus. How these characters were adapted in the scenes of Brigade Feuerstein's song theatre to expose the power

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imbalance between state and worker in the GDR forms the subject of examination in the following sections. This unfolds against the backdrop of Gundermann's conflict with the SED Party, in the period between him joining up in 1977 and his expulsion in 1984.

The Parables of Krabat and Franziska

Already in Gundermann's early work a fairy-tale element could be seen in the appropriation of the Krabat myth.[61] Krabat is a popular figure from Slavonic mythology, well known in the Lusatian area of southeast Germany surrounding Gundermann's hometown of Hoyerswerda, where the Sorbian language is spoken by a minority. The main source of inspiration was Jurij Brězan's novel *Krabat oder Die Verwandlung der Welt* [Krabat; or, The Transformation of the World][62] from 1976. This work itself is a parable of the never-ending historical power struggle between oppressors and oppressed. It follows the story of the timeless rebel Krabat on his quest for "Glücksland" (the land of happiness), locked in eternal conflict with his class adversary, the Count Wolf Reissenberg. In his early *Liedertheater* adaptations of this subject, *Krabat und seine Geschichten* [Krabat and his tales],[63] *Geschichten aus dem Koraktor*, and *Das große Match*, Gundermann himself takes on the role of Krabat, aligning his narrative persona in the songs and scenes with that of the social underdog.

An interesting development can be observed across these productions. In the earliest, *Krabat und seine Geschichten*, performed by the Singeklub Hoyerswerda during 1976–7, many of the songs still convey a belief in the idea of the GDR on route to "Glücksland."[64] This corresponds to Gundermann's stance at that time as a former trainee officer in the army and a soon-to-be SED Party member.[65] He had also just been recruited as an informer for the Stasi, who had noted his dismissal from officer training school "for repeatedly going against orders,"[66] but nonetheless felt he was ideologically secure enough to assign him with secretly "safeguarding" and "enlightening" his group colleagues, particularly on their travels to the West.[67]

However, there are already critical nuances in *Krabat und seine Geschichten* that hint at Gundermann's future artistic and political development. In the workshop parable of the three sons, Gundermann foregrounds the problem of catering to the needs of different personalities in a society where a particular type of "socialist personality" was prescribed.[68] Such foregrounding of individuals was controversial in a Marxist political culture that prioritized the collective. In the parable scene Krabat sends his three sons, "Red," "Green," and "Yellow," out into the world to make their mark. Each chooses a different path in life: Green pursues material wealth and comfort, Yellow the attainment of power, while Red, the idealist, strives for a useful role in society. When the parable shifts from the fairy tale to the realistic setting of an open-cast mine, these personalities clash in the context of a typical GDR work brigade.[69] Faced with a costly accident, their helplessness reflects the pitfalls of each of their stances: neither Green's material possessions, Yellow's position of power, nor Red's idealism can save the day. The implication here is that everyone's subjectivity must be accommodated. The scene poses the question of the relevance of socialist theory to workers when, summing up in *Lehrstück* style, Yellow adapts a quotation from Karl Marx with heavy irony: "Theory becomes a material force when it has . . . gripped!!!!! the masses!!!!!"[70]

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Geschichten aus dem Koraktor from 1978,[71] the first production of the newly named Brigade Feuerstein again questions the GDR's ability to attain the utopian goal of "Glücksland." In this, the character of Franziska, a proletarian adaptation of the heroine of the novel *Franziska Linkerhand*,[72] is depicted as endlessly waiting for a chance to be useful in society. When the magician Krabat offers her three possible scenarios, she fails at the first two—as a resistance fighter in Chile and as a monster slayer, only succeeding in creating more violence)—and finally accepts the third scenario as a factory apprentice. But as the action shifts from the fantastic back to the realistic, she encounters a host of problems: the male workers refuse to take her seriously. They are alienated by her gender, her utopian idealism, and her socialist work ethic that scolds their petit-bourgeois habits and home comforts. With this parable Brigade Feuerstein allude to recognizable issues of the GDR workplace: overzealous ideologues, lack of productivity, and workers whose needs and aspirations are ignored by the state. A later version of this play intensifies the criticism by addressing themes such as shortages in the workplace, the falsification of production figures, and the withholding of information by officials.[73]

Though some Stasi files of the time revealed consternation at the ambiguity of Gundermann's texts,[74] others defended him. One presented a glowing review of *Koraktor* as "full of fantasy and poetic ideas." It played down any portrayal of a rift between workers and leadership and praised it as Gundermann's "most mature work so far."[75] It was during this period of 1978–9, however, that Gundermann incurred his first party proceedings. A Stasi report of a concert at a youth and sport festival on 7 May 1978 in Weißwasser claims that Gundermann had blown up at a request to sing workers' songs and had made a comment about burning the place down "at all four corners."[76] The party was incensed by his scathing accusations that SED functionaries were being paid for doing nothing and that the regional FDJ leadership were "crooks."[77] An FDJ report from 13 February 1979 stated Gundermann was "not meeting the high demands of this society," criticized his influence on the youth, and noted his "radical left and anarchistic tendencies."[78] This resulted in a recommendation that the group should not be allowed to travel to play an invited concert in Switzerland. The SED resolved to expel Gundermann for his "hostility toward the party, left-wing radical views and his activities as a lyricist, in other words, the same way as it started with Biermann."[79] Another "informal collaborator" (*informeller Mitarbeiter*, IM), however, defended Gundermann, mentioning the "many obstacles put in his way" since his dismissal from officer school and claiming his conflict with the party was due to the colleagues in the mine not wanting to understand him.[80] In the end Gundermann survived this process due to an irregularity in the procedure.[81] He remained a party member for now, but this tense relationship was to persist and to continue to provide inspiration for his new shows.

The "Moor Scene" Parable in *Das große Match*

In 1980 Brigade Feuerstein embarked on a change in the structure of their productions. Gundermann now envisaged a "Baustein"[82] (building block) approach that would comprise a series of shorter thirty-minute-long, more audience-friendly performances. These would form constituent blocks of a longer program of entertainment known as a "Spectaculum." The parts would take various formats: *Liedertheater*, fairy tales, circus or clown shows for children, and singer-songwriter or rock band performances. The first *Liedertheater* "Baustein" was *Das große Match*.

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If the previous parable scenes had explored the relationship between the workers and the state, in *Das große Match* from 1980 and *Liebestraum im Weltenraum* from 1981 the focus shifted to the dangers of military conflict. This was a burning issue of the time in the context of the face-off between the two oldest nuclear powers, the USSR and the United States. *Das große Match* largely consisted of whole parable scenes adapted from Brězan's *Krabat* novel. Interspersed between the songs, these dealt with the need to exert human reason over irrationality to prevent violence spiraling into all-out war. However, the implication of the mutual responsibility of East and West in these matters was controversial. Any deviation from the SED mantra that NATO was to blame for the arms race was perceived as pacifist and was expressly prohibited in the GDR.[83]

In *Das große Match* the spiraling cycle of violence is expressed by the boxing match of the biblical archangels Michael and Lucifer, who represent the irreconcilable standpoints of the main protagonists in Brězan's novel, Krabat and Reissenberg. Gundermann and Heiko Brumma enact this using a clowning alienation technique to indicate that the fight should be understood on a metaphysical level.[84] The violence escalates, the use of knives and shields giving way to tanks and finally a hydrogen bomb screwed onto a Pershing II missile. In the form of a montage, the boxing match, which constitutes the main thread of the play, is interrupted by Brězan's parable of the tiger and the soldiers. This abstraction of the dangers of irrational faith tells of three soldiers who try to convert each other to their own beliefs, but in their "religious zeal" lose sight of the danger of the tiger, which kills them.[85]

Rejecting blind ideological dogma, Gundermann seizes on the idea of a compromise that Krabat and Reissenberg strike in the moor scene, which ultimately prevents either of them from slipping to their deaths in the swamp. Neither adversary can knock the other off the narrow path that constitutes the only way to safety. In this life-or-death situation, both know the use of force would be fatal, yet neither is willing to turn around and yield to the other's morals. Krabat proposes: "let's forget our argument about morals and try reason instead." This results in Reissenberg (played by Dietrich) crawling on top of Krabat (played by Gundermann) in slapstick fashion. The fairground music by Alfons Förster accentuates the farcical aspect. The scene is an abstraction of the balance of power between adversaries: neither can escape the other, and both form constituent parts of the whole. While Count Reissenberg will never relinquish his power, Krabat will always be a counterforce to the class dominance for which he stands.[86] This is a parable of the dilemma facing both sides in the Cold War: neither side would renounce their ideological certainties, but neither was prepared to risk mutual destruction. The alternative to such compromise is delivered by Gundermann's recital—as part of a montage—of Brězan's parable of the scorpion who could not resist sinking its fangs into the frog, even though it would result in the death of both.[87]

Space Shuttle: A Science Fiction Fairy Tale

The theme of military confrontation, hinted at in *Das große Match*, took center stage in the next production, *Liebestraum im Weltenraum* [Love dream in space], commonly known as *Space Shuttle*, from 1981. Displaying an example of Gundermann's "fairy-tale thinking" in a science fiction scenario, the computers on Soviet and US space shuttles fall in love[88] and refuse to attack, thereby averting a nuclear disaster.

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The personified space shuttles, named Katjuscha and Killer King, are played by Conny Schickor and Hugo Dietrich, respectively. Choreographically, the idea of a unity between people and their machines is portrayed by the cosmonaut (Gundermann) and the astronaut (Elke Förster), piggybacking on Schickor and Dietrich, respectively.[89] In Brechtian fashion this unity is underlined in the adjoining song "Lied von den Raumschiffen und Kosmonauten" [Song of the spaceships and cosmonauts] when the cast sings, "So let's join together / humans and machines / May they not destroy us / But help fulfill our dreams / The spirits that we summon / will make us strong and bold / May we stop running from them naked and cold."

As well as dealing with the theme of nuclear confrontation, *Space Shuttle* was Gundermann's earliest treatment of the threat to the natural environment, a theme that a decade later, in the postindustrial 1990s, would become a major focus of his songs.[90] In the play, the cosmonauts on both ships, threatened with disciplinary action, turn the tables on their generals on Earth. Not only do they refuse to use military force, but they also now attempt to enforce the environmental protection of the planet, delivering an ultimatum to Earth that all objects must reduce their pollutant emission within forty-eight hours or they will be "shot with targeted laser beams." Former group member Hugo Dietrich, before his death in 2024, remembered the political significance of this at the time:

> The first reports were appearing in the newspapers about greenhouse gasses and so on caused by the coolants in fridges. Nobody wanted to take it seriously. "Space Shuttle" is a kind of reaction to that, a *Lehrstück* playing around with what was possible or impossible. To an extent we "camouflaged" it with our clowning. [In the end] the military conflict is less in the foreground than the threat of ecological catastrophe. The spaceships—and then also the cosmonauts—realize the madness of it all when it comes to the countdown, when it's already almost too late, and ultimately refuse to serve (both militarily and politically).[91]

As a result of this critical stance *Space Shuttle* was not performed very often. Dietrich surmised: "Understandably we couldn't play it all that much. I can't remember if it was banned or if the promoters were simply too frightened to risk it." There are apparently no Stasi files on this show, but an unpublished thirty-one-page interview with Gundermann from 28 April 1983, held in the archive of the Akademie der Künste, casts light on its negative reception and how this caused problems within the group. He mentions how the show was harshly criticized by the political functionaries, resulting in his fellow group members becoming despondent and disengaged. This had infuriated Gundermann, who saw this as an example of how they had allowed themselves to be "corrupted by success and tours abroad." He, on the other hand, was convinced of the importance of the production:

> Three years ago you never heard anything about the environment, and now hardly a day goes by where one of the five channels[92] doesn't do a program on it. . . . For me it was the most successful production in the FMP [Feuersteins Musik Palast]. The people argued the whole evening about environmental problems. . . . That's a result for me.[93]

Gundermann's frustration here should be understood against the backdrop of a wider conflict in Brigade Feuerstein that resulted in their temporary yet acrimonious split

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in 1983. Indeed, tensions were already evident from group discussions filmed in Engel's documentary of 1982. The members—all of whom, like Gundermann, had full-time jobs and in some cases families too—were simply not as driven as he and struggled to keep up with his work pace and creativity. He set the bar idealistically high, for himself as well as for others, in terms of the relationship between life and art to which one should aspire. He stated: "For many in [the group] the only social engagement they have is Brigade Feuerstein. And I think that doesn't work. Cultural engagement is . . . the ultimate expression of the exchange relationship between personality and society." He compared the attitude of his bandmates to that of an uncritical worker going with the flow, and claimed: "[Y]ou can't perform political art with *Kleinbürgern* [petit bourgeois]. You can only do [it] with, for example, revolutionaries, that is, people . . . who are prepared to take risks."[94] Here Gundermann appears oblivious to the immense political pressures to conform to which most musicians and actors were subject in the GDR. At the same time, it was precisely such fearlessness that had attracted Richard Engel to Gundermann and enabled the young artist to explore themes openly in a way that few others dared contemplate.

From the group's perspective, however, another point of contention was the singling out of Gundermann for attention. When Engel's TV documentary turned out to be a solo portrait, this was a step too far for many of them, particularly their musical director Alfons Förster. Given that they were an acclaimed elite GDR singing group before Gundermann even joined them, certain members were not even convinced that he was a good enough singer for Brigade Feuerstein, let alone to be singled out as a solo artist. Engel, however, repeatedly encouraged him to step forward and sing his own songs.[95] This reflected the new mentoring role that he and Petra Kelling had in Gundermann's work and life.[96] Kelling herself tells of "a little *Spektakel* called *Glücksland*" that she and Engel wrote and performed as a wedding gift for Gundermann and Conny (who had recently split from fellow Feuerstein member Wenni Schickor).[97] This short play, dealing with the search for happiness, inspired the next project, a coproduction of the newlyweds called *Nachrichten aus dem Glücksland.*

The Parables of *Nachrichten aus dem Glücksland*

This duo production from 1983 again used a fairy-tale character in the form of Hans the Dragon Slayer. The ironic portrayal of Hans, who is in fact a failure, corresponds to Gundermann's interest in characters like Franziska who struggle to find a role in society and, as such, are more realistic than the clear-cut "heroes" of socialist realist literature. At the same time there is an autobiographical, self-doubting aspect to all of these treatments, as Gundermann, the loner and social outsider,[98] embarked on a new role as husband and father.

In the fairy-tale plot, Hans must successfully complete three trials to engage the services of "the iron horse" from the Magic Mountains to help his town fulfill its work plan. While failing miserably, Hans does manage to demonstrate practical value by using his cunning as a clown. In a parable of "lost time," Hans outwits an evil magician who has bartered Hans's "time" in exchange for "a colorful wonderful world" of TV. To steal back his time, Hans switches on the notorious GDR news program *Der Schwarze Kanal* [The black channel], which lulls the magician to sleep. In this way, Gundermann satirizes the boredom of the political propaganda of the

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GDR media. In the final scene, Hans manages to cure a sick girl called Angelina who is suffering from the inability to say the words "I want." In a slapstick satire of submissiveness before officialdom, Hans performs an operation on the girl's throat and dislodges her lost words. The final poem underlines the benefits of asking the difficult questions rather than succumbing to the untruths of party dogma:

> The difficult questions, they fly like light doves,
> to know nothing is better than believing something false,
> keep on the trail of your questions,
> and find only the difficult answers.[99]

While the political point would be clear to insiders, this *Krabat*-influenced text is still arguably poetic and general enough to avoid censorship. Stasi reports of the time, however, indicate trepidation regarding the "subliminal socially critical content" of Gundermann's texts. They now intend to instrumentalize people in his new circle of friends as well as the FDJ to steer him back "on the right course."[100] This is in the context of the escalation of his conflict with the party management in his mine, as well as the ceasing of his contact with the Stasi in 1982.[101] Shortly before the opening night of his next performance, *Eine Sehfahrt, die ist lustig* in the Hoyerswerda FMP on 20 April 1984, a Stasi file stated: "As a result of inspection of the IM files and the discussion with the BPKK [Area Planning and Co-ordinating Commission], there is no longer to be unofficial contact with G. His politically negative statements and his personal behavior can simply no longer be accepted." The memo urgently recommended an "effective control measure" to hinder his process of "independence."[102]

The Parable of Big and Little Klaus

Reconciling after the brief separation, Brigade Feuerstein returned in spring 1984 with the production *Eine Sehfahrt, die ist lustig* [A sightseeing trip that is fun].[103] This represented Gundermann's response to his expulsion from the party.[104] It was the final production of a series of drafts entitled *Mann der Arbeit aufgewacht* [Working man woken up], *Arbeiter macht Arbeitermacht* [Worker makes worker power], and *Macht-Schicht* [Power level].[105] In an attempt to preempt further flak, Gundermann made a disclaimer at the start of the performance, explaining that it did not intend to "provoke the functionaries," but rather—as was typical for one of his theatre workshops—"those present in the hall," including the cast members themselves, and invited the audience to a postshow discussion.[106]

The production used the analogy of a dysfunctional ship that has lost its direction as an allegory of the GDR's failing top-down power structure. The main thrust of the criticism is the difference in power levels between "top" and "bottom" in society, as discussed in the dialogues between Big and Little Klaus. The parable of the GDR is evident in the captain's refusal to allow his subordinate up on deck to help navigate their ship toward "Glücksland." Not content with Big Klaus's promise of a future utopia, Little Klaus questions the ship's direction of travel. He points out his superior's obsession with catching up with the ship *Imperial*, which is far ahead of them and moving too quickly. This is a reference to the GDR giving up its original socialist aims in favor of emulating the West economically. Little Klaus protests: "Didn't we want to go somewhere else? . . . Didn't we change from the *Imperial* to the

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Revoluzia? . . . So where are we going now?" After a series of satirical songs attacking the party, including "Demokratie-Tango" and "Children of the Revolution," Little Klaus concludes pessimistically: "The game is over and so is the dream, / My place is in the engine room." These lines reflect Gundermann's view of the unreformability of the GDR as well as his bereavement, having been forced out of a party he had viewed as his spiritual home.

The Parable of the Three Sons

The system critique continued in *Lebensläufe* from 1985. In its parable form, it is reminiscent of Gundermann's earlier characters Red, Green, and Yellow in how it follows the life experiences of three brothers. By presenting the audience with different social "types" who struggled to find their niche in the GDR, the production immediately ran into problems. In a prepared response to criticism the play had received from the censoring bodies, the group attempted to present their "provocation" in a more universal light to avoid accusations it was a direct attack on the GDR:

> We are trying to provoke the audience into not identifying with one behavior in terms of what the scope of their social position allows. We would like to force an approach to life steered by a consciousness that goes beyond one's personal, material, and social experience and embraces the whole of society and humanity. This is where you can find the group's standpoint.[107]

While the production went ahead, there was, in fact, no mistaking the GDR-specific content. If *Eine Sehfahrt* had focused on the power relationship within the socialist hierarchy, *Lebensläufe*[108] looked critically at the possibility of achieving individual fulfillment. As group member Dietrich stated, "in the depiction of the 'small' it becomes clearer why the 'big' isn't working or what's missing on the bigger level."[109] What is most striking is the complete lack of a utopian outlook, which had been an indispensable aspect of the earlier Feuerstein productions.

Lebensläufe, like the GDR rock group Pankow's concept album of the same year, *Hans im Glück* [Hans in luck],[110] couched its message again within the fairy-tale form. A mother goes to a work party and nine months later gives birth to triplets. A fairy endows each son with gifts that determine their respective paths in life. One son pursues power and becomes a mayor, another pursues material goods as a worker, and the third pursues knowledge and becomes an engineer. All three are doomed to fail, however, because—as portrayed previously in the Red, Green, and Yellow sketch and Franziska's industrial scene—individual character attributes are insufficient on their own. As a fairy explains: "What is power without doubt, wealth without love, intelligence without power?" While on the one hand such incompleteness is presented as realistic human imperfection, the songs and sketches suggest that wider social and political factors in the GDR are impediments to self-realization; the state, in its present form, is simply insufficient to meet the needs of its people.

At the end of *Lebensläufe* the personal is drawn together with the political. None of the three men have found love, their relationships depicted as having run their course, bogged down in habit and boredom. The cast sings a Hermann van Veen adaptation of a song by Mikis Theodorakis entitled "Die Macht der Gewohnheit" [The force of

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habit]. This suggests how habits result in an inability to distinguish between appearance and reality, a thinly veiled critique of the GDR government and the actors' deteriorating relationship with it. The rousing finale "Linke Polonaise" [Left-wing polonaise] summarizes the group's dissatisfactions. Reminiscent of Brecht's *Good Person of Szechwan* the chorus presents an image of a godforsaken place. The last two lines still reflect a will to fight, though the profane expression is laden with irony that undermines any sense of hope: "Dear God pissed off ages ago, / because there's nothing left for him to do here, / so we better start marching, / or tomorrow we'll be fucked." In typical agitprop style, a series of questions are answered with a resounding "yes" or "no" by the cast:

> You're so quiet, are you already happy?—No.
> Don't we already have heaven on earth?—No.
> Isn't the spade in your hand sufficient for peace?—No.
> Is this country sufficient for living?—No.

This is an indictment of the paradise workers' state the GDR was supposed to become, of the dream in which Gundermann had ardently believed, and preempts the mood that was to sweep through the GDR in the following years leading up to the peaceful revolution of 1989.[111]

Up until their parting of ways in 1989, Brigade Feuerstein concentrated mainly on circus shows,[112] fairy tales,[113] and concerts.[114] As Gundermann began to focus on his solo career, winning the Frankfurt/Oder songwriting award for best newcomer in 1987, he couched his parables within new songs such as "Lancelot's Zwischenbilanz" [Lancelot's interim report]. In this, alluding to his rupture with the SED Party, he appears at a crossroads. Here he connects intertextually with the figure of Lancelot from Schwartz's parable play *The Dragon*, who must find a new raison d'être after finally slaying the dragon.[115]

Erinnerung an die Zukunft

This production provided a scathingly ironical commentary on the GDR's state of isolation from the rest of the world in the late 1980s. Gundermann first introduced *Erinnerung an die Zukunft* [Remembering the future] at the Werkstatt Junge Kunst (Workshop of Young Art) on 26 March 1988. It was a combination of sketches and songs played by himself and a new backing band known as Travelin, featuring the musicians Hugo Dietrich, Lexa Thomas, Tina Tandler, Stefan Körbel, and Delle Kriese. Historically, this production should be seen not just in the context of Gundermann's personal disillusionment, but also—on the wider international stage—the glasnost and perestroika reforms that President Gorbachev was implementing in the USSR, which the GDR government was stubbornly resisting. The patience of many artists had now snapped and, as in the *Sichel-Operette* [Sickle operetta][116] from 1987, artists were simply taking more risks. Although in parable form, there is a directness and rigor that sets this production apart from previous ventures.

Erinnerung an die Zukunft is framed by the parable scenes "Conversations at the highest level I and II." The subject (Gundermann) meets with God, who shows him an aerial view of the world in which the former's own country is covered by a bulge that looks like "a huge cheese dome."[117] In this parody of the Cold War, God has

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effectively isolated the GDR from the rest of the world. It has been left in peace to develop without any external interference, protected from wars and catastrophic storms. With irony, God relates how the rest of the world has noticed the "iron curtain" that encloses his country and now looks upon it enviously like "a Fata Morgana." However, it has only become world champion in meaningless things, like ice skating and egg painting. It proclaims itself to be the best of all possible worlds, but in fact its "intellectual grasp lies under the existence minimum." God has singled out Gundermann "to think about this" because of his suitability as someone who "work[s] in a mine and . . . write[s] songs."

The fantasy parable leads us into a performance of songs and stories that reflect on the state of the GDR in the late 1980s. In a further strand to the production, Gundermann's own texts are juxtaposed with selected extracts from the historical biography of Carl Schurz. Schurz was an activist from the German 1848 Revolution who fled to the United States, took part on the Unionist side of the American Civil War, and later became a successful statesman. Schurz's comments on undemocratic behavior—for example, the despotic practices of party politicians who discourage openness and refuse to delegate power to the people—have an instantly recognizable subtext and, in this way, are brought into dialogue with Gundermann's own experience of life in the GDR. His poems and songs often have parabolic significance. For example, in "Weimar 1962"—an example of Gundermann's "fairy-tale thinking"—the young boy's puppet of Kasper (the hero of traditional German puppet theatre) learns to walk and talk but ends up lying broken in the gutter. In a satire of the lack of opportunity for seizing personal initiative in the GDR, the puppet shouts in response to the boy's concern: "Shut up, you arse / . . . That's how you look / when you move by yourself." Similarly, the children's song "Crane" is about a little bird who wants to grow up. When this "hero" falls helplessly to the ground, the singer urges the children to pick it up before it splinters in the hard world.

A recurring theme of Gundermann's is that of pointless heroism.[118] The context to this was, as he felt, his generation's sacrifice of their hopes and aspirations for the promises of a future "heroic" communist society. As he stated in an interview, "No human life should be sacrificed for a principle."[119] In the autobiographical writings of Carl Schurz, he found an ally. In July 1849 Schurz was one of the revolutionaries under siege from Prussian troops in the fortress at Rastatt in Baden. Gundermann performed an adaptation of a text by Schurz telling how the insurgents knew that holding out would mean starvation for the women and children. Schurz knows it is time "to end it" even though he may be executed. He reflects: "It felt really hard / to have to leave this life / before I'd achieved anything substantial." This relates to one of Gundermann's favorite themes, the fulfilling of oneself in the time given to one on Earth. At the same time, it links back to the idea of the "rational compromise," previously observed in relation to the Krabat and Reissenberg "moor scene" from *Das große Match*.

The concluding scene is an unconcealed warning to the GDR that its days are numbered: God tells Gundermann that each generation only has thirty years to leave its mark. Altogether the cheese dome will remain in place for sixty years (i.e., two generations), which implies that the GDR has only twenty years left (i.e., sixty years on from its 1949 foundation, in the year 2009). God says: "Then on that day I'll leave you to your own devices / alone in the big, wide world / and that will be the hour of truth / and you'll live or die / a people like all peoples." Considering what was to unfold in the GDR twelve months after the Stasi report of 17 December 1988,

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Gundermann's foresight appears remarkable. But he would not have realized how quickly his parable's prediction would come true.

The fact that this production immediately hit a nerve is confirmed by the panicky Stasi reports on performances from December 1988 and January 1989. These expressed worry regarding the predictions of the short time the GDR had left to survive. Exception was also taken to the central role of God, which betrayed the influence of "bourgeois ideology."[120] The files anticipate the Operative Personenkontrolle (OPK, Operative Control Measure) that was launched against Gundermann by the local Cottbus branch in March 1989. Urgent measures were to be taken, among other things, to locate people in his circle to exploit points of contention (even financial) between Gundermann and other group members with a view to isolating him. But even this report exudes a certain helplessness regarding how to deal with Gundermann. It acknowledges his "influential" supporters "in the Berlin *Liedermacher* scene, including the FDJ Zentralrat and the Ministry for Culture," who had recently "upgraded" him in their evaluation and clearly did not share the worries of the Cottbus Stasi.[121] Indeed, another glowing report—one from 9 June 1989, written, it is claimed, by "a reliable unofficial source"—praises *Erinnerung an die Zukunft* as a "parable of the contradictions of today and yesterday [showing Gundermann's] ability to think in global dimensions in a way that makes him stand out from other *Liedermacher*."[122]

Gundermann continued performing this production through the final months of the GDR.[123] In September he was among the GDR rock musicians and *Liedermacher* who came out in support of the newly formed civil rights organization New Forum. As noted by the Stasi,[124] he read out a resolution with a list of demands for political reform before concerts.[125] In the following months the momentum for change increased, leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November.

Gundermann in the 1990s and His Legacy in the Twenty-first Century

In the newly united Germany of the 1990s, Gundermann was highly successful in the East, where he released four greatly acclaimed CDs. He continued to pursue his unique aesthetic approach that embodied the unity between art and life, performing frequently with his backing band Seilschaft [lit.: Rope team][126] while continuing to work in his open-cast mine. When it was closed in 1997, amid rapid deindustrialization in the former East, he embarked on further training as a carpenter. Up until his death in June 1998, he continued to set his narrative persona within a wider storyline or parable, be it his *Bagger*, his spaceship, the natural world or, increasingly, the wider community of "have-nots" in the postindustrial 1990s. This aesthetic approach was the key to his survival where other ex-GDR singer-songwriters failed.

Since Gundermann's death, the association Seilschaft e.V. has promoted the artist's legacy in the form of tribute concerts, talks, workshops, and symposia. The release of Andreas Dresen's prizewinning feature film *Gundermann* in 2018 presented his story to a far wider international audience. Tribute bands singing his songs have extended beyond the former East Germany to Tübingen and Freiburg in West Germany. International artists have translated his songs into different languages.[127] The remembrance culture surrounding Gundermann has recently widened to include musical theatre productions of his life and songs in the Mecklenburg Staatstheater in Schwerin,[128] Das neue Theater in Halle,[129] and the Theater der

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Nacht in the West German town of Northeim.[130] Such tributes confirm the continuing relevance of Gundermann's work and subject matter. In Hoyerswerda on 22 February 2025, to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Gundermann's death, the surviving members of Brigade Feuerstein reenacted the *Space Shuttle* production of 1981, the fairy tale of the American and Soviet spaceships that refuse to carry out orders to attack each other and, instead, order the world to clean up its toxic environmental practices. In the current international political climate—in a world racing toward environmental destruction and where superpowers are preparing for renewed military conflict—the championing of the case for human reason is as pressing now as it was in the early 1980s.

Conclusion

This article reveals Gerhard Gundermann's role as one of the main pioneers of *Liedertheater*, a much-overlooked hybrid performance form that existed in the cracks between political song and theatre in the GDR. It shows how his group Brigade Feuerstein, a novel example of antiestablishment agitprop theatre, used fairy tales and parables to couch their political message in a climate of observation and censorship. Conducted as theatre workshops often in the style of *Lehrstücke*, these plays reflected the gradual erosion of Gundermann's belief in the possibility of democratic reform in the GDR. Whereas his early production *Krabat und seine Geschichten* from 1976 still reflected his collective identification with the aims of the GDR state, by the mid-1980s his hope for democratic change had evaporated. The parables became increasingly direct, as he threw down the gauntlet to the SED Party that would not tolerate his anarchic message and behavior.

Through tracing the full history of Gundermann's *Liedertheater*, this article not only offers a unique and hitherto largely untold tale of tenacity and stubbornness, but also of the alliances and tactical game playing involved in the survival of a critical agitprop artist in the GDR. In the context of the ongoing reassessment of GDR music, theatre, and literary history, the extent of Stasi interference in Gundermann's career casts new doubt on the validity of portrayals depicting him merely as a Stasi perpetrator. In doing so, it contributes a new approach to the history of art and the GDR, one that dispels the black-and-white separation of GDR artists into the categories of subversive versus conformist.[131] In this respect his case resonates more with the verdict of Heiner Müller, who said, "I was always on both sides"[132]—an assessment echoed by Gundermann's *Liedertheater* contemporary Hans-Eckardt Wenzel: "History is viewed as if there was a clear division between dissidents and doctrinaires. It wasn't like that. The split went right through the people themselves."[133]

Notes

1 Evelyn Preuss makes this point in her critical discussion of Dresen's film in "Goodbye, Sonnenallee; or, How *Gundermann* (2018) Got Lost in the Cinema of Others," in Frauke Matthes et al., eds., *Politics and Culture in Germany and Austria Today*, Edinburgh German Yearbook 14 (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2021), 183–206.

2 Although Andreas Leusink brought out the highly informative edited volume *Gundermann: Von jedem Tag will ich was haben, was ich nicht vergesse . . .* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2018), there has been no published academic analysis of Brigade Feuerstein's productions up until this current research project. On GDR *Liedertheater*, though no extensive research has yet been done on the group Schicht, I have previously

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published on the duo Wenzel and Mensching and their group Karls Enkel. See David Robb, *Zwei Clowns im Lande des verlorenen Lachens: Das Liedertheater Wenzel & Mensching* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), and "The Liedertheater of Wenzel and Mensching: Subversive Use of the Agitprop and Clowning Tradition in the GDR," *Theatre Survey* 52.2 (2011): 225–49. Appreciations of Gundermann include the following: Klaus-Peter Schwarz, ". . . die die Welt nicht bessern können aber möchten . . . Gerhard Gundermanns Internationalhymnen eines 'anderen Deutschlands,'" *Berliner Debatte* INITIAL 10.2 (1999): 41–50; Simone Hain, "Unsereins: Gerhard Gundermann und das wahre Leben, 1955–1998," in Franziska Becker, Ina Merkel, and Simone Tippach-Schneider, eds., *Das Kollektiv bin ich: Utopie und Alltag in der DDR* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 98–125; Simone Hain, "Gundermanns post mortem: Über das Ende der Arbeit, den Kampf gegen das Empire und die notwendige Erziehung der Gefühle," *UTOPIE kreativ* 177–8 (2005): 688–92; Richard Engel, "Eines Tages steigt er in sein Raumschiff," in Hans-Dieter Schütt, ed., *Tankstelle für Verlierer: Gespräche mit Gerhard Gundermann—Eine Erinnerung* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2011), 49–55.

3 This production was performed by Gundermann and a new backing group called Travelin.

4 It is these manuscripts from which descriptions and quotations of these performance pieces are drawn here. Some manuscripts of other productions not held in the Akademie der Künste can be found in the Gundermann Archive of the Kulturfabrik in Hoyerswerda. These include *Krabat und seine Geschichten* ([Krabat and his stories] 1976), *Liebestraum im Weltenraum* ([Love dream in space] 1981), and *Nachrichten aus dem Glücksland* ([News from the land of happiness] 1983), all unpublished (and unnumbered) manuscripts.

5 Rania Karoula, "From Meyerhold and Blue Blouse to McGrath and 7:84: Political Theatre in Russia and Scotland," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 44.1 (2018): 21–8.

6 See Götz Friedrich and Joachim Herz, "*Musiktheater*—Toward a Definition (1960)," trans. Amy Stebbins, *Opera Quarterly* 27.2–3 (2011): 299–302.

7 See David Robb, "The Legacy of Brecht in East German Political Song," in Laura Bradley and Karen Leeder, eds., Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity, *Edinburgh German Yearbook 5* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 183–200.

8 Ian Wallace, "The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and Its Consequences," in Axel Goodbody and Dennis Tate, eds., *Geist und Macht: Writers and the State in the GDR* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 68–80.

9 Laura Bradley, "Introduction," in Bradley and Leeder, eds., *Brecht and the GDR*, 1–21, at 2.

10 Ingo Dietrich, "Viel Arbeit für ein Lächeln: Unsere Zeit bei der Brigade Feuerstein in Hoyerswerda," in Leusink, ed., *Gundermann*, 47–59.

11 See David Robb, "*Political Song in the GDR: The Cat-and-Mouse Game with Censorship and Institutions*," in Robb, ed., *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), 227–54.

12 As exemplified by *Laura Bradley's* Cooperation and Conflict: GDR Theatre Censorship, 1961–1989 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), which does not mention it at all.

13 See Robb, "Political Song in the GDR," 240–9.

14 See Bradley, *Cooperation and Conflict*; Holger Teschke, "From *Faust III* to *Germania III:* Drama in the GDR between 1949 and 1989," in Karen Leeder, ed., *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 70–87.

15 See David Robb, "Music and the Rebirth of Faust in the GDR," in Lorraine Byrne Bodley, ed., *Faust and Music* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 262–75.

16 See Bradley's account of this production in *Cooperation and Conflict*, 180–8.

17 Personal interview with Petra Kelling and Richard Engel, Berlin, 25 February 2025.

18 Teschke, "From *Faust III* to *Germania III*," 83.

19 Lutz Kirchenwitz, Folk, *Chanson und Liedermacher in der DDR: Chronisten, Kritiker, Kaisergeburtstagssänger* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1993), 87.

20 For examples of the discussion rounds, see the pamphlet Liedzentrum der Akademie der Künste, ed., *Werkstatt "Lieder & Theater," 1981–1982: Dresden, 1982—Diskussionsprotokolle*, Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AdK-O 5730.

21 See, for example, the support given to Karls Enkel's *Hammer-Rehwü* in 1982 by the Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst and the Akademie der Künste when it incurred a ban in Cottbus, and the Kulturbund's support of Karls Enkel's similarly contentious *Der 18. Brumaire* in 1983. Robb, *Zwei Clowns*, 67–70 and 88–91.

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22 See the manuscript of Brigade Feuerstein's performance *Brandgesänge* (1980), Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda, unnumbered MS.
23 Personal interview with group member Ingo "Hugo" Dietrich, Hoyerswerda, 4 February 2020. Richard Engel recalls that Gundermann turned up to Busch's funeral in his ordinary clothes and was forced to borrow a suit. Personal interview with Kelling and Engel, 25 February 2025.
24 See more on the Kulturbund's mentorship of Karls Enkel in Robb, *Zwei Clowns*, 156–62.
25 Personal interview with Kelling and Engel, 25 February 2025.
26 Schwarz, "die die Welt nicht bessern können aber möchten," 44. This and all other translations from the original German are my own.
27 Personal interview with Kelling and Engel, 25 February 2025.
28 See Engel, "Eines Tages steigt er in sein Raumschiff," 49–50, 53.
29 Email to author from Reinhard "Pfeffi" Ständer, who ran the Feuersteins Musik Palast club in Hoyerswerda where Brigade Feuerstein was resident, 26 June 2023. See more on the embeddedness of musicians in the GDR system in articles such as Peter Wicke and John Shepherd, "'The Cabaret Is Dead': Rock Culture as State Enterprise—The Political Organization of Rock in East Germany," in Tony Bennett *et al.*, eds., *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (London: Routledge, 1993), 25–35.
30 Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson und Liedermacher*, 87; 184.
31 See Robb, *Zwei Clowns*, 28.
32 See Robb, "Music and the Rebirth of Faust," 267–9.
33 See Roswitha Mueller, "Montage in Brecht," *Theatre Journal* 39.4 (1987): 473–86.
34 Article 2.1 of the GDR constitution states "[a]ll political power in the German Democratic Republic is exercised by the workers in the country": "Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 9. April 1968 in der Fassung vom 7. Oktober 1974"; www.verfassungen.de/ddr/verf74.htm (accessed 10 January 2024).
35 Heiner Müller, Foreword to *Glücksgott*, in *Theaterarbeit: Glücksgott, Elektratext, Drachenoper, Horizonte, Stellasonett, Weiberkomödie* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1975), 7–8, at 8. Quoted in Theo Girshausen, "'Reject it, in order to possess it': On Heiner Müller and Bertolt Brecht," trans. Peter Harris and Pia Kleber, *Modern Drama* 23.4 (1980): 404–21, at 414.
36 Brigitte Reimann, *Franziska Linkerhand* (Berlin: Velag Neues Leben, 1974).
37 Jonathan Kalb, *The Theater of Heiner Müller,* revd. and enlarged ed. ([1998] New York: Limelight Editions, 2001), 42.
38 Bertolt Brecht, "Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks" ("On the Theory of the *Lehrstück*") (1937), Gesammelte Werke, *17:* Schriften zum Theater (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 1024–5. Quoted in Kalb, *Theater of Heiner Müller*, 26.
39 Gundermann, in Schütt interview, "Baggerfahrer und Rocksänger; das erste Gespräch," in *Tankstelle*, 15–48, at 37.
40 As one of the elite GDR *Kader-Gruppen*, the Singeklub Hoyerswerda had the privilege to perform in the West. See Dietrich, "Viel Arbeit für ein Lächeln."
41 Gundermann, in Schütt interview, "Baggerfahrer und Rocksänger," in *Tankstelle*, 37. See also Dietrich, "Viel Arbeit für ein Lächeln."
42 See, for example, Holger Teschke's remarks on the use of the fairy-tale motif in Benno Besson's production of Evgeny Schwartz's *The Dragon* in 1965 in "From *Faust III* to *Germania III*," 77. See also Qinna Shen, "DEFA Märchenfilme as Brechtian Parables: Gerhard Klein's *Die Geschichte vom armen Hassan* and Konrad Petzold's *Das Kleid*," *Brecht Yearbook* 35 (2010): 112–31.
43 Maureen T. Krause, "'Manchmal ist ein Märchen wahrer als eine wahre Geschichte': Social-Political Criticism and Prophesy in East German Fairy Tales before Reunification," *University of Dayton Review* 21.2 (1991): 123–32. Available at https://ecommons.udayton.edu/udr/vol21/iss2/15 (accessed 18 June 2025).
44 Ibid., 123.
45 Cathy Young, "*The Dragon:* Russia's Satirical Parable of Autocracy and the Human Spirit," in *Bulwark*, 1 April 2022, www.cato.org/commentary/dragon-russias-satirical-parable-autocracy-human-spirit# (accessed 23 June 2025).
46 Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Cologne: Kiepenheur & Witsch, 1992), 207; quoted in Teschke, "From *Faust III* to *Germania III*," 77.
47 Teschke, "From *Faust III* to *Germania III*," 77.

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48 Two further early "fairy-tale" productions devised and performed predominantly for children were *Raskadonien* (as the Singeklub Hoyerswerda, 1977) and *Die Geschichte der kleinen Malwina* (1980). There is a video recording of *Malwina* (AVM-33 5035) and an audio recording of *Raskadonien* (AVM-31 5058) in the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

49 See the Brigade Feuerstein production *Liebestraum im Weltenraum*, or his solo song "Einsame Spitze," on the CD *Einsame Spitze* (Berlin: BuschFunk, 1992).

50 See the solo song "Soll Sein" on *Einsame Spitze*.

51 See the figure of Hans in Gerhard and Conny Gundermann, *Nachrichten aus dem Glücksland*. See also the solo songs "Lancelots Zwischenbilanz" on the LP *Männer, Frauen und Maschinen* (Berlin: Amiga, 1988) and "Der siebente Samurai" on the CD *Der siebente Samurai* (Berlin: BuschFunk, 1993). For a more detailed treatment of heroism see David Robb, "A Heroism for the New Times in the Protest Songs of Gerhard Gundermann," *Popular Music* 43.2 (2025): 165–89.

52 Simone Hain describes how Gundermann's linking with objects from the material (and fantastical) world around him in his lyrics enabled him structurally "to express in wonderfully dialectical figures what most people only perceive, and to enjoy with all his senses the things that sounded so plain in theory." Hain, "Unsereins," 100.

53 Personal interview with Kelling and Engel.

54 Gundermann, in Schütt interview, "Baggerfahrer und Rocksänger," in *Tankstelle*, 24.

55 For further reading on this see Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., "Towards the Last Fairy Tale: On the Fairy-Tale Paradigm in the Strugatskys' Science Fiction, 1963–72," *Science Fiction Studies* 13.1 (1986): 1–41; Elana Gomel, "The Poetics of Censorship: Allegory as Form and Ideology in the Novels of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky," *Science Fiction Studies* 22.1 (1995): 87–105. See also Boris Strugatsky, "Afterword" (2012), in Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic,* trans. Olena Bormashenko ([1972] London: Gollancz, 2012), 195–209.

56 Gundermann, in Schütt, *Tankstelle*, 111.

57 Ibid.

58 Strugatsky and Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic.* The brothers also wrote the screenplay for Tarkovsky's film adaptation, *Stalker* (Mosfilm, 1979).

59 See Csicsery-Ronay, "Towards the Last Fairy Tale," 5.

60 Ibid., 4, taking an idea from Marie-Gabriel Wosien, *The Russian Folktale: Some Structural and Thematic Aspects* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1969), 104.

61 See an extensive analysis of Gundermann's treatment of Krabat in David Robb, "The *Krabat* Motif in the Songs and Musicals of *Liedermacher* Gerhard Gundermann," *Music & Politics* 18.3 (2024): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.3998/mp.4149.

62 Jurij Brězan, *Krabat oder Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 2d ed. ([1976] Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1989).

63 Singeklub Hoyerswerda, *Krabat und seine Geschichten*, unpublished manuscript (1976), Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda, unnumbered MS; audio recording, *Liedertheater* archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AVM-31 5088 (1977).

64 See Robb, "*Krabat* Motif."

65 See Gundermann's discussion of his early political stance in Schütt, "'Grigori' kommt von Kossonossow. Das dritte Gespräch," in *Tankstelle*, 77–94.

66 Letter to Stasi from Offiziershochschule Löbau, StUA0044, BsTU 099023, 27 May 1975. [StUA, Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv (Stasi Records Agency); formerly BsTU, Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR).]

67 "Beurteiling," StUA 0516, BsTU 090267, 8 December 1977. For further reading on Gundermann's activity as an informer see Christiane Baumann, "Die Sieben Jahre als Genosse 'Grigori': Akten, Einsichten und Fragen," in Leusink, *Gundermann*, 83–9; see also Steve Koerner, "IM Grigori tritt ab," *Die Zeit* 22/1995 (26 May 1995), www.zeit.de/1995/22/IM_Grigori_tritt_ab (accessed 18 June 2025; "Wie der Musiker Gerhard Gundermann vom informellen Mitarbeiter zum Kontrollvorgang der Staatssicherheit wurde: Eines Tages wollte Grigori Egon Krenz verbrennen," *Berliner Zeitung* (27 April 1995), www.berliner-zeitung.de/wie-der-musiker-gerhard-gundermann-vom-informellen-mitarbeiter-zum-kontrollvorgang-der-staatssicherheit-wurde-eines-tages-wollte-grigori-egon-krenz-verbrennen-li.55550 (accessed 18 June 2025.

68 Particular emphasis was put on the need to educate "socialist personalities" ("sozialistischen Persönlichkeiten") among the youth. The first paragraph of the GDR Youth Law of 1974 indicates the role

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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." *Jugendgesetz der DDR* from 28 January 1974, I.§1.(1), www.verfassungen.de/ddr/jugendgesetz74.htm (accessed 18 June 2025). See David Robb, "Censorship, Dissent and the Metaphorical Language of GDR Rock," in Ewa Mazierska, ed., *Popular Music under State Socialism: Breaking the Cold War Paradigm* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 109–28.

69 Georgina Paul mentions portrayals of workers' brigades in GDR socialist-realist literature of the 1950s in her "Gender in GDR Literature," in Leeder, ed., *Rereading East Germany*, 106–25, at 107–8.

70 After Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie" (1844), *MEW* 1, 378–91, at 385. www.schmidt.hist.unibe.ch/pot/marx/MarxKKritikderHegelschen.pdf (accessed 18 June 2025).

71 Brigade Feuerstein, *Geschichten aus dem Koraktor* (1978), Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda, unnumbered MS. All quotations in this section are from this manuscript.

72 See David Robb, "The Influence of Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand* on the Political Songs of Gerhard Gundermann," *German Life and Letters* 77.4 (2024): 514–37.

73 Brigade Feuerstein, *Geschichten aus dem Koraktor*, audio recording from Leipzig, 20 October 1978, *Liedertheater* archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AVM-31 5054. An updated manuscript version that corresponds in essence with the plot line of this audio recording is located in the Hoyerswerda archive. See Robb, "Influence of Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand*," 528–9.

74 "Informationen zu Vorgängen um Gerhard Gundermann," Bundesarchiv, StUA 0427, BsTU 090212, 19 March 1979. This report complains that "it wasn't clear who his songs were against and who they were for."

75 "Zur Brigade Feuerstein Hoyerswerda," StUA 0315, BsTU 090170, 25 October 1978.

76 "Zur Person Gundermann," StUA 0309, BsTU 090167, 20 June 1978.

77 "Protokoll der GO Leitungssitzung" StUA 0339, BsTU 090182, 19 December 1978.

78 Freie Deutsch Jugend, Kreisleitung Hoyerswerda, untitled, StUA 0349, BsTU 090187, 13 February 1979.

79 "Information zu Vorgängen um Gerhard Gundermann," StUA 0427, BsTU 090212, 19 March 1979.

80 "Einschätzung des Genossen Gerhard Gundermann," StUA 0441, BsTU 090220, 10 October 1979.

81 StUA 0433, BsTU 090216, 25 May 1979.

82 See the derivation of this term from Brězan in Robb, "*Krabat* Motif," 14.

83 See the sensitivities surrounding this in the *Hammer-Rehwü* of 1982 in Robb, *Zwei Clowns*, 51; 61–4.

84 Personal interview with Dietrich, Hoyerswerda, 2 June 2022.

85 Brigade Feuerstein, *Das große Match*, Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda, unnumbered MS. All quotations in this section are from this alternative manuscript of *Das große Match*, which differs in some respects from the one held in the Akademie der Künste. Adapted from Brězan, *Krabat oder Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 322.

86 See Robb, "*Krabat* Motif," 15–16.

87 Adapted from Brězan, *Krabat oder Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 317.

88 This idea was possibly inspired by the Kraftwerk song "Computer Liebe" ("Computer Love") of that same year.

89 Description is per a photograph from the original production, projected onscreen at the new performance of *Space Shuttle* in the Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda, 22 February 2025.

90 See Robb, "Heroism for the New Times," 181–4.

91 Email to author from Dietrich, 7 October 2022.

92 Here he is including the West German TV channels, which most East Germans could easily pick up.

93 "Interview mit Gerhard Gundermann zu Arbeits- und Methode-Fragen, am 28. 4. 83 in Hoyerswerda in seiner Wohnung," unpublished manuscript no. 352, *Liedertheater* archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 15.

94 Ibid., 9.

95 Personal interview with Kelling and Engel. See also Dietrich, "Viel Arbeit für ein Lächeln," on the group's views of Gundermann's musical ability, particularly in the early days.

96 In "Interview mit Gerhard Gundermann" he refers to Engel and Kelling on pp. 19, 20, and 23.

97 Personal interview with Kelling and Engel.

98 See Engel's comments on "the possibility of failure" that Gundermann embodied for him, as well as his "loneliness," in Engel, "Eines Tages steigt er in sein Raumschiff," 51.

99 Gundermann, *Nachrichten aus dem Glücksland*. This idea stemmed from Jurij Brězan's *Krabat oder Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 337. A version of this section on Hans has previously been published in Robb, "*Krabat* Motif," 17–18.

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100 See "Einschätzung des Genossen Gerhard Gundermann," StUA 0549, BsTU 090286, 16 March 1984. This file shows awareness of the influence exerted on Gundermann by a wider association of artists called "Werkstaat für morgen" that included groups such as Oktoberklub, Regenmacher, and Feuerstein. He was also to perform new musical fairy tales at the Theater der Freundschaft in Berlin, which was Petra Kelling's youth theatre.

101 Since the report "Beurteilung," StUA 0499, BsTU 256, 15 February 1982, where they stated plans for him to penetrate deeper into the GDR *Liedermacher* scene, the Stasi files indicate that he had made no further contact.

102 "Gundermann, Gerhard," StUA 0555, BsTU 090289, 3 April 1984.

103 This is a pun on the title of Alwin Elling's 1935 film *Eine Seefahrt, die ist lustig* (*A Merry Sea Trip*).

104 In a report from the Bezirksparteikontrolkomission from 28 March 1984, the party lists Gundermann's main accusations against them: for example, the personality cult in the USSR, democratic centralism, the party's historical covering up of their mistakes, and their capricious cultural policy against artists, such as singer and actor Manfred Krug (who left for the West in the wake of the Biermann Affair). StUA 0557, BsTU 039290. A documentation of the party's grievances against Gundermann can be seen in Hans-Dieter Schütt, *Gundermann: Rockpoet und Baggerfahrer* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1996). See also Leusink, *Gundermann.*

105 This is a pun that plays on the other meaning of *Schicht* as "shift." The manuscripts of these drafts, unnumbered, are in the Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda. I look at different scenes and songs from this series of productions, including *Eine Sehfahrt, die ist lustig*, in Robb, "Influence of Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand*," 529–32.

106 Brigade Feuerstein, *Eine Sehfahrt, die ist lustig*, audio recording (1984), *Liedertheater* archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AVM-31 5066.

107 Untitled, unsigned statement by Brigade Feuerstein from 20 October 1985. Included in the text manuscript of *Lebensläufe*, Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda.

108 Brigade Feuerstein, *Lebensläufe*, from *Power-Fabrik*, audio recording made in Haus der jungen Talent in Berlin on 4 January 1986, *Liedertheater* archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AVM-31 5100. Observations are based on the above as well as the various unnumbered manuscript versions held in the Gundermann Archive in Hoyerswerda.

109 Email to author from Dietrich, 14 November 2022.

110 See a brief analysis of this in Robb, "Censorship, Dissent," 122.

111 See Robb, "*Krabat* Motif," 19, for an explanation of the influence of the *Krabat* novel on "Linke Polonnaise."

112 *Harlekin und Pimpinella* [Harlequin and Pimpinella] in 1986 and *Sechse kommen durch die Welt* [Six come through the world] in 1987, unpublished, unnumbered manuscripts, Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda.

113 *Märchen von der blauen Blume* [Fairytale of the blue flower] (no manuscript, 1985); *Prinzessin Tausendschön* [The very beautiful princess] and *Die Hexe im Lumpenwald* [The witch in the tattered forest] (both 1988), unpublished, unnumbered manuscripts, Gundermann Archive, Kulturfabrik, Hoyerswerda.

114 These included *Männer, Frauen und Maschinen* from 1986 and *Erinnerung an die Zukunft* [Remembering the future] from 1988. In the final year they also performed "Entdeckungen" at the theatre in Schwerin.

115 See Robb, "Heroism for the New Times," 179–80.

116 Karls Enkel and friends, *Die Sichel-Operette*, unpublished video (1987), Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin. See Robb, *Zwei Clowns*, 107–21.

117 Gundermann & Band, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*, unpublished manuscript (1988), *Liedertheater* archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, AVM-31 401.

118 See other instances of Gundermann's treatment of this in Robb, "Heroism for New Times," 180; 183.

119 Gundermann, in Schütt interview, "Baggerfahrer und Rocksänger," in *Tankstelle*, 39.

120 "Eine Veranstaltung am 17. Dezember 1988 unter Mitwirkung des Liedermachers Gundermann im Jugendklub Hoyerswerda," StUA: MfS bV Cbs, AKG 1436, 13 January 1989. The Stasi had previously also picked up on the role of God in the Gundermann's Krabat material. It seems, however, that God is merely a parabolic device in all these instances, used ironically and not to be taken at face value.

121 "Einleitungsbericht zur OPK 'Sänger,'" StUA, MfS HA XX. ZMA 3195, Hoyerswerda, 2 March 1989.

122 "Zur derzeitigen Situation des Liedermachers Gerhard Gundermann," StUA 0021, 362/8, 9 June 1989.

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123 See, for example, MfS BV Potsdam Abt. XX/7, 25 September 1989. In her chapter Baumann mentions the existence of a video recording of *Erinnerung an die Zukunft* among the files of that period. Baumann, "Die Sieben Jahre als Genosse 'Grigori,'" 88.
124 See MfS BV Dresden AKG 14537, 6 October 1989.
125 See video of *Roter Rummel* concert (referencing the 1924 Piscator revue), with Gundermann, Wenzel, and Mensching and Gina Pietsch, 24 October 1989, Liedertheater archive, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. See Robb, "*Liedertheater* of Wenzel and Mensching," 241.
126 The word *Seilschaft* had a particular meaning in the GDR, referring (usually with a negative connotation) to an informal network of cronies. Postunification, it was used ironically as the band's name in a gesture of defiance.
127 See *Gundermanns Lieder in Europa*, CD (Berlin: BuschFunk, 2019), and Dave Robb, *Filling Station for Losers: Songs of Gundermann*, CD (Berlin: BuschFunk, 2024). See also the website *Songs of Gundermann*, www.songsofgundermann.com.
128 *Gundermann: Männer, Frauen und Maschinen*, dir. Patrick Wengenroth, Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater, Schwerin, 2021. www.mecklenburgisches-staatstheater.de/programm/gundermann-maenner-frauen-und-maschinen.html (accessed 19 June 2025).
129 *Blasse Blume auf Sand*, dir. Lisett Ansorge, musical dirs. Matthias Walter und Tristan Becker, Das neue Theater, Halle, 2021–2. www.buehnen-halle.de/de/program/gundermann-blasse-blume-auf-sand/238069 (accessed 19 June 2025).
130 TheaterKorona, *Gundermann: Engel über dem Revier*, Theater der Nacht, Northeim, 2025. Some of the puppetry in this incarnation can be seen at "*Gundermann—Engel über dem Revier*, Trailer TheaterKorona," www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6v59tpGmr8 (accessed 8 June 2025).
131 For examples of such reassessments see David Bathrick, "Die Intellektuellen und die Macht: Die Repräsentanz des Schriftstellers in der DDR," in Sven Hanuschek, Therese Hörnigk, and Christine Malende, ed., *Schriftsteller als Intellektuelle: Politik und Literatur im kalten Krieg* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 235–48; Wolfgang Emmerich, "Deutsche Intellektuelle: was nun? Zum Funktionswandel der (ostdeutschen) literarischen Intelligenz zwischen 1945 und 1998," in Laurence McFalls and Lothar Probst, ed., *After the GDR: New Perspectives on the Old GDR and the Young Länder* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 3–27; Mary Fulbrook, The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker *(New Haven and* London: Yale University Press, 2005); Sara Jones, Complicity, *Censorship and Criticism: Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).
132 Heiner Müller, "Jetzt ist da eine Einheitssoße: Der Dramtiker Heiner Müller über die Intellektuellen und den Untergang der DDR," in *Der Spiegel*, 44.31 (30 July 1990), 136–41, at 141.
133 Hans-Eckardt Wenzel, in an interview with Jens Rosbach, Deutschland-Radio, 15 April 1998. See also Robb, "Political Song in the GDR," 249.

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