Music as Political Power in Postwar Germany: The Fight for German Reunification through the Voices of East and West German Musicians

Monica Meldrum, author
Dr. Michelle Mouton, History, faculty mentor

Monica Meldrum graduated from UW Oshkosh in spring 2018 with a bachelor of arts degree in history and a minor in music industry. During her undergraduate career, Monica conducted research for a public history project regarding the UW Oshkosh residence halls. Her additional passion for music has inspired her interest in the social role of music, dating from the Middle Ages to the present.

Dr. Michelle Mouton teaches courses in modern European, German, and women’s history. She is the author of From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Nazi Family Policy 1918–1945. Her current research examines German children during the Second World War and during the Cold War.

Abstract

When the Second World War ended, Germany embarked on a period of heightened reconstruction. Along with the restoration of bombed buildings and the reestablishment of political systems, the postwar era was a time of rich cultural adaptation as German musicians reinvented themselves and their style. Initially, the evolution of music was impacted by the military occupation in Germany and by American and British musical influences, which inspired German musicians to change their sound. However, the Cold War, which divided Germany, influenced the evolution of music in both parts of postwar Germany. In the West, the increasingly democratized Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) embraced capitalism, which created a freer environment for musicians to express themselves. In contrast, the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) became a socialist state, which censored music. My paper surveys how musicians in East and West Germany negotiated the presence of the Iron Curtain through their music. Using case studies of two Eastern musical groups and one Western singer-songwriter, I analyze how musicians challenged the socialist system and the Iron Curtain through their music. Whereas Eastern musicians faced censorship and sometimes persecution as they composed and performed their music, Western musicians aided the fight for freedom in the East by composing political music. As my paper demonstrates, musicians provided a voice for the people of a divided Germany and may even have contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Introduction

The Cold War developed out of the competing postwar worldviews of the Soviet Union and the United States and its Western allies. The disagreements complicated efforts to rebuild war-torn Europe and led to the formation of the Iron Curtain, a solid line that divided Germany into a Soviet-controlled, socialist, East German state and a Western-influenced, democratic, West German state. In response to Cold War tensions,
many East and West Germans turned to music to establish political, social, and cultural messages to protest the Iron Curtain.

A number of historians have examined the impact of music during the Cold War. Historian Uta Poiger discusses the role of American culture in Cold War Germany. She argues that the introduction of American culture in postwar Germany influenced progressive changes among German youth who began to challenge the contemporary cultural norms.1 Historian Alexei Yurchak explores the integration of Western music and mass culture into Eastern Soviet socialist society, arguing that while Western mass culture during the Cold War produced political messages, Eastern youth failed to recognize the divide between “bourgeois mass culture and the politics of anticommunism,”2 essentially claiming that artists had no hand in stirring up politics through their music. On the other hand, historian Yale Richmond argues that the transmission of Western rock music onto the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain encouraged progressive free speech among citizens in a socialist society.3 Ultimately, few historians have looked at both the East and the West and focused on the impact of specific artists, which is the goal of this paper.

The role of musical ideology begins with the American occupation in postwar Germany. American GIs arrived in Germany as occupying military authorities with the goal of influencing Germany’s perspective of democracy. Two similar concepts, Westernization and Americanization, are commonly associated with the introduction of democracy into postwar Germany. According to historian Konrad Jarausch, popular culture and mass consumerism were powerful tools of Americanization and were useful in the process of teaching West Germans the value of democracy.4 However, the reception of this new culture varied widely in the context of East German socialism. Moreover, Jarausch argues, “This democratic influence was by no means a sure-fire success.”5 As this paper argues, Western influence inspired a united front against the postwar divide of the East and West, and popular music became a powerful political force in the years to come.6

The acceptance of popular music varied at different generational levels in this era. Jarausch, in an examination of listeners, suggests the difference in reception between generations by stating, “Rock (in particular) appealed to the working-class youth, while it alarmed adults who saw suggestive gyrations.”7 While the youth were able to identify with this new form of music, adults were fearful of cultural change. After rock music became popular, responses in East and West Germany took the form of actions to combat the new cultural ideology.

These so-called actions took different forms on either side of the Iron Curtain. Uta Poiger suggests that “West German authorities, in spite of their commitment to a Western military and political alliance tried to find a fourth ‘German’ way,” especially to separate from the “self-destructive, sexualizing, and emasculating power of American-style consumerism.”8 After a decade and a half of occupation, dominant American culture became a roadblock to West German culture, nevertheless initiating inspiration into Germany’s own creative process. West German musicians began to match the Western influences and had the freedom to produce German mainstream music without restrictions to their lyrical messages or public performances in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The subsequent idea of “Germanness” began to spring forward, giving form to German music styles and creating a response to the
pressures of a globally distributed popular music.² West German musicians, inspired by Western culture, flourished by introducing their own German styles and musical expressions.

In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), maintaining a socialist ideology supported the government’s oppressive nature. The GDR’s vision for a socialist society strictly focused on youth groups and celebrating the working class. In the eyes of East German officials, rock ’n’ roll was to blame for social unrest in the GDR, an issue they attributed to Western music culture.¹⁰ After witnessing so many rock ’n’ roll riots, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) responded with a statement, criticizing the nature of the West. SED leaders wrote, “In West Germany, they depend on these ways of life to poison young people psychologically and to prepare them ideologically for their criminal war plans with all possible means of brutalization and of stimulation of the basest instincts.”¹¹ The SED believed that the West was poisonous because rock ’n’ roll “was one of the first forms of Anglo-American music to ‘conquer’ Germany and reinforce a ‘quasi-colonial relationship’ between West Germany and the United States.”¹² Accordingly, Eastern leaders saw the looming threat from cultural change in the FRG as the result of the West’s willingness to adapt to Western culture.

Soviet leaders were determined to persuade the East Germans of the superiority of Soviet culture and socialism.¹³ In this effort they failed. Pedro Ramet, author of “Disaffection and Dissent in East Germany,” observed, “As resocialization fails, the population becomes susceptible to alternative cultures.”¹⁴ East Germans refused to conform to socialism, not because the SED failed to convert its residents, but because its residents were already immersed in the Western culture that permeated through the Iron Curtain. As a response, the Soviet Union and East German authorities “began a campaign against the United States and United States presence.”¹⁵ The Communist Party was determined to “portray America as an oppressor and aggressor,”¹⁶ and eventually cracked down and banned Western artistic influences and the artists themselves.

In the East, the ultimate goal for socialist music was to inspire artists to return to their German roots. In 1958, the SED worried that the Germanness, which had “brought forth Bach and Beethoven,” would be distorted, and “young people were being transformed into raging beasts with the help of [rock] music.”¹⁷ Furthermore, “the SED had feared that rock music . . . [reinforced] tendencies toward individualism,”¹⁸ and began making clear that these immoral and individualistic attitudes were unacceptable. Additional restrictions on East German citizens followed.

But how did East German musicians use their music to combat these cultural restrictions? Pedro Ramet has suggested that disaffection and dissent are accurate representations of society in this case. “Disaffection,” according to Ramet, “is discontent with the system without invoking one’s ability to change the system,” whereas “dissent is discontent charged by one’s ability to effect change.”¹⁹ Although East German musicians were primary targets of cultural censorship, disaffection arose among Eastern and Western activist musicians alike. This led to dissent against the GDR’s unnecessary cultural restrictions and the Iron Curtain itself. Author Jolanta Pekacz argues, “The question as to whether rock music is able to play a role in a process of political change evokes skepticism, rather than endorsement.”²⁰

My research compares Eastern rock musicians the Klaus Renft Combo and Wolf Biermann with the Western singer-songwriter Udo Lindenberg, and explores the
disaffection shared through their music. While one cannot argue that they brought down the Wall, their music and lyrical messages contributed to an undercurrent of rebellion against the Cold War, evoking a political attitude and backlash against the Eastern cultural censorship.

**The German Democratic Republic and Censorship: “The Bad Boys of East German Rock”**

Cultural oppression in the socialist landscape of the GDR took a toll on musicians’ lyrics. Regulation of creative freedom burdened a musician’s creative process. For example, lyrics were required to portray an appreciation of the socialist state and underwent censorship. Furthermore, public performances depended on musician licensure. To understand the musical culture in the GDR, this research draws from Eastern musicians Klaus Jentzsch and Wolf Biermann and will examine how socialist censorship affected them as musicians in East Germany.

In 1958, Klaus Jentzsch took his mother’s maiden name for his stage name Klaus Renft and formed a group known as the Klaus Renft Combo. In the GDR, bands were normally called “combos,” or given other descriptive terms like “dance ensembles” in order to adhere to the socialist theme. In an interview, author Anna Funder described him as “the bad boy of East German rock ’n’ roll,” because Klaus and his friends, like many other youth, had access to and listened to the government-banned RIAS radio (Radio in American Sector). RIAS allowed Western culture to continue to seep through the Iron Curtain. After Jentzsch and his bandmates, Christian Kunert and Gerulf Pannach, formed the Klaus Renft Combo, they started performing covers of hit music from the late 1950s and early 1960s of their forbidden Western inspirations, including Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and the Beatles.

By the late 1960s, the combo had evolved from performing covers to writing their own original works. During this period, SED censorship intensified. In response, the combo felt compelled to radicalize their message. When playing Western covers, they never conformed to the socialist ideology; however, their original music, as it became more politicized, earned them a reputation for refusing to cooperate with the regime. Their aim was to send messages to the SED leadership through their lyrics, describing the oppression all East Germans felt.

Three particular songs reveal the change in Renft’s music. The first, titled “Die Ketten Werden Knapper” (“The Chains are Getting Tighter”), largely reflects the group’s main intention of speaking out. The song’s lyrics explain that with worldwide performance of music, all the chains will loosen and break free, putting an end to the suffocation of the oppressed in East Germany. Another song, “The Ballad of Little Otto,” describes a little boy who longed to reach his brother in West Germany, which was a common theme for many East Germans who were separated from family by the Iron Curtain. A third ditty, titled “Questions of Faith,” spoke directly to the SED through spiteful lines, which asked, “You, what does he believe in/ he who goes to the flag/ swears to the glory of the flag/ stands tall there?” Author Olaf Leitner, who interprets these lines, states, “The phrase ‘going to the flag’ refers to absolving one’s military service,” which was a one-way ticket to prison. The combo’s lyrics reflected the struggles of many East Germans living under socialism. The lyrics attacked socialist censorship, the ban on travel outside the GDR, military conscription, and the SED leaders.
The combo’s new focus successfully drew the attention of the SED leadership, and more specifically, that of Erich Honecker, general secretary of the SED, who employed the Stasi (East German secret police) to keep a record of Klaus and his combo. Klaus Renft’s Stasi file contains correspondence from Erich Honecker and Erich Mielke, head of the Stasi. Honecker wrote, “Dear Erich (Mielke), Please attend to the case of Jentzsch, Klaus, as speedily as possible. Regards, Erich (Honecker).” The letter suggests an intent to disrupt the combo and provides evidence as to how oppressive the SED was becoming. The party began to devise strategies by which to silence the combo. However, the SED and the Stasi quickly realized that the combo was too popular to “handle directly” and abandoned their public efforts to silence the group.

Instead, when it came time for the Klaus Renft Combo to renew their performance license in 1975, the SED attacked. Performance licensing, which began in 1958, was guided by the GDR’s 60:40 clause, which mandated that “no more than 40% of the repertoire of GDR bands or of the programming of radio and televisions could be from capitalist countries.” The GDR’s Directive on Programming stated, “To elevate the level of light music and dance music in the shaping of socialist culture, at least 60% of works performed are to be created by composers in the GDR.” The decree furthermore dictated that all “events in this sense are public performances, of which entertainers need professional cards.” For this reason, the Klaus Renft Combo headed to the SED Ministry of Culture for a renewal.

As the combo began to set up for their performance, they were approached by an SED official who told them the Ministry would not hear them play. Moreover, she informed them that “the lyrics have absolutely nothing to do with our Socialist reality. The working class is insulted and the state and defense organizations are defamed.” As if this did not strike a hard enough blow to the reputation of the combo, the official further stated, “We are here to inform you today that you don’t exist anymore.”

Klaus related to Funder that he should have seen this coming after he was, on several occasions, approached by “strangers” who offered him passports and money to flee to the West. After the hearing, the Ministry of Culture began to spread rumors that the band had split up. A short time later, Klaus Renft defected to West Germany. However, his bandmates, Pannach and Kunert, were imprisoned in the GDR until West Germany bought their freedom in 1977.

The case of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann is similar to that of the Klaus Renft Combo. Biermann was an early “inspiration for the Klaus Renft Combo,” although his troubles with the GDR came later. Biermann grew up in Hamburg, West Germany, before relocating to the GDR in the mid-1950s when he was seventeen years old. David Robb suggests that Biermann moved east due to “an apparent yearning, as a communist, to learn how to build a communist society.” Once in the GDR, Biermann recognized the restraints on his musical career and composed critical musical messages in order to mock the political practices of the GDR. In short, from 1965 to 1976 Biermann was banned from performing and publishing. Following the end of the ban, however, he returned to performing his original works. As a result, the GDR expatriated Biermann in November 1976.

Renft and Biermann provide two examples of extreme cultural defiance on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, many other East German musicians who fought alongside them continued after they had moved West. By the 1980s, the context for East German musicians had changed. Many up-and-coming artists performed in the
new punk rock genre, which became a further nuisance to the SED. A few of the artists were even able to remain licensed and live in the GDR. Lesser-known groups were no longer constantly targeted and probably experienced very little hassle. Some groups preferred to stay out of trouble altogether and adapt their music to the socialist agenda. In the end, traditionalism was the safest way to remain intact.

The political oppression that characterized the GDR clashed with citizens’ yearning for Western culture. Musicians who wished to express their appreciation of musical heroes in the West faced particular trouble. The Klaus Renft Combo and Wolf Biermann refused to conform, writing songs critical of the socialist system that were understood and enjoyed by their fans. East German audiences related to their message, causing the SED to suppress musicians either by jailing them or by forcing them to go West. Eastern musical martyrs had limited avenues through which to protest, and the SED effectively upset their attempts.

The Federal Republic of Germany: Udo Lindenberg’s Peace Ideology

While the cultural and political situation of the East looked glum, West Germany was more conducive to protest. Udo Lindenberg, a West German singer-songwriter, came ready to challenge the daunting politics of the Cold War. Lindenberg grew up in Gronau, West Germany. According to Annette Bluhdorn, he experienced “a childhood dominated by the economic miracle and political consolidation of the 1950s, further based on a lower-middle-class lifestyle and strong Catholic convictions.”

His childhood in the West allowed him to set his priorities and shaped his dream for the future.

To understand Lindenberg’s musical ambition, it is important to understand his position alongside other musicians whose role models were Western artists. Lindenberg’s inspiration to begin his career as a rock ‘n’ roll drummer was none other than Elvis Presley. Lindenberg credited Elvis and Bill Haley, among many other American artists, for motivating him to become a musician. He writes, “I pulled myself up by his example, and with that, the decision about my choice of career—sailor or drummer—was made. Elvis helped pave the runway from which many musicians, myself included, eventually took off in their own jets.” Elvis’s influence on Lindenberg did not reflect Lindenberg’s political ambition. However, the beginning of Lindenberg’s career, heightened by freedom of opportunity and the inspiration of others like Elvis, marked the beginning of his musical journey to give a voice to those without one.

By the late 1960s, Lindenberg's career as a musician began to emerge. Invoking Germanness, Lindenberg sang in his native language throughout his career, which makes interpretation for a non-German speaker difficult. Several sources aided my search to understand Lindenberg’s appeal. Historian Edward Larkey argued that Lindenberg “utilized the daily jargon of pub-goers, musicians, youths, and outcasts to tell stories of different people and figures.”

Lindenberg puts together a real model of “the people’s” feelings, marking his style by drawing off the everyday German people. For example, in his song “Strassen-Fieber” (“Fever Street”), Lindenberg describes “the potential for protest among young people who find themselves conflicting with coldness and inhumanity of society, mendacity and unreliability of politicians, and apathy and insensitivity of older generations.” It is unclear to which side of the Iron
Curtain Lindenberg directed his words, however. Initially, “the metaphor of fever suggests that young people’s protest against socio-political status quo are comparable to an immune system’s response to illness.”

Lindenberg’s career made him more than a musician. With his politically charged messages, Bluhdorn asserts that “Lindenberg engaged the East-West conflict of the Cold War and was strongly committed to bringing the two German states closer together.” Lindenberg’s life in West Germany, she argues, helped him make a Cold War statement through his unconventional songs while his motives encouraged the two nations to “come together,” even if he did not “advocate for German unification.”

What then were his motives? Bluhdorn believes that Lindenberg was looking more for “unconditional recognition of the GDR by the FRG and further development of good contacts between the two.” Ideally, this meant that the maintenance of a better relationship and more effective communication between the FRG and GDR had the potential to influence the GDR to be more cooperative and less oppressive.

Furthermore, among the amusing features of Lindenberg’s political music was his fascination with the GDR and his goal of crossing the Iron Curtain to promote his idea of development. Unfortunately, Erich Honecker expressed disgust at the “criticism and protest apparent in Lindenberg’s lyrics dealing with political issues.” It seems his criticism of the GDR’s refusal to develop was most prevalent, and his calls to action were intended to inspire GDR citizens to protest, an action despised by the SED. Due to his persistence, Lindenberg became a constant thorn in Honecker’s side and the general secretary banned him and his music.

However, Lindenberg was determined to have a relationship with Honecker. Early in their struggling association, Lindenberg published a song titled “Special Train to Pankow,” an electrified contra facta of “Chattanooga Choo Choo” by Glenn Miller, an American musician and composer. Intended for Honecker, the significance of the song was primarily a self-invitation from Lindenberg for a drink with Honecker in the residential district of Pankow in the GDR capital. The blunt lyrics were not appropriate for the socialist state. For example, Lindenberg wrote, “Excuse me, is this the Special Train to Pankow? / I need to have a short trip to East-Berlin / I’ve got to get something straight with your chief-indian.” Nevertheless, he goes further, “Oooh, Erich, hey, is it true you’re such a squareminded troll?” This provocation resulted in Honecker vetoing Lindenberg’s self-invitation. However, the song made its way into the GDR music scene and was played in clubs, where two unfortunate disc jockeys were caught by the Stasi and served five-month prison terms for playing the banned artist.

In 1983, Lindenberg again requested a chance to perform in the East and, to his astonishment, Honecker finally obliged. At the recommendation of fellow SED officials, Honecker sought other musicians to perform as well “so that his visit would not degenerate into a ‘concert of Lindenberg only.’” Agreed upon and communicated, Lindenberg’s management reached out to “American singer and peace activist, Harry Belafonte, who was added to Lindenberg’s act.”

Lindenberg and Belafonte arrived in East Berlin on October 25, 1983, to play at the Palace of the Republic, which Lorenz Luthi calls “Erich’s Lamp Shop” because of the large number of light bulbs. Luthi recounts that Lindenberg did not realize he would be performing for “a blue-shirted and politically reliable Free German Youth (FDJ) activist group, while his real fans remained outside, ‘loudly’ demanding access.”
Undaunted, Lindenberg performed his concert, an SED preapproved set, inside the “lamp shop.” At the end of his set, to the surprise of the SED, Lindenberg addressed the audience claiming, “we want peace, neither a cold nor a hot war’ completely astonishing the East German activists.” Although “the GDR saw Lindenberg as a tool in a desperate mobilization campaign initiated by the Warsaw Pact,” Lindenberg was acting on his own. Lindenberg had his say and went home to the West awaiting a chance to tour the East.

A tour deal was worked out between Lindenberg’s management and the SED for 1984, which was later cancelled because Honecker grew impatient with Lindenberg’s politicized lyrics. The musician was officially banned from East Germany in 1984 and received no invitations to return. Following many attempts to recreate a deal, Lindenberg tried to contact Honecker in 1987 following a round of protests near the wall in the East. According to Bluhdorn, he appealed to Honecker for greater tolerance of youth culture, and even sent the East German leader “a leather jacket,” which is kept today in a museum in Rostock, Germany. Lindenberg’s effort was valiant even if Honecker eventually undermined his campaign. Indeed, his hard work made an impact. In 2014, “Lindenberg was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz am bande (The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) to honor his commitment to German-German cultural exchange, the contribution of his lyrics to the discussion of social and political issues, and his dedication to the German language within popular music.” Although Lindenberg was unable to visit the East again, he “achieved political fame for his performance in the GDR, contributing an added success to the peace movement in the FRG,” and his actions led to the buildup of politicized dissent yet to come.

Rock in the 1980s: The Generation That Witnessed the Fall of the Wall

Although they met many roadblocks, German musicians like Klaus Renft, Wolf Biermann, and Udo Lindenberg paved the way for the new culture of politicized music to combat the Iron Curtain. As the Cold War dragged on into the 1980s, more musicians followed their path and advocated for reunification. In this section of my research, I examine non-German musicians who joined the movement, such as David Bowie and Genesis. As author Toby Thacker has argued, “Musicians who were so embroiled in the confrontations of the early Cold War in Germany took note of the cultural ideals presented to them by the super power centers, but provided their own distinct understanding of how these applied to their peripheral struggle.” The use of new political messages to fit with the most recent issues became the new wave of hope for the 1980s. Peter Wicke argues that “rock musicians were instrumental in setting in motion the actual course of events which led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the GDR.”

Furthermore, Tony Mitchell contends that “rock music represented probably the most widespread vehicle of youth rebellion, resistance, and independence, behind the Iron Curtain.” One of the best examples to consider is a three-day music festival, which took place in 1987. Staged in West Berlin, opposite the Reichstag, East Berliners could also hear the performance. David Bowie, Genesis, and others entertained the crowd as East Berlin residents gathered near the wall and enjoyed the music. Intended as a cultural festival, it turned into a rock’n’ roll riot for the East. As the guards tried to shoo people from the wall, residents began to chant “Gorbachev! Gorbachev!” in an attempt to appeal to East German authorities and to copy some reforms aimed at easing restrictions on expression.” Of course, the SED leadership blamed the West for the riot.
What was it about Genesis and David Bowie that caused such a riot in the first place? Bowie’s contribution evolved through several decades of his personal experience with the Berlin Wall. Bowie, a British musician, lived in West Berlin at the time he wrote his 1977 song “Heroes,” which is about a couple separated by the wall. Bowie wrote, “I can remember, standing, by the wall / and the guns, shot above our heads / and we kissed, as though nothing could fall / and the shame, was on the other side.” For Bowie and the rest of the Cold War population, this song was “an anthem of optimism and defiance in a time surrounded by hopelessness and terror.” Furthermore, Bowie’s concert was surreal for those in the West and those who could hear it over the wall in the East. Only a week later, President Reagan visited West Berlin and, standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate, spoke the famous words, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

Further evidence of this change is presented in a song by Genesis, a British rock band, titled “Land of Confusion,” released in 1986 on their album Invisible Touch. While Bowie’s song is focused on the trouble in Berlin, Genesis’s song is full of references to problems, not just in Germany, but all over the world. In one line from the song, the group explains how rock musicians set society in motion by singing, “I won’t be coming home tonight/ my generation will put it right.” The subsequent 1986 music video appeals to the confusion that Genesis was attempting to portray. At the end of the video, President Ronald Reagan wakes up in the night, drinks a glass of water, and expresses to Nancy Reagan his need for another. Reaching for the nurse button, situated next to a nuke button, at the side of his bed and confused between the two, he accidentally hits the nuke button and the world explodes. Obviously, the ending reflects the fear of the arms race; however, using only assumptions, this song is a mid-1980s call to action against the Iron Curtain.

James Shingler, in his “Rocking the Wall,” recounts the 1988 performance by American singer-songwriter Bruce Springsteen in East Berlin. Unaware of Springsteen’s notable style for expressing freedom through his music, the SED was shocked when the artist announced, “It’s nice to be in East Berlin. I am not for or against a government. I came to play rock ‘n’ roll for you in the hope that one day all barriers will be torn down.” Later, in 1989, “the Rocker Resolution was drafted by singer-songwriters Steffen Mensching and Hans-Eckardt Wenzeland signed by a number of well-known artists all over the GDR,” expressing the angry sentiments of musicians toward the SED. As an “important part of the GDR reform” the Rocker Resolution caused the SED committee for entertainment “to meet in October 1989, a meeting that was ‘the first official acknowledgement of and reaction to the worsening political situation in East Germany.’” While the resolution and other concerts did not cause the wall to fall, musicians deserve some credit for assisting in the collapse.

Conclusion

In short, political music gave hope to the German population on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the darkest of days of the Cold War. Although the SED was effective in silencing musical protest, especially during the late 1950s to the early 1960s East Germans listened to and supported their musicians. The fact that the SED was forced to expatriate Wolf Biermann and ban the music of the Klaus Renft Combo and Udo Lindenberg proves the impact of their messages on society. Still, the SED was not able to force musicians to change their messages. Even after being censored
by the GDR, Wolf Biermann continued to protest. While it may be too much to claim that these musicians directly caused the fall of the Berlin Wall, their insistence on using music to portray to political leaders the powerless feelings of East German citizens must be acknowledged.

Did the German population realize, when foreign militaries occupied their country in 1945, that cultural influences would play such a huge role in their lives? When the German population first encountered Westernization, many from the older generation turned away with disapproval. Over time, disaffection with the GDR rose from the masses in East and West Germany, inspiring dissent and transforming a musical fight against the closed-mindedness of the SED. Westernized music gave a voice to the people, helping to end the Cold War and bring down the Iron Curtain.

At the end of the road, what became of our German musical heroes? After the Cold War, the Klaus Renft Combo reunited. Sadly, the death of Gerulf Pannach prevented a complete reunion. It was later discovered that Pannach died from his lengthy exposure to radiation during imprisonment in the GDR. The Klaus Renft Combo continued to record through the 1990s and even remastered their old music onto a greatest hits album titled *As If Nothing Happened*. Klaus Renft passed away in 2006. As for Wolf Biermann and Udo Lindenberg, the fall of the Iron Curtain meant they and their music were available throughout reunited Germany. Back on tour, millions of screaming fans from all over the country came to greet each of them. Wolf Biermann and Udo Lindenberg are still alive today and continue to compose and perform.

If there is one thing to remember about the Klaus Renft Combo, Wolf Biermann, and Udo Lindenberg, it is that their music shaped a powerful message that contributed to defeating the stigma of war. When considering the role of censorship versus the disobedience of those who believe in free expression, the impact becomes impressive. Musicians laughed in the face of the government and composed political music, leaving a legacy for the German people.

**Notes**

5. Jarausch, 120.
10. Volker Berghahn and Uta Poiger, “An East German Rock ’n’ Roll Riot at the Wall Turns Political (June 10, 1987),” *German History in Documents and Images*, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1118 (accessed October 26, 2017). The context of social unrest as a factor of rock ’n’ roll will be explored in more detail further on in this paper. The introduction of social unrest in this section is to give you an understanding of occurrences in reaction to the presence of Western music culture in the GDR. In June 1987, a journalist from the *International Herald Tribune* reported on a three-day series of riots that occurred near the Berlin Wall in East Berlin: “The riots broke out as police attempted to bar young pop music fans from standing near the wall to listen to the concert that was happening just on the other side. Several youth were arrested and wrestled into police cars, some even having been beaten by police with nightsticks. In an interview, the East German authorities denied having clashed with the youth and explained that there had been Western attempts to provoke trouble.”


13. Poiger, 44.


15. Poiger, 44.


19. Ibid., 86.


23. Funder, 185.

24. Ibid., 185–86.

25. Ibid., 187.


27. Leitner, 30.

28. Funder, 188.

29. Larkey, 246.

31. Funder, 189.

32. Ibid., 190.


34. Leitner, 30.


36. Robb, 126.

37. Ibid., 126.

38. Ibid., 134.


42. Bluhdorn, 188.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 151.

45. Ibid., 191.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 180.


50. Luthi, 88.

51. Ibid., 94.

52. Luthi, 96.

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., 84.
55. Bluhdorn, 195.
56. Ibid., 151.
57. Luthi, 84.
65. James Shingler, “Rocking the Wall.”
66. Ibid.
67. Funder, 191.

Bibliography


