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Conference Report: Music in Divided Germany

Johanna Yunker

The Music in Divided Germany Conference, organized by Emily Richmond Pollock and Anicia Timberlake, was held September 9–11, 2011, at the University of California, Berkeley. Over sixty international scholars gathered to hear twenty-three presentations focusing on the relationship between the musical cultures of East and West Germany. The conference was an important moment for the study of divided Germany, bringing together senior and junior scholars from both sides of the Atlantic.

Anne C. Schreffler, Amy C. Beal, and Joy H. Calico each discussed the current status of Cold War musicology in individual keynote talks. Schreffler outlined the challenges of writing about East Germany after the Cold War, emphasizing the biases that western scholars may continue to hold as “victors” of the War. Beal examined how East-West constructs from the Cold War still inform scholarship, using as an example the historiography on John Cage. For her part, Calico focused on the status of East German studies, advocating a shift from an abstract discussion of ideology to an examination of the individual’s relationship to East German politics.

Three broad themes emerged from the papers: German music’s relationship to the past, engagement with foreigners, and the importance of opera during this period. The conference began with four comparative papers dedicated to examining how both East and West Germany dealt with the Nazi past. Toby Thacker presented on denazification efforts in Occupied Germany between 1945 and 1949 and its impact on emergent musical cultures in the 1950s. Florian Scheduling and Pamela Potter both addressed musicology in the 1960s and 1970s. Scheduling focused on the trend of *Exilforschung* and the differences in East and West German biographies of Jewish exiles. Potter read East German musicology and West German musicology in light of their respective ideologies, and reflected the archival work she conducted in Germany in the

1980s. Boris von Haken examined the case of Udo Zimmermann's *Weisse Rose*, explaining that the two versions—one for East and one for West Germany—were representative of their distinct national identities. Another panel was dedicated to earlier German pasts: Lydia Rilling spoke of the Romantic influences on Mauricio Kagel's *Aus Deutschland*, and Neil Gregor read Hindemith's performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Bayreuth Festival in 1953 against Hindemith's reputation in Weimar Germany. Laura Silverberg's paper on musical borrowing in the GDR suggested that this musical practice, in fact, has its roots in the 1930s and 1940s. She called for historians and musicologists to expand their scope when studying divided Germany and to look for connections to earlier periods.

Four other scholars drew connections between Germany and other countries. Abby Anderton and Kira Thurman addressed America's connections to music in divided Germany. Anderton examined America's cultural agenda during the years of occupation (1945–1949). Thurman considered East Germany's ideas of race through the story of African American singer Paul Robeson and his tours of East Germany. Her paper exposed the racial tensions in his reception, most significantly the perpetuation of the aesthetic myth of the African American's natural musicality. Jürgen Thym and Andrea Bohlman focused on European connections. Thym's paper dealt with the Italian composer Luca Lombardi, who lived in both Germanies. Bohlman's presentation was an ethnographic study of three trips from Warsaw, Poland, to East Berlin: one made by a musicology student in 1979, another by composers of electronic music in 1983, and a third by protesting punk musicians in 1989.

Opera composition, mentioned in the talks by Haken and Rilling, was the focus of many other papers. Boris Blacher's *Die Flut*, the first opera composed and performed in postwar occupied Germany, was the subject of Andrew Oster's paper. William Robin addressed Cold War politics by focusing on B. A. Zimmermann's operatic atomic bombs in *Die Soldaten* and *Les Rondeaux*. Emily Richmond Pollock expanded the boundaries of West German modern opera by examining Boris Blacher and Werner Egk's *Abstrakte Oper Nr. 1*.

An entire session was dedicated to opera staging. Paul Chaikin questioned the radicalness of politicized opera stagings, suggesting that they, in fact, masked a static tradition. Elaine Kelly offered an in-depth examination of two productions of the *Ring* by East German directors—one by Joachim Herz (Leipzig, 1974–76) and another by Ruth Berghaus (Frankfurt, 1985–87). Kelly explained that Herz’s style of realism and Berghaus’s style of allegory reflected shifts in Cold War politics. Johanna Frances Yunker focused on *Les Troyens* (1983), another Berghaus production, in Frankfurt am Main, explaining how Berghaus took inspiration from GDR feminist author Christa Wolf and from the pacifist movement to present a staging that resonated with both East and West German audiences.

Three papers that focused on more popular forms of music complemented the many talks on art music. Jeff Hayton described the changing attitudes of the East German government toward punk music in the early 1980s. Michael Schmidt focused on the jazz music debate held at a meeting of the East Berlin Academy of Arts in 1956. He contextualized the contrary positions of Reginald Rudorf and Hanns Eisler as having derived from their backgrounds in art and popular music, respectively. Juliane Brauer compared the use of choral music in education in East and West Germany by looking at both the ideals of an artistic education and the newly composed pieces for students.

Those interested in more details about the conference may visit the website:

<https://sites.google.com/site/musicindividedgermany/>