

JOURNEYS-JOURNAL-DIARY: HISTORY, NARRATIVE, (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY

JAZZ IN THE GDR

Cultural Transfer, Appropriation and Nonconformist Jazz Communities of “Eigen-Sinn” in Thuringia 1963-1989

This paper proposes an alternative historicization of jazz music in the GDR, its culture and communities by combining a regional study based on twenty in-depth biographical interviews, historic research and music analysis, exploring answers to questions of personal meanings and cultural practices by means of previously unheard-of everyday-lives of jazz fans and jazz musicians.

Offering a *way of life* besides the norms of society, Thuringian jazz clubs were venues, imagined and manifest spaces of jazz culture: nonconformist communities, that can be understood through concepts of *Cultural Transfer*, *Eigen-Sinn*, and *Appropriation*.¹

Actual appropriation processes of jazz music are being retraced and displayed through rare audio material of professional and amateur jazz artists, answering questions of how jazz was learned and practiced.²

As jazz transgressed from “subculture” to “high culture”, the communities and musicians were indeed collaborating with state institutions and ideology to the point of necessity, but rarely further. How did the dictatorship’s cultural institutions regulate, manage, and also facilitate local jazz cultures? Following the notion that ideology and power are always negotiable social practices, ranging between ideological meaning and the individual attribution of meaning, what were the dynamics of interplay between the Socialist Unity Party and jazz enthusiasts?³

Combining approaches from everyday-life history, musicology and various types of media, the paper seeks to contribute to the question of how to write the history of jazz.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFO

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¹ For *Eigen-Sinn*, see Glossary, in: Alf Lüdtke: *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton 1995, p. 313-314.

² Recently German Popular Musicology explored new approaches and meanings of the concept of appropriation, see: Dietmar Elflein and Bernhard Weber: *Aneignungsformen populärer Musik. Klänge, Netzwerke, Geschichte(n) und wildes Lernen*, Bielefeld 2017.

³ See: Thomas Lindenberger: “Eigen-Sinn, Domination and No Resistance“, Version 1.0, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 3.8.2015, Link: http://docupedia.de/zg/Lindenberger_eigensinn_v1_en_2015?oldid=127938.