

HELMA KALDEWEY (2020). *A PEOPLE'S MUSIC. JAZZ IN EAST GERMANY, 1945-1990.*

A review by Martin Breternitz

A People's Music by Helma Kaldewey aims for the daunting task of presenting a full and comprehensive historical depiction of jazz in the former socialist East Germany. An ample amount of academic works that focus on jazz behind the Iron Curtain¹ were published in the past ten years alone, examining musical practices and their (trans)national histories under state socialism.² Prominently, *The History of European Jazz*, a 742 pages compendium of 47 nation by nation contributions edited by Francesco Martinelli,³ which includes a comparative history of jazz in East and West Germany by Martin Pfleiderer, Wolfram Knauer's *Play yourself, man!*,⁴ and Bruce Johnson's continuous works in the field of *Jazz Diaspora*⁵ are providing new perspectives on the field of historical jazz research. Yet until now, there was no extensive monograph in English exclusively devoted to jazz in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic).

The book operates chronologically—a conventional, yet not an undebated method for engaging with popular music history. Empirical data stems from large-scale examinations of official government documents, archives of the

1 Gertrud Pickhan / Rüdiger Ritter (eds.) (2010). *Jazz behind the Iron Curtain*. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang.

2 Among others: Christian Schmidt-Rost (2015). *Jazz in der DDR und Polen*. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang; Siegfried Schmidt-Joos (2016). *Die Stasi swingt nicht*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung; Katharina Weißenbacher (2018). *Jazz unter Kontrolle des Systems* (Dissertation). Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Graz (recently published in the series *Jazz under State Socialism* by Verlag Peter Lang, Frankfurt/M in 2020).

3 Reviewed by Lawrence Davies (2019): »Francesco Martinelli (ed.) (2018). *The History of European Jazz*.« In: *Samples 17*. Ed. by Eva Krisper and Eva Schuck.

4 Wolfram Knauer (2019): »*Play yourself, man!*« *Die Geschichte des Jazz in Deutschland*. Stuttgart: Reclam.

5 Bruce Johnson (ed.) (2017). *Jazz and Totalitarianism*. New York/London: Routledge.

Stasi,⁶ private and visual records, as well as 40 oral histories conducted with professional musicians, fans, and jazz ›advocates‹ of the GDR jazz scene.⁷ The strength of the book's structural approach lies in summarizing and contextualizing national as well as East-West ideologies and policies, depicting continuities and discontinuities of jazz's development in East Germany. Starting with this music's first appearances in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, the book concludes with the ruptures caused by the social transformations that followed 1989/90's Peaceful Revolution.

The first of six chapters (›Jazz in Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918-1945‹) engages with jazz in the cultural life of the Weimar Republic and follows up by discussing its status in Nazi Germany, tracing political actions of the Nazis' anti-jazz convictions back to their ideologies. Reservations were strongly connected with the Nazis' perception that jazz was generally incompatible with the German cultural identity (13). Still, nonconformist youth groups such as the ›Swing Youth‹ (›Swing-Jugend‹) emerged and refused to be in line with the Nazis' mass organizations and world view (21).

Chapter two (›Jazz in the Soviet Zone‹), spanning from 1945-1949, discusses how the Soviets fostered jazz by quickly rebuilding East Germany's cultural life. The chapter further explores the emergence of the narrative of jazz being an African American music of an ›oppressed people within the capitalist system‹ (40). This ideological approach, it seems, was popularly adopted early on by Soviet communist organizations such as the Comintern (Communist International), later becoming the ›go-to argumentation‹ for pro-jazz advocates in socialist societies. This is followed by an extensive analysis of ›diverging cultural concepts‹ in the Cold War's ›ideological competition‹ (49), namely the discourse about ›socialist realism‹ as opposed to the so-called ›formalism‹.

In ›Jazz in the Founding Years of the GDR, 1949-1961‹ (chapter three), Kaldewey shows how stances on jazz of both GDR and the Soviet Union gradually changed from considering it inherent antifascist music to regarding it as some sort of ›Trojan Horse‹ that subversively imported American culture. Especially the Zentralkomitee (ZK, Central Committee of the GDR) attributed pivotal and critical aspects to art as a central means of socialist mass education (90). As an example, cultural institutional debates on a ›National Dance Culture‹ (91) are analyzed, following discourses about whether, how, and which jazz should contribute to said culture.

6 Short for Staatssicherheit—State Security Service: GDR's vast intelligence service and secret police.

7 Among them Bert Noglik, Konrad Bauer, Ulli Blobel, and Karlheinz Drechsel as well as state-involved functionaries such as Rolf Reichelt and Walter Cikan.

Chapter four (»Jazz behind the Wall«), spanning from 1961-1971, depicts aspects of the cultural life after the Berlin Wall had been constructed, causing an increase of jazz events and people's commitments to the music. As before, Kaldewey examines high-level cultural-bureaucratical processes, such as a 1962 »Jazz Resolution« by the ZK that pronounced measures of centralization and micromanagement, explicitly stating that »jazz events should not be prohibited«, but instead »rightfully integrated in our musical life« (160). The Stasi's methods and influence are explored through documents and reports from Berlin-based influential jazz critic Werner »Josh« Sellhorn (IM Zirkel).⁸

Chapter five (»The Rise of New Jazz, 1971-1979«) offers global and national perspectives on the emergence and dissemination of free jazz, which accompanied the increase of alternative life concepts of jazz fans in the GDR. Kaldewey's narration is witty and well-written, as the section »The STASI at Woodstock« exemplifies, referring to the influential, subcultural 1970's and '80's free jazz festivals Jazzwerkstatt Peitz, colloquially named »Woodstock at the Carp Pond«.⁹

In the last decade of the East German socialist state, jazz unarguably had made its way into the official cultural canon and was widely popular. Kaldewey exerts this notion in chapter six (»»A National Treasure«: Jazz made in GDR«) by narrating and comparing aspects of the renowned festival Leipziger Jazztage (held since 1976 by the Jazzclub in Leipzig) to the state-organized 1. Jazztage der DDR,¹⁰ which took place in Weimar in 1985. Examining these festivals provides new insights into the involvement and practices of cultural-political entities such as the Kulturbund der DDR (Cultural Association of the GDR) and the Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst (Committee for Entertaining Arts). Kaldewey concludes with an outlook on the progression of jazz activities in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The book's literary title— *A People's Music*—originates from American author Sidney Finkelstein's *Jazz: A People's Music* (1948) which was translated and published in West Germany in 1951.¹¹ It was perceived as an early »standard

8 »IM«: Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (unofficial contributor). »Zirkel« (Circle) supposedly refers to a common expression for jazz associations and jazz clubs—»jazz circle«—and points to Sellhorn's vast network of musicians and fans.

9 Ulli Blobel (ed.) (2011). *Woodstock am Karpfenteich: Die Jazzwerkstatt Peitz*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung; Rainer Bratfish (ed.) (2005). *Freie Töne. Die Jazzszene in der DDR*. Berlin: Ch. Links.

10 »1st Jazz Days of the GDR«, held on December 6-8, 1985 in Weimar.

11 The German translation of the book title though is Jazz, only.

work in the East« by jazz fans and intellectuals, offering »an alternative, more politicized source to Joachim Ernst Berendt's *Jazz Buch*« (109). As a sort of leitmotif, the title represents a central premise towards relevant overarching questions in the field of historical jazz research in socialism: To whom did this music belong? What roles did state ideologies and institutions play—and in return: What roles did historical actors, such as fans, musicians, or promoters attribute to themselves? Here, the author uses the concept of ›the people‹ (›das Volk‹) to unravel and follow the ambiguous and often parallel ideological and political connotations of jazz: The music is both regarded antifascist and Western decadent at the same time, and discourses and measurements about ›integration in‹ or ›exclusion from‹ a »Socialist Entertainment Music« (›Sozialistische Unterhaltungsmusik‹) were continuous.

»East German jazz discourse«—key insights

By meticulously analyzing numerous historical documents on the central government level,¹² the book sheds light onto two particular desiderata:

First, it shows the origins, roles, and significances of two ideological concepts that jazz in the GDR had to deal with: 1) Jazz being an African American art form, expressing »victimization by imperialism« and thus being directed against »capitalism and its inherent racism« (46). 2) The notion of jazz as a GDR specific ›national‹ art form. This »East German jazz discourse« (55) about ›true‹ vs. ›corrupt‹ jazz is comprehensibly put into the contexts of the debates about formalism vs. socialist realism.

Secondly, the phenomenon of multiple changes that took place in the cultural policies of the SED party¹³ regarding jazz is further explored. These »pendulum swings of a cultural dictatorship«¹⁴ to date are not systematically captured. By analyzing processes of cultural institutions and mass organizations, Kaldewey shows that the state did not assume a passive role, but was rather an »active, generative participant in the creation and management of jazz culture« (xvii) challenging a still common claim that »jazz in East Germany was a cultural form perpetually in opposition to state ideology« (xiv).

12 Especially the Zentralkomitee (Central Committee); Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten (State Commission for the Arts); Komitee für Unterhaltungskunst (Committee for Entertaining Arts), Ministerium für Kultur (Ministry for Culture); and Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security).

13 Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany).

14 Frank Hoffmann (2014). *Kulturgeschichte der DDR: Ein Überblick*. Erfurt: Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung Thüringen, p. 59.

Contextualizing *A People's Music* into current research allows some insights into the reliability, validity—or rather quality—of historicization processes in the field of GDR jazz history. Looking closely at the vast amount of archival sources investigated by Kaldewey, she often does not draw from the same documents and sources as other researchers did before, but reaches similar conclusions, for example: the significances of 1950's vivid jazz activities in Leipzig by Reginald Rudolf (›the Jazz Marxist‹) and Siegfried Schmidt-Joos in nearby Halle; the impact of the Berlin label Free Music Production (FMP); an »emancipation« of jazz in the GDR in the late 1960s and early '70s.¹⁵ In identifying and contextualizing the efficacy of cultural ideologies, cultural institutions, mass organizations, and overall Cold War diplomacies, new insights into ›why‹ and ›how‹ jazz came to be included into GDR's cultural canon are discussed in the book. In these aspects, in my view, *A People's Music* does excel.

Biographical episodes and narratives occasionally provide glimpses into some everyday-life experiences of GDR jazz fans, musicians, and organizers. For example, jazz journalist Karlheinz Drechsel (Dixieland Festival Dresden) recounts his childhood in the bombed city of Dresden shortly after the end of WWII, and previously unpublished photographs from archives of private GDR jazz aficionados are presented. But despite the large number of oral histories gathered by Kaldewey, one could argue that these perspectives are rarely visible and somewhat not essentially contributing to the book's general narration. For future endeavors, this still leaves aspects of cultural, musical, and social ›grassroots practices‹ of jazz in the GDR unexplored, for example, the formative role of the more than 60 jazz clubs. Here, jazz enthusiasts created their own meanings and attributions towards jazz, considering themselves and ›their‹ music non-conformist and ›along-side‹, rather than in direct opposition to the state, while semi-legally organizing thousands of jazz concerts and dozens of jazz festivals each year. Jazz fans often imagined themselves as part of a global, transnational community¹⁶ and strategically (›eigensinnig‹)¹⁷ utilized state frameworks and ideologies locally. This jazz engagement, although more integrated into a socialist society, aligns to other

15 Martin Pfeleiderer (2018). »Jazz in Germany«. In: *The History of European Jazz. The Music, Musicians and Audience in Context*. Ed. by Francesco Martinelli. Sheffield: Equinox, 96-119, p. 110.

16 Christian Schmidt-Rost (2015). *Jazz in der DDR und Polen. Geschichte eines transatlantischen Transfers*. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, pp. 4, 12.

17 For detailed information on the concept see Thomas Lindenberger (2015). »Eigen-Sinn, Domination and No Resistance.« Version 1.0. In: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, http://docupedia.de/zg/Lindenberger_eigensinn_v1_en_2015, Access: 27.8.2020.

cultural and social non-conformist music-related scenes that were flourishing in East Germany in the 1970s and '80s, such as Blues, Metal, and Punk.¹⁸ Kaldewey refers to these limitations of her research in the book early on, acknowledging that looking for jazz culture in GDR outside of the large urban spaces are still necessary desiderata.

Kaldewey's historical work *A People's Music. Jazz in East Germany, 1945-1990* contributes valuable insights into the academic knowledge and discourses in the field of historical jazz research. She is providing a vast amount of new sources and rendering the topic of jazz under state socialism more accessible for international audiences, especially since research on jazz in the former GDR was mainly written in German—until now.

Helma Kaldewey (2020). *A People's Music. Jazz in East Germany, 1945-1990*. New York: Cambridge University Press (340 pp., Hardback: \$99,99; 77, 69 €).

18 Peter Wurschi (2007). *Rennsteigbeat: Jugendliche Subkulturen im Thüringer Raum 1952-1989*. Cologne: Böhlau; Wolf-Georg Zaddach (2018). *Heavy Metal in der DDR: Szene, Akteure, Praktiken*. Bielefeld: transcript; Michael Rauhut / Thomas Kochan / Christoph Dieckmann (eds.) (2004). *Bye bye, Lübben City. Bluesfreaks, Tramps und Hippies in der DDR*. Berlin: Schwarzkopf und Schwarzkopf.