

**Berlin Program Alumni Roundtable
at the 32nd Annual GSA Conference
October 2 - 5, 2008 in St. Paul, Minnesota**

**Making the GDR: Constructing a Socialist Society in the East After 1945
Saturday, October 4, 2008**

Moderator: Brian Puaca, Christopher Newport University, Berlin Program Fellow 2002-2003

Musical Remigration: Schoenberg's 'Survivor from Warsaw' in Postwar Europe
Joy Calico, Vanderbilt University, Berlin Program Fellow 1997-1998

Memory Restoration and the Socialists' Cemetery in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde
Jon Olsen, George Mason University, Berlin Program Fellow 1999-2000

Music for the Masses: The Musical Landscape of East Germany in the First Postwar Decade
David Tompkins, University of Tennessee, Berlin Program Fellow 2000-2001

**'Wiederaufbaufütterung' and the German Past: The Meanings of Feeding Workers
for Reconstruction, 1945-1949**
Alice Weinreb, University of Michigan, Berlin Program Fellow 2006-2007

This panel brought together alumni of the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies to discuss their research on the construction of postwar East Germany. The interdisciplinary panel showcased the work of historians and musicologists whose research examines cultural and social changes within the GDR during the first postwar decades. In particular, these projects focused on music, labor, food, and historical memory. Because it was a roundtable, presenters spoke for approximately ten minutes each and then the audience asked questions. A lively discussion among the panelists and audience dominated the final half-hour of the panel.

David Tompkins opened his presentation by offering the basic premise that music served an important function in instituting and maintaining the communist regimes of East Central Europe from the end of the war to the late 1950s. His project compares the role of music in helping the ruling parties establish legitimacy in Poland and East Germany. The communist parties in both states invested considerable resources in the attempt to create an authorized musical language that would secure and maintain hegemony over the cultural and wider social world. Despite these efforts at total control from above, Tompkins demonstrated that a striking degree of contestation, creativity, and even innovation existed throughout this period. Furthermore, he explained that there existed considerable space for intense discussion and indeed negotiation among numerous, differing musical and political pressure groups. Restoring agency to East Germans and attempting to gauge the reception of cultural policies in these two dictatorships, his project underscores the power of music as one of the "softer" forms of political control.

The second presenter, Joy Calico, discussed the performance and reception of a single piece of music (Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw*) on both sides of the Iron Curtain between 1948 and 1961. Schoenberg was Jewish, had been the iconic representative of European musical modernism and vilified by the Nazis as such, went into exile and became an American citizen, and died in 1951 without setting foot in Europe again. His composition *Survivor* was one of the first artworks to deal explicitly with events of the Holocaust and of German culpability. Calico explained that she had selected this composition in order to hit "as many of the exposed nerves of the immediate postwar period as possible". In her evaluations of the performances throughout the postwar, she sought two specific things: 1) the performance and reception history of the piece that were site-specific; and 2) the common themes that emerged in the performance and reception history across the Cold War divide. In so doing, her work draws attention to the importance of the postwar international music festival circuit which served as a contact point between east and west, as well as lingering anti-Semitism and early discussions of the Holocaust. Citing the work of Marita Krauss, Calico also addressed the remigration of ideas in postwar Europe, which refers to the agency and reception of cultural products created by émigrés who did not physically return after 1945.

Shifting from music to food, Alice Weinreb discussed feeding practices as a way of opening up questions about the significance of food for the history of socialism and of postwar Germany. In a state self-defined as one of 'farmers and workers', Weinreb argued, food could be imagined as a link between these two categories; farmers as the producers of food enabled the labor of workers, who, in turn, created the national economy. However, the fact that food was always both produced and consumed, that it was the most individual of activities yet at the same time constitutive of community, meant that the SED was unable to adequately dictate the shape of a socialist food culture. She devoted special attention to the canteen programs set up by the Soviet occupiers, often in collaboration with German communists, in the Soviet Zone of Occupation. The canteen was seen as the 'just' answer to the capitalist model of production and consumption, which was based on an inverse relationship: the more one produced, the less one consumed (therefore the 'fat capitalists' and the scrawny proletariat). East Germany claimed to have finally restored equity – one ate only in ratio to how much one worked. She closed by highlighting the paradoxical nature of this equation (that food is in fact necessary in order to work and cannot simply be a reward for having produced) and raised questions about the ways in which economic systems dictate the patterns of everyday life.

The final presenter, Jon Olsen, examined the process of social reconstruction in the East through analyzing the attempts of the GDR leadership to reconnect with working-class traditions of the pre-1933 period. His presentation centered on one of the first places of memory targeted by the leadership of the communist party after the war: the Gedenkstätte der Sozialisten (the Socialists Memorial) at the Friedrichsfelde cemetery in Berlin. Following the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919, their graves were transformed into a central memorial for the socialist movement that also incorporated thirty-two other victims of the January revolution. Although the memorial was desecrated during the Third Reich, it returned to prominence after 1945 as the KPD worked to re-establish a line of continuity to the traditions of the German working class. Olsen noted that the site was particularly significant for two reasons. First, the site was not an entirely new construction but, rather, drew on already existing, personal memories within the Berlin working class in an attempt to legitimize and gather support for the communists and their efforts to rebuild German society in the postwar period. Second, this site

also emphasized how the relatively new antifascist tradition was integrated into preexisting revolutionary and labor movement traditions.

The session then transitioned into an engaging discussion of the four projects and the cultural and social policies of East German social and cultural policies more generally.

*Report by Brian Puaca
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