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Introduction by Peter Wicke

This special edition of *Popular Music* reintroduces the topic of popular music behind the Iron Curtain to the academic discourse, offering a novel perspective on the subject. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union 35 years ago, the countries of Eastern Europe were able to open up to the West and to adopt a more Western-oriented approach to governance, economic and cultural development. This also facilitated the emergence of academic interest in the popular music of these countries in the West. Up until that point, this part of the world had been largely isolated owing to the implementation of repressive policies under the guise of 'socialism' by the Communist parties of these countries. The opening following the dissolution of the Soviet empire in the 1990s was accompanied by a proliferation of English-language publications dedicated to the various forms of popular music in Eastern Europe. These studies documented the existence of dynamic musical scenes that had persisted in the margins of the system despite the prevailing repression and had remained unknown to the West. Notwithstanding this generally encouraging development, these countries with their history and culture situated within the context of Soviet-dominated power apparatus are still to a large extent terra incognita in the West. The perception of their culture and their music within the field of popular music studies has, thus far, been shaped by Western preconceptions. Consequently, this has resulted in a one-sided and selective approach to the subject matter. Subcultures in Eastern Europe, such as the various punk scenes, have been the subject of considerable scholarly scrutiny. Nevertheless, this constituted merely one aspect of the popular music cultures in question. Owing to its critical and provocative impetus, it was an important one, albeit a minor one. A comparable observation can be made with regard to the jazz avant-garde in the musical life of the East. Owing to the lyric-free nature of this music, it was not subject to ideological scrutiny and therefore able to develop relatively freely across system boundaries before the fall of the Wall. Consequently, this music also attracted considerable academic interest in the West. However, neither punk nor jazz can be considered representative of the national popular music cultures of 'Socialist' Eastern Europe, nor can the daily popular musical practice in these countries be indiscriminately consigned to the dustbin of history as ideologically corrupted, sounding everyday phenomena of a repressive political system. The totalitarian thesis, which originated in political science and which uniformly understood the countries behind the Iron Curtain as subsumed under a totalitarian power structure, obscured the view of the sometimes vast differences between the affected countries, which were so significant for their culture and music. On closer inspection, the popular music cultures under the conditions of real socialism are more diverse and varied than one would expect from the perspective of ideology alone, despite the repressive nature of the system.

One of the gaps left by such simplifications is the lack of knowledge about the existence and development of popular music research in the former socialist

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countries. It is still largely unknown in the West, not least for linguistic reasons. In the East, publications were mainly in the national languages. English was not considered a lingua franca. The few exceptions only serve to confirm this rule. However, publishing in the West was also made more difficult by the entrenched prejudice that, under the aegis of the ruling communist parties and the obligation of science to Soviet-style Marxism–Leninism as a dogmatic theoretical paradigm, any research that was even remotely free of ideology and worth knowing about did not exist anyway. Thus it was overlooked that the study of popular music has a longer history here than in the West. Behind the iron facade of Soviet-style Marxism–Leninism, there were divergent scientific approaches that allowed even something as comparatively exotic as pop music research to emerge, while in the West music research was still unswervingly focused on the canon of classical music. The fact that the systematic study of genres and types of popular music, of popular music culture and of the sociology of popular music, either in the context of ethnomusicology or as an independent branch of music research, was on the fringes of the institutionalised scientific community in the East has left enough room for developments that are worth knowing, even in retrospect, despite the dominance of Marxist–Leninist ideology as the leading theoretical paradigm. Last but not least, a look at research carried out under completely different social conditions and the paradigms that emerged from it can also sharpen awareness of the social conditionality of one's own research approaches and theoretical concepts and thus open them up to critical examination.

The focus of this issue is on both academic research into popular music in selected countries in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe before 1989 and on aspects of popular music culture under political, economic and cultural conditions of the historical phenomenon of socialism. It is evident that within the confines of an academic journal, this can only represent a preliminary step. There is still a paucity of research in this area, and a significant proportion of the existing research is inaccessible to the English-speaking world owing to linguistic constraints. Consider this special edition to be a step on the road.

Introduction 2: Martin Cloonan

In May 2023 I got an email. Nothing unusual in that. But this one was from Peter Wicke, someone with whom I was not in regular contact. In his (too) modest way, Peter asked if I remembered him (how could I not) and whether *Popular Music* would possibly be interested in publishing an article which he had attached to the email. The topic of the article was, in Peter's words, 'a hitherto untold part of the genesis of popular music research, its emergence in Eastern European countries'. This sounded very intriguing.

As I read the article, I saw that beyond the merely intriguing this was something vital with the potential to radically reshape the ways in which the origins of Popular Music Studies are conceived of within academia. I believed it to be a landmark text.

However, it was not a text without its problems. As one of coordinating editors of *Popular Music*, the prime one for me that it was that it was around 21,000 words long. Our word limit is 10,000 words. It was time to consult my colleagues on the editorial board. We considered whether it might be possible to publish the article

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across two editions but ultimately decided that this would interrupt its flow. So, following the board reviewing the article, we decided to publish it as one piece. Moreover, it seemed to us that such was the importance of Peter's article that it should be used as a springboard for a special edition on Popular Music Studies (PMS) in the Eastern Bloc. We hoped that this might be a somewhat revisionist account and here we have not been disappointed.

As far as the edition itself goes, I must admit that the articles we received came as something of a revelation to me and have changed the ways in which I think about the evolution of PMS. What I had previously mistakenly seen as being the result of growing interest in the West amongst certain intelligentsia in popular culture following the rise of The Beatles, added to pioneering academic work by the likes of Phil Tagg and Simon Frith actually had important precursors in Eastern Europe where the Communist regimes were ever interested in mass culture, even when disapproving of it. The result was the establishment across the Eastern Bloc of research centres focused on popular music and/or youth culture more broadly. Unfortunately, the Cold War context generally meant that, as Peter Wicke writes in this volume: 'The research produced theoretical approaches, which were hardly acknowledged outside these countries'.

While the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe did cannot be characterised as ones which embraced human freedom, they were also places free of some of the prejudices which hampered the development of Popular Music Studies in the West. Reading the articles now assembled in this volume, it becomes apparent that these regimes believed that *all* music should studied. For example Peter Wick writes in this volume that in Hungary: 'The hierarchical model of traditional musicology and music historiography has been replaced by a differentiated view of the various social groups whose interaction constitutes modern societies, of their culture and the music they produce therein'.

We need to understand music as a distinct, yet inter-related, cultural form. This is what good PMS scholars do. Here it seems that the question of whether popular music was a legitimate form to study was not asked in the East. Of course it was legitimate field of study! As was the case with any mass form of entertainment. Popular music was the music of the masses, and as official custodians of the masses the Communist parties of the East *had* to be interested.

If in the West, it was the rise of The Beatles that gave a beginning to – to use Simon Frith's term – *Taking Popular Music Seriously*, then the writings here suggest that in the East it was pop as an institution that was of interest. If analysis in the East was often constrained by rigid state Marxism (or, to be more accurate, Marxist–Leninism), then it is also clear that an orientation towards mass culture resulted in the 'socialist' countries of east producing an array of projects, even if these often remained largely unknown outside of those countries. At the very least, it is to be hoped that those teaching the history of PMS at least recognise these important pioneers.

It should be noted here that the articles in this edition were commissioned by the journal. We approached people whom we believed would have something interesting to say – and they did! We knew that this special edition would never be comprehensive and cover the whole of the Eastern Bloc and other 'socialist' regimes. We endeavoured to get diversity, but are aware that we did not always achieve that. Some proposals fell by the wayside and others ran out of time. Such is the life of a

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special edition. We did our best and now leave it to readers to decide whether that was good enough.

I do not wish here to introduce each of the articles in this volume here and leave it to readers to delve in to them without the need for any commentary beforehand. I can only say that I learned a great deal from reading them and feel a better scholar for having done so. I am not sure that we can ask for much more than that.

I must follow these remarks with a few thanks. The first of these must be to Peter Wicke. First, thank you for submitting your article. It is a remarkable piece of work. Second, thanks for being so easy to work with, accepting our proposal and then working so diligently to make it happen. We are in your debt.

Next thanks to all the authors here. Thank you responding to our Call, submitting your papers and patiently bearing with us throughout the editing process. You have made an important contribution to rethinking PMS.

Thirdly, thanks to the editorial board of *Popular Music* for buying in to the idea of a special edition. You were wonderfully receptive to the idea and helped bring it to fruition. That required vision and that was provided in spades.

Next, various members of the editorial board acted as reviewers, as did a number of other anonymous helpers. Reviewing can be a thankless task, but all those involved in reviewing the articles now assembled here acted in a truly collegial way which I very much appreciate. So, many thanks to this anonymous team.

Finally, thank you, dear reader, for reading both this and the articles themselves. I hope that you enjoy doing the latter as much as I did.

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