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# Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s (Book Review)

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David Robb, ed. *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007. Pp. vii, 320. Cloth \$75.

While the title of this nine-essay anthology focuses on the protest song from the 1960s and beyond, one of key elements of the book is an examination of the legacy of the *Vormärz* revolutionary songs and political cabaret of the Weimar Republic in the repertoire of West-German and East-German *Liedermacher*. The first two chapters by David Robb offer a differentiated analysis of how the *Vormärz* and early twentieth-century political song traditions were adopted and adapted in the FRG and the GDR and how the resulting high/low culture blend of the political song enhanced its appeal. The third chapter, also by Robb, addresses the use of narrative role-play in protest songs in both East and West, again with links to earlier traditions, particularly the twentieth-century *Kampflieder* of Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler.

Eckard Holler, former manager of the Club Voltaire, participant in the Burg Waldeck festivals of the 1960s, and coorganizer of the Tübingen Festival from the 1970s to the 1990s, is the author of the following two chapters. His personal involvement in the German folk and protest music scene imbues his historical review of the major festivals and *Liedermacher* scene with the immediacy of an eyewitness. Both Holler and Robb point out how successful the West-German “establishment” became at integrating the festivals by providing state subsidies, thereby making them a part of the system rather than external to it. This cultural funding resulted in a gradual shift in perceptions of alternative culture in West Germany from the late 1960s into the 1980s to an emphasis on sociocultural activities supported by state and regional governments. The situation in East Germany was somewhat different, with a clearer divide between the official political songs fostered by the *Singebewegung* and the politically critical protest songs of *Liedermacher*, such as Wolf Biermann or Bettina Wegner, whose works were banned by the government. In his chapter on the political song of the GDR, David Robb provides a more nuanced view of official versus forbidden political song and demonstrates that there was “a substantial middle ground” (227) of political singers in the East who did not fit into either category and whose work was enabled by the schizophrenia of GDR cultural policies. Annette Blühndorn and Peter Thompson offer discrete chapters on Konstantin Wecker and Wolf Biermann respectively, and David Robb concludes the volume with an assessment of the relevance of the political song after reunification

and a look at what he sees as the more aesthetic than political resistance embodied in alternative techno.

The anthology provides an excellent overview of the evolution of the political song in East and West Germany, but there is little in the way of substantive textual analysis of excerpted song lyrics, which are offered in German without translation. There is also some repetition and overlap in the first three chapters by David Robb. As a whole, the volume is an accessible resource for both specialists and neophytes, with ample endnotes for each chapter and a useful bibliography of primary and secondary works.

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