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Spring 2021

## 1The Hootenannies of East BerlinThe North American Roots of an East German Singing Movement

Roman Ebert

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1THE HOOTENANNIES OF EAST BERLIN  
THE NORTH AMERICAN ROOTS OF AN EAST GERMAN  
SINGING MOVEMENT

by

Roman Ebert

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the German

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Waltraud Maierhofer  
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2021

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
German have been completed.

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Waltraud Maierhofer  
German Honors Advisor

**The Hootenannies of East Berlin**  
**The North American Roots of an East German Singing Movement**  
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Waltraud Maierhofer  
Department of German Honors Advisor

## Abstract

This work focuses on analyzing in further detail an East German singing movement that developed during the 1960s, the hootenanny movement as it was initially called and later the FDJ singing movement. This work focuses in detail on the North American folk music influences on the movement and the largest and most well-known group, the Hootenanny Klub Berlin or later the Oktoberklub. A brief introduction to aspects of East German music, and notably political music is provided before looking at the influences that North American artists had both indirectly and directly on the movement. The political environment of various musicians in the American context of the Folk Revival is also looked at as a way of understanding how North American folk music was imported into an East German context. Various conflicts within the movement with origins within political and musical themes in part brought by the North American influence, such as antiwar politics, are also briefly discussed. The lasting legacy of the hootenanny movement on East German society and East German political music is also analyzed.

Overall North American folk music deeply permeated the hootenanny movement in East Germany. From the initial performing artists, the songs covered and used as inspiration, as well as the world view of many club members. North American folk music deeply influenced the hootenanny movement. One reason for the importation of this largely American folk music tradition was some of the politics inherited in the initial American Folk Revival, most notably the early generation of American artists, who had had ties to left wing political parties and movements in the United States. There were difficulties and conflicts within the movement that had their origins, in part, due to some aspects of the political themes imported from North American folk music traditions. Most notably antiwar songs and pacifism orientated politics created friction within the movement and with party and government authorities. The lasting legacies of the North American influence on the hootenanny movement were the increase of

interest in folk music in East Germany as well as the internationalization of East German political music.

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYKt-L0ncGahD6hs6dMzs2zbUSININXYG>

*Here is a YouTube playlist I made of all the songs mentioned in this work in order of appearance. All songs referred to have links in the footnotes as well.*

### **Introduction**

During the 60s, a musical movement spread across East Germany, inspired by a North American musical tradition. Artists from East Germany as well as from abroad built ‘Hootenanny Clubs,’ that, at the beginning, were loosely organized meetings of both amateur and trained artists focused on singing and performing folk songs. Hootenanny itself refers to an American singing and dancing event typically featuring folk music and defined by improvisation and informality. This all occurred during the American folk revival, a movement with its roots in the generation of American folk artists from the 30s to the 50s that would later become the inspiration for the hootenanny movement of East Germany. These clubs were deeply influenced by North American folk music, from the songs they covered as well as the content and themes they espoused in both adaptations and new songs. The largest of these groups, the hootenanny Club Berlin which was founded in 1966, would become the most popular and well known group, receiving extensive state and party backing, encouragement, and opportunities. The band, as well as the movement as a whole, would become synonymous with the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ), the party-aligned youth movement within the German Democratic Republic (GDR), performing at countless concerts and events for the group.

The hootenanny movement evolved quickly in the GDR and took on many forms as time went on. For many groups, internal and external contradictions soured their relationship to the movement. External political events such as the Soviet Intervention into Czechoslovakia in 1968 were massive events in the GDR. Ideas and songs about peace and an end to war suddenly became hollow for many when the media and state at large supported the intervention. Additionally, the increasing state involvement with the movement alienated some, with

perceived artistic freedom being curtailed. At times the hootenanny movement also changed drastically. The largest club changed its name to Oktoberklub during a time of Anti-English policies in the GDR. The original founder of the movement, Perry Friedman, was then blacklisted for several years before finally being allowed to work again. He was given a reparation pension by the state.

Oktoberklub, or the hootenanny Club Berlin, is one of the most recognizable East German music groups to have existed. Not only did they perform at countless FDJ and state events but various musicians in the group went on to have their own musical careers as well as political ventures. Throughout the history of the group, however, a few things remain clear. The group and movement it was a part of, were deeply inspired by American folk music, mostly from two unique generations: those from the 30s and up to the 50s, and the more commercially and cultural successful generation of the late 50s and 60s. Important questions while looking at the hootenanny movement are: how did these two generations of North American folk musicians influence the artistic direction of the hootenanny movement, and specifically the hootenanny Club Berlin/Oktoberklub? How did this group and the movement it was a part of influence East German society? Hootenanny clubs all over East Germany were fascinated by the Civil Rights movement in the United States at the time. This deeply animated their music in a broadly left wing direction and was quickly embraced by the FDJ and *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), or Socialist Unity Party of Germany, which was the governing party and political organ of the GDR. Many songs sung by Oktoberklub were either inspired by American folk and union songs or were covers of these songs. Additionally, many East Germans that participated in the hootenanny movement felt a connection with the United States and with American political activists and performers. The ideals that swelled around the movement and

within Oktoberklub while broadly left-wing to varying degrees could often come into friction with real existing socialism in the GDR, mostly in regard to the military and freedom of expression. The long lasting impact of the Oktoberklub and the hootenanny movement in the GDR was the politicization of a large amount of musicians and audiences. There were 111,115 hootenanny club members in 3,543 clubs in 1969 (Dietrich, 1185). The politicization of hootenanny club members was varied. The movement was very much connected and influenced by international politics and, broadly speaking, left wing movements. It helped modernize many aspects of the East German political music. At the same time the experience of some members was politicization in a direction away from loyalty to the East German state. The way in which the movement would be absorbed by party institutions like the FDJ alienated some, and on top of geopolitical developments both within and on the border of the GDR some were largely driven away from believing in GDR society. The movement also helped revitalize German folk music in the GDR when, during the later 70s and 80s, folk musicians formed bands and workshops all over East Germany.

### **Review of Literature**

The Oktoberklub, originally the Hootenanny Klub Berlin, and the movement it belonged to was one of the lasting cultural legacies of the GDR. The development of the movement from an impromptu and relatively spontaneous singing movement to the official singing movement of the FDJ has been a point of a scholarly interest. Hagen Jahn, in his essay *Jugend, Musik und Ideologie. Zur Geschichte der FDJ Singebewegung* (2002, Youth, Music and Ideology. The History of the FDJ Singing Movement), looks at this dynamic. The Oktoberklub and the hootenanny movement belonged to a unique and tumultuous time in the history of the GDR, in a



period of fluctuation after the construction of the Berlin Wall. The Oktoberklub reflected the culture and politics of the GDR caught in between attempted reform and attempts to bring East German youth into society. The group was also looked at as a symptom of international movements, being deeply influenced by the American Civil Rights Movement, and as time went on, other international causes such as the Greek Junta of 1967, Irish republicanism, and Latin American socialism. The internal dynamic in the mass movement and specifically in the most well-known group, the Oktoberklub, has also been a point of academic interest. In a Masters Thesis entitled *Zwischen Systemkonformität und Opposition. Die Gruppe "Oktoberklub" im Kontext der politischen Liedkultur der DDR*. (2020, Between Conformity to the system and Opposition. The Group „Oktoberklub“ in the Context of the Political Song Culture of the GDR) Terrance Heinen gives an overview into the development of the Oktoberklub, and analyzes the musical style he terms *DDR Konkret* (GDR Concrete) as well as various songs created by both system sympathetic and system critical band members. The DDR Konkret style is indicative of the cultural and political high-water mark of the GDR, when the system was most broadly stable. He also provides short biographies of band members and where they went after Oktoberklub, with some becoming dissidents while others becoming deeply involved in the East German state.

The dynamic of the spontaneous beginning of the hootenanny movement up to its absorption of by the FDJ is an important aspect of the movement, examined by both Heinen and Hahn. The movement began accidentally and was truly started by a left-wing Canadian singer who happened to be in the GDR. The movement and the group that would become the Oktoberklub was endorsed, supported, and later influenced by official GDR government organs such as the FDJ.

The music culture of the GDR has been thoroughly analyzed, especially music from oppositional groups. David Robb has looked at German folk songs in the GDR stemming from the Revolution of 1848 in *Playing with the 'Erbe'* [2010] as well as the development and nature of criticism in East Germany among rock musicians in *Censorship, Dissent and the Metaphorical Language of GDR Rock* [2016]. Both articles examine how political critiques and dissent worked in the GDR, mostly in the late period of the GDR in the later 70s and 80s, and how folk and rock musicians navigated and avoided censorship. Folk artists in the late period of the GDR often used songs with a left-wing history coming from 1848 to express criticisms of the GDR, mostly of conscription as well as lacking civil liberties. The songs themselves were known as trusted left-wing songs and were therefore hard to be overtly challenged politically, as they were subtly critiquing East German society. This later generation of East German folk bands, inspired by traditional German and European folk music was heavily prevalent in the late 70s and 80s. Wolfgang Leyn examined the GDR Folk scene in his book *Volkes Lied und Vater Staat* (2016, People's Song and Father State). Leyn's book examines the scene and the inspirational roots of the movement, censorship and publication issues, the grass root workshops, and the artistic themes often handled by various folk bands. He lists the hootenanny movement as one of the roots of the expansion of the folk scene in the late 70s, especially the way in which the spontaneous movement was absorbed into official GDR government apparatus as an inspiration for many to start their own folk groups. The international aspect of East German folk music both official and unofficial has also been analyzed. Christina Richter-Ibanez in her article *Latin American Songs in the GDR and the East German Singer-Songwriter Repertoire* [2020] looked at how various Latin American musical traditions mostly from Chile, Cuba, and Argentina influenced East German music and how the songwriter Gerhard Schöne adapted Latin American

folk songs to an East German context. The self-image of the Oktoberklub was extremely international, and Latin America was one way that the band saw itself connected to the world. Richter-Ibanez examines how exiled Chilean band Quilapayun lived and performed in East Germany alongside the Oktoberklub and become incredibly popular internationally and in East Germany.

An important influence on Oktoberklub's music and the whole hootenanny movement was American folk music. Aaron J. Leonard examined the history and political themes of the American folk artists of the 1930s up to the 50s in his book *The Folk Singers and the Bureau* [2020]. Leonard explores this generation of American folk singers that would in turn deeply influence the more well-known folk singers of the 60s, i.e. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez etc. He shows that many of these singers were deeply connected with left wing politics in the United States, many had met through and had devoted themselves to the Communist Party of the United States of America [1919- ] and had in turn been a target of massive and intensive surveillance and state persecution. The Communist party of the United States of America was born out of previous American third parties in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Socialist Party of America as well as the People's Party/ Populist party. The party was ideologically inspired and guided by the Soviet Union, and the main wing of the party followed the Soviet line through most of its existence. Aaron Leonard gives a good overview of the party in his book *The Folk Singer and the Bureau*. During the Second World War, the party was more tolerated by the American State. However, near the end of the war and during the late 40s and 50s, the party faced opposition and persecution from the federal government, with leaders and members being imprisoned and facing deportations as well as bans on leaving the country and mob violence. The left-wing politics that had animated and driven influential American folk musicians was, for many of these artists such

as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie (1912-67), Paul Robeson (1898-1976), and Sis Cunningham (1909-2004), central for their work. This would be important when an aspiring Canadian folk singer and fan of Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson brought elements of this musical tradition to East Germany, inspiring the hootenanny movement. Gillian Mitchell provides an overlook and analysis of various stages of the American folk revival in her book *The North American Folk Music Revival* [2007]. She looks at the roots of the revival and later commercial success of the later generations from a North American perspective, and for the use of this work gives a good overview of the political and social themes expressed by various musicians. Her work is relevant to this paper in that it examines how the later generation of the American folk revival, the more commercially successful generation, influenced East German musical traditions.

My thesis will focus on analyzing in more detail than in previous scholarship the way that North American folk music traditions influenced the hootenanny movement and the Oktoberklub and how, in turn, the development of the movement from a spontaneous and grassroots movement into the official singing movement of the FDJ animated the political and artistic themes of those in the movement and inspired later East German folk bands. I will first provide a brief overview of East German music up to the beginning of the hootenanny movement and ask how North American music influenced the movement and the Oktoberklub specifically.

### **The Development of East German Music: *Aufbau zu Mauerbau***

The construction of a socialist society and reconstruction of East Germany was not only a physical affair. Not only did rubble need to be cleared and buildings, factories, and infrastructure need to be rebuilt but society itself needed to not only be forged anew but, in the eyes of many of the new leaders and party functionaries, transformed. The cultural scene after the end of World

War II in the Soviet Occupation Zone and in the newly founded GDR (1949) was focused on establishing the legitimacy of the GDR and establishing an ‘antifascist’ German identity. East German music, whether explicitly political or not, was focused on this dynamic. This would remain a defining characteristic of large swaths of East German political music and deeply affect the Oktoberklub as well as many of the later hootenanny clubs across the GDR when they would depart from some aspects of this tradition and in other ways build off it.

There was an explicit attempt in East German political songs sung at state or SED events to portray a continued legacy of anti-Nazi political struggle. This repertoire of songs included Spanish civil war songs like “Spaniens Himmel”<sup>1</sup> also known as “Die Thälmann Kolonne”, the post-1933 Communist song calling for a workers alliance against the NSDAP “Das Einheitsfrontlied”<sup>2</sup>, and the concentration camp song “Die Moorsoldaten” (Heinen, 6). These songs range from proud songs calling for battle for socialism or against fascism such as “Spaniens Himmel” to the grim and morose lyrics of “Die Moorsoldaten”. The idea of a continued struggle against the legacy of the NSDAP, as opposed to collaboration and or whole-hearted involvement, by Germans was a central part of the East German identity and was a focal point of many East German political songs. The song “Die Moorsoldaten” (English version “The Peat Bog Soldiers”)<sup>3</sup> is a good example of the legacy of continued resistance to the NSDAP. The song was written by imprisoned Communists and Social Democrats in Börgermoor Concentration Camp in Northern Germany (Probst-Effah). The original song consists of four

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CZgXSAAhis> Spaiens Himmel version published in the US in 1940

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXEMrg9FgvM> das Einheitsfrontlied preformed by Ernst Busch, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsEsm5LAdkE> das Einheitsfrontlied preformed by the Oktoberklub

<sup>3</sup>The song was translated/adapted very early by English and American folk singers and communists as early as the 30s. Recordings of this song can be found as postings on Youtube, Die Moorsoldaten:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NDitxFOHcA> (1937), the English version in a recording of 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdCCPqjGSEg>.

stanzas describing the experience at the camp, clearing desolate North German swamps while surrounded by barbed wire, while ending with the triumphant and sure proclamation:

<p>Einmal werden froh wir sagen,          „Heimat du bist wieder mein.“          Dann ziehn die Moorsoldaten          Nicht mehr mit dem Spaten ins Moor          (Probst Effah)</p>	<p>One day we will cry rejoicing,          “Homeland, dear you’re mine at last!”          Then will the beat bog soldiers march          no more with their spades to the bog          (translated in Probst Effah)<sup>4</sup></p>
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This song continued to be taught and sung in the GDR including in school where according to Gisela Probst Effah most sixth graders learned it by heart.

New songs tended to focus on the theme of continued resistance to Nazi legacy as well as commemorating past figures and heroes. A new song written in exile by the poet Kurt Barthel, and titled “Thälmannlied”<sup>5</sup> also expresses the continued legacy of a left-wing German tradition, of the German Communist Party (KPD, founded in 1918). The song is named after the leader of the interwar KPD which was banned in 1933, Ernst Thälmann. The song was written after his execution in 1944 and venerates Ernst Thälmann as a national hero. The chorus of the song is,

<p>Thälmann und Thälmann vor allen.          Deutschlands unsterblicher Sohn.          Thälmann ist niemals gefallen,          Stimme und Faust der Nation.          Thälmann ist niemals gefallen,</p>	<p>Thälmann and Thälmann before all,          Germany’s immortal son.          Thälmann has never fallen,          voice and fist of the nation.          Thälmann has never fallen,</p>
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<sup>4</sup> All German to English translations are by myself unless a published translation is cited.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-vzI0-8Dno> Thälmannlied sung by the *National Volksarmee (NVA)*, the Army of the GDR and the *Volkspolizei*, police force of the GDR

Stimme und Faust der Nation.	voice and fist of the nation.
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An interesting part of the chorus is the repeating line “Thälmann has never fallen”. The line is triumphant proclaiming that Thälmann will live on in Germany, and that he will serve as a hero for the founding of a new German state. It is metaphorically saying that Thälmann will live on in the new Germany when in reality Thälmann and the pre-war German left were decimated.

Thälmann himself spent eleven years in prison and was executed as the Red Army began to near Germany. East German political songs built therefore a message and a mythos that the pre-war German left would live in Germany, and later as the division of Germany became increasing inevitable, in East Germany. The rest of the of the song consists of verses describing Germany united behind the image of Ernst Thälmann. With this song as well as other forms of remembrance Ernst Thälmann was sanctified as a national hero in East Germany. Again the idea of an anti-fascist German state and culture was a central theme of GDR political songs during this era.

Although directly political songs were very present in the GDR since its founding not all music and songs were overtly political. A wide variety of songs existed that did not directly deal with political topics. Helga Brauer (1936-1991) for example was an extremely popular and successful *Schlager* or hit songs singer (Dietrich, 909). Her songs were typical of the genre, utilizing large traditional bands with brass instruments with some jazz influences accompanying upbeat lyrics. Of course often various political events shone through into the world of light pop music. Helga Brauer recorded and performed Lipsi songs for example. Lipsi was a type of dance developed at behest of the SED in order to combat Western music, mostly Rock and Roll (Dietrich, 917). Like in any society, non-directly political art work and media in the GDR often had its own political context, as did Lipsi music, underneath the surface. This is especially true

of the GDR, where everyday life could be incredibly politicized and charged. *Schlager* would remain popular in the GDR alongside traditional classical orchestras and jazz music.

Interestingly this dynamic of the state intervening in the world of cultural production would effect the hootenanny movement in the 60s, when government officials attempted to limit North American phrases, song names, and band names. Music and cultural events did receive a massive amount of funding and state support, or state control, throughout its existence.

Throughout the history of the GDR there were an astonishing number of orchestras in the country. No other country in the world had a higher orchestra to population ratio than the GDR (Dietrich, XI). It is safe that cultural events were extremely important in the GDR, weather overtly political or not. The state was generous with funding cultural events, however, of course with that came state management and in part control.

Other important characteristics throughout all East German cultural history is Amiga and access to foreign music. Amiga was the state-owned and run record label that would publish and organize production of records in the GDR. All official music that went on for commercial success flowed through this institution. This would remain true for later years up to the end of the GDR. Amiga functioned by establishing quotas and ratios of what genres of music they would publish (Robb, 113). According to David Robb, depending on the time and who has working at Amiga, varying degrees of regime-critical art could be published. There was often a revision process for any music that might have been seen as critical, not only of the SED but really any aspect of society. Criticism in music was often, though the revision process, forced to be tame and indirect. This would remain true for virtually all of East German history. At the same time music and records from Western Europe as well as North America could be accessed relatively easily. Western radio stations, the West German operated Deutsche Welle, as well as



American radio targeted towards central and western Europe such as Radio Free Europe would broadcast news as well as music to East German radios. Until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 goods and people could relatively easily move across the inner-German border (Robb, 110). This would change in 1961 with increasing attempts to regulate what was moving through the German border alongside various drives to limit foreign, mostly English and American music and cultural influences, in East Germany that would later happen during the mid-60s. This dynamic of attempted bans and limits on Western music failing and being followed by begrudging acceptance was very common within the cultural history of the GDR. After attempting to limit unamerican influences by changing band names, Hootenanny Klub Berlin to the Oktoberklub for example, the cultural authorities of the GDR, Amiga as well as state censors, largely gave up. Western music became increasingly easier to get within official GDR society. Amiga would sign contracts and print western Music like ABBA by the end of the 70s for example (Robb, GDR Rock, 114).

Overall the musical culture of the GDR, and before it the Soviet Occupation Zone, was focused on establishing an anti-fascist German identity. Political songs, performed at state events or through official media, focused on the pre-war German left as well as the actions of left wing Germans during Nazi rule. Political songs were not all songs in the GDR, like any society, however nonpolitical songs or movements often had roots or origins in political events within the GDR. Official music all went through the official organs of the state, such as the state record company Amiga. Foreign music was always present within the GDR, often through unofficial means such as through western radio stations or through networks of smuggling, however foreign music would become increasingly more accepted.

## The Cultural Background of the Hootenanny Movement

The construction of the Berlin Wall paired with cultural and political events both within and outside the GDR changed East German music. Government officials and party members felt there was a stagnation in East German culture especially among the youth of the country in regard to the normal repertoire of *Schlager*, jazz, classical and traditional political hymns and songs. In September of 1963 the Politburo of the SED published an open communique titled *Der Jugend Vertrauen und Verantwortung* (The Confidence and Trust of the Youth) that attempted to confront the perceived issues facing the youth of the country, that is apathy (Jahn, 3). This shift occurred at a time, after the death of Stalin in 1953, in which a desire of destalinization and societal liberalization was in the air, ever since the denunciation of Stalin by Nikita Khrushchev at the XXII party congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Dietrich, 1271). Various politicians in East German society wanted to liberalize some aspects of the GDR. Paradoxically this coincided with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, already creating more conflict between theoretical goals and reality.

Internal shifts as well as shifts in the Soviet Union influenced the direction of GDR cultural life as did events in the United States. The American folk revival paired with the growing rise of the Civil Rights movement had a massive impact on a variety of countries in Europe including the GDR. The American Folk Revival includes a variety of artists who performed and published songs from the 30s up to the 60s. The later generation, the artists whose music would become attached to the American Civil Rights movement during the 60s included artists like Bob Dylan (1941- ), Joan Baez (1941- ), Barbara Dane (1927- ), and Phil Ochs (1940-1976). This generation would reach commercial success unlike previous artists and become internationally known. The image of the American Civil Rights movement and this wave of

American folk music were intertwined and as the 60s went on, both crept into the cultural spaces of countries all over the world. In the GDR, Bob Dylan songs were some of the first songs sung at the first local hootenanny meetings for example (Dietrich, 1183).

It was in this milieu that the East German hootenanny movement first developed, a period of attempted liberalization with a conscious fear that the youth of the country were becoming increasingly apathetic with society. Ironically the SED and governing forces of the GDR had very little to do with the development of the singing movement, at least at the beginning. A Canadian folk singer, who ended up in the GDR essentially by accident, was the main harbinger of the movement.

### **Folk Music in North America**

The hootenanny movement as can be seen from its name alone was deeply influenced by American folk music. An important question in analyzing how it would be imported and interpreted in an East German context is what the status of North American folk music in its original context was. Overall, the American folk revival was largely attached to left wing politics in a broad sense, however with a large divide between musicians of the early part of the revival, those that performed mostly in the 30s up to the 50s, and those of the later 50s and 60s. Perry Friedman (1935–1995) was the artist who would end up bringing a North American singing movement to the GDR, the hootenanny. Friedman was a Canadian singer and performer who has active with various left-wing movements and parties in Canada and internationally, as well as a fan of left-wing folk singers. He ended up moving to the GDR, starting a family, and becoming an extremely important cultural influence essentially by mistake.

Perry Friedman grew up and absorbed the political and cultural worldview of 30s, 40s, and 50s Folk Musicians, mostly from the United States. Friedman met Pete Seeger (1919–2014), a well-known American folk singer and activist for various left-wing causes multiple times, together with the band ‘the Weavers’ which was widely popular for a time and then later at a solo concert (Friedman 21, 29). The Weavers were a folk band formed by various musicians that had met through and worked often with the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) (Leonard, 42) The Weavers were a departure from previous attempts at left-wing music groups, such as the Almanac singers. Their music was less overtly political while still having its origins within the CPUSA. They had multiple songs that achieved commercial success and with the songs “Goodnight Irene”<sup>6</sup> and “Tzena Tzena Tzena”<sup>7</sup> they reached the top of the charts in 1950 and 1951 respectively (Leonard, 177). This generation of folk singers lived during the Great Depression, one of if not the largest and most disruptive event that global capitalism has ever faced. The future and people’s belief in the market was challenged like never before. During the 30s, 40s and up to the 50s this drove many to flirt with and in many cases dedicate their lives to radical political parties and movements. Folk music was seen by musicians that were engaged with or were members of the party as a way of changing the world. Pete Seeger for example came from a relatively privileged background, his father a professor and Seeger himself having studied at Harvard (Leonard, 24). Nonetheless in the cultural and historical moment of the 1930s and interwar era, the communist party was attractive. For many it was the institution that would change society and the world fundamentally. Paul Robeson for example, a musician and performer with an astounding career as a football star, Stanford valedictorian, and later singer as well as actor saw the communist party and world communist movement as a way for African

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSDyiUBrUSk> Goodnight Irene sung by the Weavers

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phgiS\\_sJJ\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phgiS_sJJ_c) Tzena Tzena Tzena sung by the Weavers

Americans to achieve full rights in the United States, as well as a movement that would challenge the European domination of the African continent (Leonard, 32). This generation of folk singers created and collected a repertoire of songs that would later find use in the next generation of American folk artists as well as in the GDR. Perry Friedman was one of the most important carriers of this legacy in the context of the GDR. Friedman himself from an early age was inspired after seeing Pete Seeger in concert. He worked a mixture of odd jobs as a factory worker and laborer, before getting involved in politics and music. He performed at union halls and helped fundraise for local Canadian trade union strikes. Overall, however, his experiences were mixed, driving him in 1958 to eventually leave Canada and go to Europe, to London. Friedman was growing up and performing music during the second Red Scare, which included but was not limited to the McCarthy era of American politics. This era of anti-Communist politics had echoes in Canada as well. Friedman describes being under surveillance by local police due to previous actions with local socialist groups in Vancouver. Additionally, Friedman was denied entry to the United States in the 50s on account of his experience with union activism and his association with the Communist Party of Canada (Friedman, 20). That is to say his disappointment and eventual relocation to London was not just due to perceived and real political repression by Government institutions as well as virtually all Canadian media. Friedman found it hard to make ends meet as a wandering folk singer. Additionally, he felt a declining interest in his music paired with a decline in the socialist movements of Canada. Thus Friedman later found himself in London and in 1959, essentially by accident in the GDR. In London, Friedman continued to work as a musician as well as being politically engaged. At a concert organized by the Communist Party of Britain, Friedman was offered an open invitation to visit and perform in the GDR by a delegate from the SED, Kurt Seibt. Friedman later ended up using the invitation

only after being denied entry to Denmark while attempting to visit an acquaintance (Friedman, 54). He would spend nearly the rest of his life in the GDR.

Friedman spent the next months and later years in the GDR performing music in concerts and playing songs for local radios (Friedman, 60). After befriending other musicians in the GDR he followed up on the idea to organize a sing-along, or a hootenanny. A hootenanny is originally a term referring to sing-along events characterized by improvisation, and exploration of song and dance. Friedman began to organize and sing at hootenannies first in Berlin and then elsewhere in the country. The first hootenanny was organized through the FDJ at a concert hall on the Stalinallee in 1960 (Friedman, 66). The songs sung at these events were a mixture of traditional left-wing folk songs: “Joe Hill”, “Which Side are you on?”, “Hammersong”, traditional German Folk songs, as well as traditional German and East German socialist and communist songs such as “Das Einheitfrontslied” (Song of the United Front) (Friedman, 67, König, 71). Friedman in his autobiography documents the initial hesitation of audiences to sing German folk songs. Folk songs in the German-speaking world up to this point had had a mixed legacy and reputation. The German word *Volk* (people or folk) had a mixed history during the Nazi era. The word brought up certain connections to 19<sup>th</sup> and late 20<sup>th</sup> century *Völkisch* ideology, a form of mystic German nationalism that served as an ideological backbone for the NSDAP (Robb, *Erbe* 296). Conservative and anti-Semitic folk songs had been encouraged and supported during the NS-regime, and in the GDR especially the word *Volksmusik* still carried a negative tone even after attempts to rejuvenate it as a genre. However, Friedman was happy to see that the audience was ready to join in and sing along to various German folk songs. The first hootenanny was an immediate success. Many of the audience present at the first meeting would become either integral members like Hartmut König (1947- ), as well as musicians that would play alongside

the Oktoberklub often such as Gisela May (1924-2016) and Barbara Kellerbauer (1943- ) (König, 68).

Friedman would continue to be active in German folk and left-wing music events in both the GDR and the FRG. His influence as an important organizer of hootenanny clubs and a performer of American folk music ushered in a massive folk music wave in East Germany that led to the creation of the most recognizable and important state-aligned music group, the Hootenanny Klub Berlin or later Oktoberklub. His role as a spreader of folk music is incredibly important. By performing and attending events in Berlin, Friedman passed along songs and tunes orally to local members.

The earlier generations of the American Folk revival were important and influential for Perry Friedman, who would in turn bring this musical tradition to East Germany, however the later generation of artists, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and others were also incredibly influential as well. These musical traditions were coming through cultural osmosis, Bob Dylan was becoming increasingly popular worldwide, as well as through official events. Joan Baez would for example host a televised concert in East Berlin in 1966 (König, 73). It is important to point out that the political and cultural themes of the later generation of folk artists often differed from older artists. As mentioned, many of the artists that performed music during the 30s up to the 50s were intimately connected with the CPUSA. Later generation artists' music like Bob Dylan's or Joan Baez's can also be described as broadly left wing; the aspects of American society they often critiqued, the Vietnam War or the racial segregation of American life were important pillars of the American state. However, this generation did not have the same intimate connections with an orthodox Communist Party as the previous did. This would prove to be a source for contention for artists within the Oktoberklub. Joan Baez would later in her life denounce East Germany and

Communism after the 1968 Soviet Intervention into the CSSR. It was these two generations that would be influencing the hootenanny movement and already in the home source there were political divisions that would later help explain divisions within the movement and within the Oktoberklub.

### **The Oktoberklub**

Before discussing the North American influences on the Oktoberklub it is necessary to give a brief overview of the group. As already stated, Perry Friedman was the most important figure to the beginning of the hootenanny movement and by extension the Oktoberklub. He performed his first hootenanny concert in Berlin in 1960 and afterwards hootenannies became common musical events on one of the main streets of Berlin, the Stalinalle (Friedman, 68). Friedman describes in his autobiography how he wanted to encourage the German audiences to sing along with any music, traditional German folk songs as well as American folk songs. The initial hootenannies were organized through the FDJ, and as the 60s went on hootenanny clubs spread across East Germany. The popularity of the clubs grew in help with the FDJ, however, with their help came oversight. The late 60s, starting around 1967 when the state paper *Jungen Welt* published an article denouncing the usage of the term “hootenanny,” saw attempts to limit anglicisms in GDR culture (Dietrich, 1184). Already in 1965 one of the larger clubs of Berlin changed their name to the “Oktoberklub”. This club would receive the most state backing and would become immensely popular in East Germany (Dietrich, 1183). Oktoberklub’s name stems from the October revolution in the Russian Empire and was seen as a more cultural and politically reliable name. This transformation stage was a period of turmoil in the hootenanny movement. It was truly never to begin opposed to the GDR, in fact many of the songs performed



at the initial meeting were reliable and pre-established left wing songs. However, as time went on the movement grew and changed. It was initially organized through, however, largely independent from the FDJ. However, in the late 60s, the clubs were mostly referred to as FDJ *Singclubs*, singing clubs, if whatever local club had not already given itself another name. They were mostly organized through local cultural centers or through universities (Dietrich, 1182). The Oktoberklub through its size, level of state support, and popularity became its own institution. Initial Oktoberklub/ Hootenanny Klub Berlin concerts had been open events with large amounts of improvisation. As time went on and in order to publish their music more effectively, they focused more on writing and performing established songs.

From their initial founding, North American musical traditions influenced the group. A North American folk music tradition, broadly left-wing to varying degrees, permeated a lot of Oktoberklub music, from many of their songs, to their covers, to their instruments, and to their own self-image.

Many of the songs that were part of the group's repertoire at FDJ performances were originally American union and folk songs. The American Civil Rights and union song "We shall not be moved"<sup>8</sup> was on Oktoberklub's first record, *Der Oktober-Klub singt* (1967), published by Amiga ("Oktoberklub", Discogs).<sup>9</sup> The recording of this song is peculiar and different from other versions in many ways, most notably some lyric changes. "The union is our leader" is a unique line of the song, showing some dogmatic ideology shining through the song put out by the band. Other similar lyrics of the song that deal with unions, sung by Pete Seeger or Mavis Staples, often have the line "The union is behind us" rather than "the union is our leader" ("We Shall Not

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq0kvoC8ebA> We shall not be moved by the Oktoberklub

<sup>9</sup> The database *Discogs* lists all of Oktober-Klub's Albums, their variants, Singles, and EPs as well as track lists and has images of the records.

Be Moved”). Other North American folk songs, either traditional folk songs or workers songs were also covered and performed by the Oktoberklub. “She’ll be comin”<sup>10</sup> or “She’ll be coming round the mountain” as well as “Casey Jones” were performed by the band in their next two albums *Unterm Arm die Gitarre* (The Guitar under the Arm) (1968) and *Aha* (1973), respectively (“Oktoberklub”, Discogs). The version of “Casey Jones” which was also performed in the GDR by other musicians and poets like Heinz Kahlau<sup>11</sup> is a song about a worker going to hell for working during a strike (Friedman, 186). The usage of American union songs is in itself semi-contradictory. While unions were essentially universal and did possess real power in East German society, strikes were essentially illegal and impossible (Böhme). American union songs like “Casey Jones”<sup>12</sup> stemmed from a fundamentally different social context for unions, thus making the usage of a song about a striking worker contradictory in a society in which strikes were illegal. Much more important was the aesthetic and legacy of the strike, to which the Oktoberklub attached themselves to by performing the song.

Many North American folk songs and tunes were later adapted to a GDR context. One of the most well-known Oktoberklub songs and an anthem of the FDJ was “Sag mir, wo du stehst?” (Hahn, 5).<sup>13</sup> “Sag mir, wo du stehst?” (Tell me where you stand) was written by Hartmut König at an Oktoberklub meeting and was adapted from the American union song “Which side are you on?” (Heinen, 38).<sup>14</sup> The original context of the song, however, is nearly entirely absent from the Oktoberklub adaptation. Only the structure of the repeating chorus remains the same, “Which side are you on?” to “Sag mir wo du stehst?”. The tune is completely different and only the use

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<sup>10</sup> <https://youtu.be/MPRcdwQBPAE?t=1197> She’ll be comin’ preformed by the Oktoberklub in 1968

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngBnkmrSITA> Casey Jones by Heinz Kahlau

<sup>12</sup> <https://youtu.be/GBUhAoU07FY> Casey Jones by the Oktoberklub

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvn\\_b59Ws0w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvn_b59Ws0w) Sag mir wo du stehst? Preformed by the Oktoberklub

<sup>14</sup> <https://youtu.be/9XEnTxIBuGo> ”Which side are you on?” by Pete Seeger

of the question to the audience remains. Both songs are asking the audience to pick a side. In the American context the song is directed to workers asking them to either be on the side of the union or to fight for the coal bosses. The Oktoberklub version instead asks the audience, in this case directed towards mostly the youth at any FDJ event, to pick a side to either be with ‘them’ or not with them in the building and maintaining of a socialist society, bringing humanity to the future as the verses describe it. “Sag mir wo du stehst?” is one of the most well-known Oktoberklub songs. During the mid 60s, as the FDJ was absorbing the hootenanny movement more and more, the FDJ organized a nationwide guitar playing competition in which “Sag mir wo du stehst?” was one of the established songs most often sung (Dietrich, 1182). That this well-known song was both used by the state and has its roots in an American union song speaks to the North American folk music influence in the GDR.

The song “Who killed Norma Jean” was adapted and turned into “Wie Starb Benno Ohnesorg” (How did Benno Ohnesorg die) (König, 131).<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>“Who killed Norma Jean” is a song originally stemming from the poet Normen Rosten (1913-1995), writing about the death of the celebrity actress Marilyn Monroe. The poem was turned into a song by none other than Pete Seeger, and it is most likely how Oktoberklub members heard of the song. The Oktoberklub completely changed the original content and context of the song, however the same general tune and structure remains. The Oktoberklub song “Wie starb Benno Ohnesorg” reacts to the death of the student demonstrator at the hands of a police officer in West Berlin during the 1968 student protests (Heinen, 69). The death of Benno Ohnesorg was incredibly important for the student movement in West Germany as well as a use for the geopolitical aims of the East German state. His death, as shown by the song itself, shows how the incident was portrayed by East German

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0OeAL6mxE> Who killed Norma Jean by Pete Seeger

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUgVO01BgxA> Wie Starb Benno Ohnesorg

artists, aligned ideologically with the state, as a way to denounce West German society. The adaptation of the song here uses a similar tune of the Pete Seeger song and through the use of the rhetorical question ‘How did Benno Ohnesorg die?’ denounces West German society for the death of a student protestor at what is portrayed is the system’s fault. The first verse of the song and the refrain are as follows.

Oktoberklub, “Wie Starb Benno Ohnesorg” <i>Der Oktober-Klub singt</i> , 1967 (Terrance, 68)	English Translation	“Who Killed Norma Jean?“, poem by Norman Jean, turned into a song by Pete Seeger (Seeger, 439)
<p style="text-align: center;">Refrain:</p> <p>Wie starb Benno Ohnesorg, Student in Westberlin? Was wisst ihr über ihn? Wie starb Benno Ohnesorg?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">First Verse:</p> <p>Er starb auf breiten Straßen mit Dreck. Sein Blut, sein Blut wusch den Dreck nicht weg. Er wollt’ ihn auch gar nicht wegwaschen. Er hatte die Hände in den Taschen, Solang bis die Polizei kam. Und als er die Hand aus der Tasche nahm, Da tat es so manch and’rer Student, Der seitdem so vieles besser kennt!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Refrain:</p> <p>How did Benno Ohnesorg die, Student in West Berlin? What do you know about him? How did Benno Ohnesorg die?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">First Verse</p> <p>He died on wide streets with filth. His blood, his blood, did not wash the filth away. He did not even want to wash it away. He had his hands in his pockets, Up to when the police came to him. And as he took his hands from his pockets, So did many other students Who know much better now.</p>	<p>Who killed Norma Jean? I, said the City, as a civic duty, I killed Norma Jean.</p> <p>Who saw her die? I, said the Night, and a bedroom light, We saw her die.</p> <p>Who'll catch her blood? I, said the Fan, with my little pan, I'll catch her blood....</p>

The original song “Who Killed Norma Jean” by Pete Seeger does not have the same refrain and verse structure as “Wie Starb Benno Ohnesorg,” however a similar tune, similar word choice, and similar use of a rhetorical question to critique a society (Seeger, 439). The original poem and

the version sung by Pete Seeger uses the rhetorical question “Who killed Norma Jean” to decry the larger society that the song names as the killer. The Oktoberklub version does much the same in denouncing West German society for having killed Benno Ohnesorg. The Oktoberklub version carries with it other influences from the Pete Seeger work and original poem as well. The rhyming pattern of the refrain follows the rhyming pattern of the original, ABBA. The verse itself also uses a rhyming pattern however changes it to AABB. Some word usage is similar in both versions as well. The usage of blood in the first verse mirrors the fourth couplet. That said the Oktoberklub version is less poetic and the language less flowery as the Pete Seeger/Normen Rosten song/poem. A reason for this change is due in part to the new context of this song. The Pete Seeger adaptation was itself an adaptation of a poem in its entirety, Seeger only added a tune (Seeger, 439). The Oktoberklub version was never made as a poem and was made specifically for concerts, political events, and hootenanny meetings. The song was made with a rhythm to be sung along to and although having some similar eloquent and metaphorical language that evokes the Pete Seeger version, is blunter in criticizing West German Society. The adaptation of the song is a testament to the American musical influence on the art of the Oktoberklub and other hootenanny movement clubs.

Another American song adapted by the band was the left-wing union song “Solidarity Forever.”<sup>17</sup> The band performed a song to the same tune as the original and with a similar refrain albeit different subject matter and called it “Die Solidarität geht weiter”<sup>18</sup> (The Solidarity Continues). This song has the same tune as the American version that originally stems from the

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdrjN6lKiw4> Solidarity Forever sung by Perry Friedman and Dieter Süverkrüp, published in the FGR <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8eK9ZXf-Ow> Solidarity Forever performed by Pete Seeger

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXCP5Y8g11E> Die Solidarität geht weiter performed by the Oktoberklub

American civil war song “Battle Hymn of the Republic.”<sup>19</sup> The song was written and performed at the *Weltfestspiele der Jugend* (world festival of the youth), an event organized in part by and heavily featuring the Oktoberklub as well as other hootenanny clubs from all over the GDR (Heinen, 8). The subject matter of the song is completely different than that of either “Solidarity Forever,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” or any other North American song to the same tune. “Die Solidarität geht weiter” focuses on the Vietnam War nearing its end and expresses the need to support North Vietnam and the guerrillas as evident in the following comparison of the original, German adaptation, and its literal translation.

Original English Version, “Solidarity Forever” by Pete Seeger	Oktoberklub Version, “Die Solidarität geht weiter” (1973)	English translation
<p><b>Refrain:</b> Solidarity forever Solidarity forever Solidarity forever For the union makes strong</p> <p>When the union’s inspiration through the workers blood shall run, there can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun. But what force on earth is weaker, then the feeble strength of one? But the union makes us strong!</p>	<p><b>Refrain:</b> Die Solidarität geht weiter Die Solidarität geht weiter Die Solidarität geht weiter Für das Volk von Vietnam</p> <p>Die Solidaritätsbewegung in der ganzen Welt half mit Raketen, Unterschriften, und mit ‘ner Menge Geld. Die Kinder schickten Buntstifte, die Eltern schickten Blut. Diese Einheitsfront gab Mut.</p>	<p><b>Refrain:</b> The solidarity continues The solidarity continues The solidarity continues For the people of Vietnam</p> <p>The Solidarity movement in the whole world helped with rockets, signatures, and with a whole lot of cash. The children sent colored pencils and the parents sent blood. This united front gave courage</p>

Due to the geopolitical stance of the GDR in regards to the Vietnam War, music and art talking about the Vietnam war was much more direct and often framed differently than similar

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHforl6vnco> Battle Hymn of the Republic performed by Joan Baez

art coming out of the United States. The GDR was ideologically friendly to North Vietnam and supported them with aid as well as military advisors. The Vietnam War was a major theme of many of Oktoberklub's songs. Solidarity with and hoping for North Vietnam's victory and America's defeat is expressed in "Die Solidarität geht weiter" and other Oktoberklub songs such as "Saigon ist frei"<sup>20</sup> or "Ho Chi Mihn."<sup>21</sup> Various members such as Hartmut König, the author of "Sag mir, wo du stehst" and overall someone who remained very attached to and involved within official GDR society, expressed outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War as did some later members who were critical of the regime, such as Bettina Wegner (1947- ). It was through their opposition to the Vietnam War, specifically to the United States's participation, as well as their own support of North Vietnam, that the Oktoberklub felt connected to various other international movements and specifically to North American folk artists. Again solidarity with the Vietnamese people and direct support to North Vietnam could be directly stated in East German political music. This was radically different in the American context. Most political antiwar songs focused on the brutality of war as an abstract concept (Mitchell, 96). There were songs like "Draft Dodgers Rag" that were more direct in their criticism and political messages. "Draft Dogers Rag" is a satirical song from the perspective of a patriotic and anticommunist American who also insists on themselves not being a soldier (Perone, 80). However, directly stating support for North Vietnam that was prevalent in much of Oktoberklub's music is not present in much of North American folk music. The reasons for this are varied, later American folk artists with some exceptions were not as ideologically dogmatic or as orthodoxly left wing as previous generations (Leonard, 112). In fact towards the end of the Folk revival in the artistic work of its most well-known artist Bob Dylan, Dylan actively moved away from politics in his

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXEsJsTOuOo> Saigon ist frei by the Oktoberklub

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4h95NABZTnc> Ho Chi Mihn preformed by the Oktoberklub

music (Mitchell, 85). There were also the geopolitical and societal reasons. America was at war with North Vietnam and most artists wanted to avoid being called traitors by politicians or the larger media. Therefore, songs dealing with the Vietnam War in East Germany could afford to be much more direct and ideologically aligned with the North Vietnamese.

The Oktoberklub participated in televised concerts in East Berlin, with performers like Joan Baez who sang 'We shall overcome' at an East German concert in 1966 as well as Pete Seeger performing the year after her (König, 73). These artist visits left for some Oktoberklub members a profound impression. Hartmut König describes in his autobiography the connection and admiration he felt with Pete Seeger as Seeger performed "Die Moorsoldaten" as well as a verse of the English version "The Peat Bog Soldiers" (König, 73). Seeger had himself been in the same left-wing and CPUSA circles as artists that would later live in the GDR such as Hanns Eisler during his exile and up to Eisler's forced expulsion from the United States in 1948 (Leonard, 110). Thus, the North American influence of East German music was not completely one way, and German and German speaking artists had left their mark on the folk music of the United States as well with songs like "Die Moorsoldaten." For Oktoberklub members and for the East German consumers of their music this connection was very important. An imagined connection with artists from the 'other' America, those that opposed the Vietnam War and America's actions in the rest of the world, was at the center of the Oktoberklub. Pete Seeger's performance of a song at the heart of the East German identity of continued opposition to National Socialism would have been very effective at establishing a connection. The Oktoberklub preformed alongside Americans in some of their published albums as well as through a yearly festival that was founded by the Oktoberklub in 1970, *Das Festival des politischen Liedes* (The Festival of the Political Song) (Dietrich, 1414). An American named Bob



Lumer performed on Oktoberklub's second Album *Unterm Arm die Gitarre* what appears to be his own self written song "Lied Vom CIA" (Song of the CIA) ("Oktoberklub", Discogs). "Lied Vom CIA" is a satirical song that 'thanks' the CIA for fighting for humanity with spies, bribes, and bombs. Lumer comments on the CIA's illegal funding and operation of domestic spy operations such as the National Student Association. Through *Das Festival des politischen Liedes* American artists like Barbara Dane, Pete Seeger, and Dean Reed performed in the GDR (1938-1986) (Musikundpolitik.de). Left wing American musicians had a lasting impact on the hootenanny movement through their ability to perform alongside the Oktoberklub as well as through concerts in the GDR.

American Folk music deeply influenced the Oktoberklub as well as the hootenanny movement as a whole. Many American civil rights and union songs were performed by the Oktoberklub at hootenanny concerts and published by Amiga. Additionally, American songs and tunes served as inspirations for multiple Oktoberklub songs, including the arguably most well-known Oktoberklub song, "Sag mir wo du stehst?". North American artists had ample opportunities to play in the GDR, either alongside the Oktoberklub or at local hootenanny meetings, or through the *Festival des politischen Liedes*.

### **Conflict: Prague 1968 and War**

The legacy of anti-war and pacifism oriented politics as well as civil rights politics of the hootenanny Movement and the core of many of the songs of the Oktoberklub often came into conflict with what Government-aligned authorities desired. This drove some members of the club and local clubs into conflict with the East German society.

A central theme of much of North American folk music, especially late generation (1960s) artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez was pacifism and the anti-war movement. These songs were performed by various hootenanny clubs including the Oktoberklub at official events. However, the antiwar songs and pacifism based lyrics often came into tension with other expressions of ideals of the GDR such as the state's military pride. Events such as the Soviet intervention into the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) in 1968 shook many in the GDR to their core, including Oktoberklub members. Anti-war songs were often able to be played and performed due to their surface-level political statements, namely opposition to war and specifically the wars of the United States. The more general theme of pacifism and anti-war politics often was a point of tension between club members and government and party officials. As previously explained, American folk music permeated the hootenanny movement in many ways. American anti-war songs, especially those from Bob Dylan were very popular at early hootenanny club meetings across the GDR (Dietrich, 1183). However, after the initial phase of the clubs spreading across East Germany the themes of these songs often came into conflict with the Party. The GDR was very proud of its new military image, and this was very much connected with its image as an antifascist country. Government forces attempted to limit pacifist songs in the movement and within the newly christened Oktoberklub (Dietrich, 1187). The reasons for this are varied. Pacifism and abstention from military service were very much frowned upon, and therefore pacifist songs could often be in an abstract sense problematic. Additionally, this all coincided with attempts from above to limit American influence over GDR culture as a whole. Specifically American pacifist songs were seen with disapproval from above, from state institutions like the leadership of the FDJ. The songs were not eliminated completely, merely curtailed. At televised concerts in East Germany with Pete Seeger for example, he performed the

American anti-war song “Down by the Riverside” (König, 87). Additionally in later years after the zenith of the movement’s popularity at the *Festival des politischen Liedes*, anti-war songs were sung by Perry Friedman alongside the Oktoberklub such as the Bob Dylan song “Master of War” (“Festivalteilnehmer 1970-1990”). These songs came from musicians that opposed key American policies in the USA, with many artists such as Pete Seeger or Perry Friedman having personal histories of being involved in left-wing movements, making it difficult to always confront the political themes in their music. Themes of anti-war politics gained real relevancy in the GDR during the 60s as well. The endorsement of the GDR of the Soviet intervention into the CSSR in 1968 was a polarizing event in the GDR. Many artists’ views were shaken when the GDR media as a whole condoned the intervention. This affected artists that had been sympathetic to the regime like Bettina Wegner into becoming disillusioned with the Party and the GDR (Heinen, 70). The GDR support for the Soviet intervention is another one of the paradoxes that disrupted East German attempts of liberalization in the 60s, the cultural and political scene that was the breeding ground for the hootenanny movement. The intervention and ongoing friction with certain kinds of antiwar songs was alienating for many members.

The hootenanny movement started in the 1960s in the GDR, however, by the mid 70s had lost most of its life with the exception of the Oktoberklub. Even then, the Oktoberklub had taken on a different look and structure than the original Hootenanny Club Berlin. A central reason for the eventual evaporation of the group outside of the state-supported Oktoberklub was perceived control and involvement from Government and party organs. The head of the FDJ said as much in 1968 when he described the hootenanny movement as *Eigentum der FDJ* (property of the FDJ) (Dietrich, 1185). The Oktoberklub specifically received extensive state support, they became essentially the official FDJ band. This state support came with state involvement in the

group. The group was subject to government policy and followed the lines set out about limiting American music and certain themes of songs. For members within the Oktoberklub, the state involvement within the group became a point of tension. One member of the group became a vocal point of this tension, Gisella Steineckert (1931- ). Steineckert was much older than all the other members of the group and other members, like Wegner, suspected her of being a party-sent censor (Heinen, 62). Song and musical choices in the group were often made in large discussion between all the members. Both Wegner as well as König describe Steineckert as following the party orthodoxy strictly and often speaking out for the group to do so as well (Heinen, 73). The involvement of the party and the state in organizing and financing the band as well as the perceived idea of a party censor of the band was a violation of the ideals that members had about their art and music. The idea of a government authority dictating their art was for some unacceptable. Outside of the Oktoberklub the perceived party and government involvement in the movement led to many leaving the group.

### **Legacy of the Oktoberklub**

A lasting legacy of the hootenanny movement and the Oktoberklub was the modernization and internationalization of East German political songs. The hootenanny movement at its inception and early development in the 60s was influenced deeply by its time, the period globally when both the United States and various Eastern Bloc countries like the GDR were exploring with liberalization and new ways of politics. In America the Folk Revival was reaching its zenith of cultural and commercial popularity alongside the developing Civil Rights and anti-war movement. As discussed in this work, the earlier generation of American folk artists, those that lived and preformed music during the 30s 40s and early 50s were often

themselves deeply influenced by left wing politics. This generation influenced and continued to in part perform alongside later artists, whose popularity and cultural impact peaked in the 60s. Foreign musicians such as Perry Friedman as well as East Germans themselves imported and adapted many aspects of this American musical tradition into the GDR and helped change and modernize East German music. Guitars and rock inspired music covered in American cultural influences suddenly entered the realm of acceptable music in the GDR, whereas years before it would have been denounced and curtailed by government institutions. Instead, the East German state supported, influenced, and largely absorbed the hootenanny movement within to the existing mechanisms of the state. The hootenanny movement and the Oktoberklub brought new themes and musical inspirations. Suddenly at state cultural events and on official records bands and groups were playing and singing American civil rights songs. The North American influence of the hootenanny movement stands at the center of it, from the principle people that imported and guided the movement as well as to the songs and themes first handled by bands within the movement, however, other cultures and traditions would influence the movement and East German music culture at large. The Oktoberklub would take up the aesthetic of internationalism. Departing from the previously established orthodoxy of political hymns and marching songs from Germany or occasionally imported songs from the Soviet Union and neighboring European countries, the movement would perform songs from the whole globe. Here would be a plethora of further potential research topics into the Oktoberklub and East German society as a whole. Irish Folk music would become popular in East Germany during the ongoing Northern Irish civil rights movement and following British occupation of Northern Ireland for example. Irish folk music inspired artists in the hootenanny movement/ FDJ Singclubs as well as other artists outside the movement. The Oktoberklub performed a song with

the same tune and structure of the Irish Republican Army song “Come out ye Black and Tans” for example. It was titled “Es ziehen die Söhne los”<sup>22</sup> (The sons are moving out) and replaces the original Irish lyrics admonishing the British police force sent to pacify Dublin with lyrics describing the bitter scene of sons going out to war, remembering their fallen fathers.

The Latin American influence of East German music was discussed and analyzed in part by Richter-Ibanez however there is still plenty to look for. The cause of Chile and the military coup in 1973 against President Allende was also important for the Oktoberklub and other political artists in the GDR. The Oktoberklub covered Chilean songs and sung songs expressing the need to support the, in reality soon to be crushed, civilian resistance. Other international causes such as the Greek military Junta of 1967 brought left-wing Greek music to the GDR, specifically songs by Mikis Theodorakis (1925- ). The struggle of the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa and it’s neighboring countries would be a vocal point of the later end of the Hootenanny movement as well. The first inspiration for this movement that would become so deeply international, however, was North American music. The importation of American folk music, a country that was generally portrayed by state media and the governing ideology to be the antagonist of the GDR and other socialist countries, connected East German artists to the world. It was the perceived connection to the ‘Other America’ that inspired the music of the Oktoberklub and other local hootenanny clubs. An Oktoberklub version of the Italian communist song “Bandiera Rossa”<sup>23</sup> (Red Banner) is a good example of this. In a live recording posted on YouTube, from possibly around the time the Oktoberklub published a version of the song in an Album titled *Sing mit Uns* (sing with us) in 1974, the group sings the song in Italian, German, English and then Italian again (Discogs, “Oktoberklub”). Most notably before singing an English

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra84rIqzGFw> Es ziehen die Söhne los by the Oktoberklub

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_dD5rwyfP8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_dD5rwyfP8) Bandiera Rossa by the Oktoberklub

verse of the song, a singer announces that a youth wing of the CPUSA was recently founded in Chicago and that the following verse is dedicated to them, applause then interrupts them briefly before they finish their song. That time would be taken to dedicate the verse to supposed communists in America and that it would earn applause from the audience speaks to the connection that the Oktoberklub and other hootenanny club members had with the supposed idea of the “Other America”.

Another lasting legacy of the movement and the Oktoberklub was the experience of the absorption of the movement within official GDR society. As discussed above, various members within the Oktoberklub as well as local clubs were alienated by the perceived cooption and control of an independent movement. This was for these members a catalyst and a lesson that was followed by later folk band movements in the GDR. The hootenanny movement additionally helped popularize folk music of American, German and international varieties in the GDR. A wave of folk artists spread across East Germany during the 70s and 80s up to the collapse of the GDR. These groups were generally focused more on traditional German and broadly speaking European folk music. These groups existed openly and had their albums published through Amiga. However, many avoided state control and oversight with the hootenanny movement as a lesson in this. Wolfgang Leyn covers this in detail in *Volkes Lied und Vater Staat*.

## **Conclusion**

The hootenanny movement changed rapidly within GDR society. What had started with one impromptu concert from a banjo playing Canadian had, within a decade, become a mass musical movement all over the GDR. The movement was from its beginning spontaneous and relatively un-centralized, however by the end of the decade was firmly absorbed into state

institutions like the FDJ. This work focused on explaining the initial roots of the movement within a North American folk music tradition and how this effected the movement. The movement was deeply influenced, as were other European countries, by the American folk revival. This tradition was imported from specific people like Perry Friedman as well as through cultural osmosis, through the immense popularity and commercial success of later artists in the Folk Revival. The music was able to be imported in part due to the political and cultural scene of 1960s East Germany, with attempted liberalization in the air. The music was also able to be imported because of its roots in the North American context. The earlier artists of the Folk Revival particularly came from a broadly left-wing musical tradition that could often be directly connected to organized left-wing parties and unions. The American musical influence on the hootenanny movement is heavily apparent in the largest and most well known group, the Oktoberklub. Many of the initial songs that they performed at events or through published albums were originally American union songs or Civil Rights songs. Additionally, American songs and tunes were used by the Oktoberklub as inspirations for songs that were firmly pro GDR. American and North American artists served an inspiration for Oktoberklub and other hootenanny club members, and American artists were often able to perform in the GDR. Some of the themes and motifs that were heavily featured in American folk music and imported into the GDR created conflict within the movement and with government authorities. The way that the movement was absorbed into official GDR institutions like the FDJ conflicted with many artists' feelings of artistic freedom. Antiwar songs were also a point of conflict. Antiwar songs or pacifist songs from an American context, dealing with American wars were broadly accepted. However, more general antiwar songs or antiwar themes were not favored by Government censors and institutions. The lasting legacy on GDR society by the movement was the



internalization and modernization of East German political songs as well as the increase of interest in folk songs in the GDR that would pave the way for later artists.

There is still a variety of ways to analyze the Oktoberklub or the hootenanny movement as a way of examining the culture and politics of the GDR. This work has mentioned the *Festival des politischen Liedes*. The list of artists who performed at the festival is enormous and incredibly varied and shows the range of cultural elements and traditions that would influence the later hootenanny movement/ FDJ singing clubs. What exactly happened to the Oktoberklub and other East German bands during and after the reunification of Germany would be an interesting point of research as well. The *Festival des politischen Liedes* still exists in some form to this day, as the *Festival Musik und Politik* (Festival of Music and Politics). Numerous Oktoberklub members have published autobiographies after the reunification of Germany such as Hartmut König, Gisela Steineckert, and Bettina Wegner, all briefly discussed in this work.

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