Light and Shadow: The Fall-Out of 1989 on Berlin's Folk Music Scene

Introduction

On 9th November 1989 a most remarkable thing happened in Germany: The Wall between the Eastern and Western part of the country that had been in existence since 1961, became more and more permeable by the hour. Local residents united in celebrations and enthusiastically welcomed the overnight fall of the Wall, which had divided the country for twenty-eight years. By the following day people from East and West were standing on the Wall by the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, hugging each other, chanting and celebrating. The future looked bright for everyone. What has become of this vision?

In this paper we will look at the consequences of this seminal event on local musicians in Berlin from both sides of the former Iron Curtain. I carried out fieldwork at intermittent intervals from the 1990s onwards. The focus community were native Irish folk musicians long-term settled in Berlin and their socio-musical relations with local folk musicians, especially those learning how to play traditional Irish music from them and with them. We will take an inside look at how the fall of the Wall had many and multifaceted effects on diverse aspects of the local folk music scene. We will discover how the present international view of Germany as a 'strong economy' is at variance with perceptions of local community musicians in Berlin, whose economic positions were in a number of ways negatively affected by the changes that resulted from the fall of the Wall.

Background of the Berlin Community Folk Music Scene

What I remember about Berlin (then 'West-Berlin') in the 1970s and early 1980s is that it was a major hub for community music-making. Musicians from many different countries had been attracted to the blossoming 'island culture' of West-Berlin because there existed a proliferation of ethnically diverse community pubs and restaurants featuring regular live music events. Some of these were located in small side streets in the city centre, others were placed in multicultural districts like Berlin-*Kreuzberg* – internationally known as home for a very large Turkish community, besides many other nationalities – and often in relatively low-budget premises situated in close proximity to the Wall. Some of these, like Spanish, Greek, or French restaurants, combined ethnic cuisine with matching ethnic music. Others used a multicultural variety of folk music genres to attract patrons. Quite a few of these venues offered half-hour slots featuring different acts during the night, thereby giving international musicians an opportunity to meet and exchange information about the Berlin folk music scene.

All these small-scale community venues constituted employers who provided a small but regular income to adaptable community musicians, and quite a few of the latter moved around to play slots at different venues during the night. This setup attracted a clientele of young people, many of them students, and it furthered inter-cultural appreciation and cooperation. Attending audiences were interested in folk music and came specifically for the offered live music. Many of these small-scale community venues advertised their live music programme only by little flyers on their tables and by word of mouth of their patrons, thereby keeping their advertising expenses very low. These folk venues generally had small stages to accommodate communication between musicians and audiences, and musical items could be introduced with some background information. Many of these small folk venues charged a small admission fee, but not all of them did.

Ruth Finnegan, who has carried out a comparative study of local level musical activities in Milton Keynes, found that compared to other genres the folk scene is quite small, and that this appears to be the case across Europe (1989:58). What she also found was that folk performers took their music seriously, were interested in the history of traditional material, and that many mentioned their music – whether paid for or not – as very important for their identity constructions (1989:306). This was certainly also the case within the Berlin folk scene of the time. Berlin musicians of the post-war generation – as well as their colleagues from other countries, many of whom settled in Berlin – were at this period in their twenties to early thirties. Quite a few of them were part-time students, and this generation grew up with this type of employment being freely available as a source of income. Apart from bars, cafés and restaurants, folk musicians found employment at outdoor events like local festivals, at theatre events and hotels, for social gatherings like weddings or folk dances, at schools, youth clubs and charity events. Additionally, for Irish musicians regular pub sessions played an important role for meeting and exchanging repertoires and related information.

For the more committed musicians among them it was paving a path to become professional performers, and some of them – we may think, for instance, of Hannes Wader, who is now internationally well known, or Thomas Loefke, who arrived in 1976 as a student in the Berlin music scene, and later joined up with some members of the Irish folk group *Clannad* to form *Norland Wind* – became highly successful musicians with an international reputation. Like Hannes Wader, Thomas started playing in Berlin community pubs like the locally famed legendary Go-In [1]. Others had more modest aims, feeling contented with enjoying the buzz of audiences in these diverse community venues, and opportunities for experimental international musical cooperation. A snapshot from the LP *Berlin Folk News* – recorded live at Berlin folk music venues around 1980 – lists musical examples from the Berlin-resident group *A Sugar Cane* with musicians from Cuba, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, and Argentina; a piece by the Berlin-born Iranian musician, Hamid Rahpyma, playing Russian folk music in ragtime

[1] The legendary Go-In was a folk music pub with live music programme on seven nights per week. Its main seating area was in front of the stage, but there was also a small backroom area for people who wanted to talk. The Go-In finally closed in 1993, but it is fondly remembered by many, artists and patrons. See also https://www.go-in-berlin.com

style on guitar; an Armenian folk song performed by the group *Persepolis,* with members from various Middle-Eastern countries working and studying in Berlin; as well as compositions by German, Scottish, and American songwriters cooperating with a variety of musicians from the international Berlin music scene.

A group of American singer/songwriters who arrived in Berlin in the 1970s to play the local folk circuit, got together to record a CD with their own songs written about their Berlin experiences. On the cover of their CD, *Hagelberger Street* [2] (see fig.3.1), they describe the Go-In, the well-frequented folk venue of the time (see fig.3.2), as 'the epicentre of our musical world, a bazaar of world music long before the concept became fashionable.' Many of these musicians settled in Berlin and developed their own fan base. It was the time of the folk revival, and interest in community music-making was plentiful.

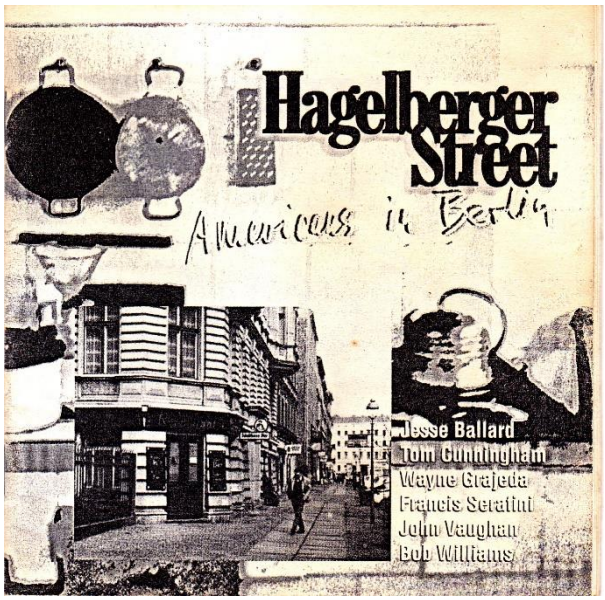

Fig. 3.1 Cover of the CD *Hagelberger Street* At this time Hagelberger Street, like other Berlin streets, still carried marks from the past war.

Fig. 3.2 Joe Dieckman, who managed the Go-In live music programme from 1968 to 1990. In the background are autographed pictures of Go-In artists.

Methodology

My access to the Berlin folk music community was easily facilitated because some of the long-term settled international musicians remembered me from the 1970s, when I played the Berlin folk music circuit and toured Germany with different folk groups.

[2] A street in Berlin-*Kreuzberg*, where they all lived and played music together.

Access to the Irish music community was even easier because most of them played from time to time in pub sessions, where verbal communication is interspersed with music-making, allowing for a flexible combination of participant observation, occasional semi-structured interviewing, and absorbing information that was voluntarily offered to me because the Irish music community was aware of my research project. They did indeed welcome it, and those who had read some of my previous work, had commented in the vein of 'Very good. More of this.'

Since all the long-term Berlin resident Irish musicians speak German, our conversations took place in a mixture of English and German (and occasionally Irish), frequently changing back and forth between languages, often even within the same sentence. To simplify matters, I took all my field notes in English, and then paraphrased conversations to ease accessibility.

The Community of Irish Musicians in Berlin

The Berlin community of Irish musicians consists of approximately thirty to forty people, not all of them native Irish, but all committed to playing this genre of folk and traditional Irish music. There is little fluctuation in these numbers, as these musicians are long-term resident in Berlin. Gender participation is around one third female to two thirds male, but there is little difference in their choice of instruments. Around a dozen of the native Irish musicians have lived in Berlin since the 1970s folk revival, and most of them have mixed German-Irish families. A few of the Irish musicians have well paid daytime jobs, but many of them are professional musicians who depended for their income on teaching music and employment in community music entertainment. Some of this work occurred irregularly, for instance for community projects, fairs, or theatre events, but by far most of their work was based on regular employment at community bars that offer live music entertainment.

During my period of research Irish bars in Berlin came in two varieties: fairly large, slightly Irish-themed bars in the city centre, with only a sparse sprinkling of Irish live music, mainly catering for passing tourists, and small community pubs where local musicians would congregate on specific nights of the week for Irish session playing and where, mostly on weekends, paid small stage performances took place. At these community sessions Irish and non-Irish musicians would meet and exchange musical information, and sometimes explore cross-cultural improvisation. It is also a pleasant learning opportunity for international musicians interested in this genre to learn detail from the native Irish musicians. This central ingredient of the home Irish pub session, the informal exchange of information about specific musical items, was present at these local Berlin Irish pub sessions from their beginning in the 1970s. And it is indeed still found nowadays at a few locations, where it has by now been passed on to the next generation of musicians. So in this regard we can talk of a local tradition of Irish session playing in Berlin.

Interesting about this categorisation into two different types of pubs is that local musicians refer to the Irish bars in the city centre as 'Irish pubs', but to their community venues as *'Irische Kneipen'* – which is, of course, German for 'Irish pubs', but the use

of native terminology indicates that these community Irish bars are regarded as part of their local community scene, and they are indeed widely frequented by local residents.

A case study: A Cultural Project to Facilitate Learning About Irish Music

Local musician, David Bradfield, who came to Berlin in 1981, earned his income from selling Irish and world music instruments – as well as CDs, Celtic craft items, and some other related merchandise – in a small community music shop in Berlin-*Kreuzberg,* supplemented by occasional stage performances at community venues with a local Irish folk group. Dave's music shop, the *Tír na nÓg,* had backroom facilities, named the *'Meeting Place'*, which served for spontaneous music sessions, music classes (Dave himself teaching tin whistle), Irish language classes (for Irish and for German people), and as a contact and meeting place for visiting Irish people. Dave recounted to me that after the Wall came down many Irish construction workers arrived in Berlin, who had migrated from work on the Channel tunnel, through Disney World in Paris, to the now required reconstruction work in East Berlin. According to Dave, they 'got a rough deal' for this work from the agents, with more or less illegal contracts, and often no payment in the end. For this group of people the *Meeting Place* became available as a contact place for getting themselves out of their distress, but otherwise the venue served mainly for advertising Irish culture and as a meeting place for musicians.

Additionally, Dave organised an annual *Bealtaine*-Festival on each 1st May in a communal yard with greenery behind his shop, which was very popular with the Berlin Irish community as well as with local residents. Sadly, although Dave's *Tír na nÓg/Meeting Place* provided a relevant social space with a variety of cross-cultural services, no funding support could be found for Dave's community projects. By the late 1990s Dave's income from community performances had dwindled to such an extent that the remaining music shop work did no longer provide sufficient income for Dave and his family, forcing Dave to concentrate on his other qualification, teaching *Shiatsu* massage, and soon afterwards the family moved to Italy, where earning an income through music and *Shiatsu* massage turned out to be still possible.

The Cultural background of Musicians from the Eastern Side of the Wall

Rather different was the Irish music scene in the 1970s and 1980s on the Eastern side of the Wall. Musical performances and merchandise were state-organised. Irish recordings, films, and literature were not available (with very few exceptions), and live music events were heavily censored. Informal playing of Irish music in public was legally prohibited, and therefore was only passed on from person to person at private parties. As regards recordings, only those released by the state company, *Amiga,* were available in the East. Hermann Glaser, who took over the management of the Northern Irish folk group, *The Sands Family,* in the early 1980s, told me that the only Irish folk groups to have recordings available in the East were a trio from Galway called *Celtic Tradition,*

The Whistlebinkies from Dublin, and *The Sands Family.* Foreign artists were invited for performances by the state-run *Staatliche Künstleragentur,* who were the only ones to have a West money budget to pay artists, but they were only interested in performers of bland pop music.

However, according to Hermann Glaser and Lutz Kirchenwitz (1993), folk music became very popular in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, the GDR youth organisation FDJ [3] began to organise a clandestine alternative concert agency. The problem was that they had no West money budget to pay artists, and it was legally prohibited to take East money out of the GDR. So the money had to be spent, and available merchandise in the East was limited. Sometimes visiting artists were lucky to be able to use their earnings to obtain musical instruments.

The FDJ organisers were interested in offering music with interesting lyrics or histories, and they later succeeded in setting up the *Festival des politischen Liedes* [4] in the GDR, for which musicians from many world countries were invited. As concerns language issues, Hermann told me that the FDJ provided translators, also to tour in the GDR with the artists, because audiences had very little English, having learnt instead Russian in school.

As far as aspiring GDR musicians are concerned, there was state sponsorship available for training to become middle-of-the-road German pop music performers – which was not the case on the Western side of the Wall. There was also a state budget allocated to support classical musicians – and this was likewise the case in the West. According to Kirchenwitz (1993), choir singing and newly composed politically themed folk music was also sponsored by the GDR state, while alternative culture folk songs questioning the status quo found a home in local churches.

Coming Together after the Fall of the Wall

From this brief overview it becomes obvious that musicians on either side of the border had quite different networks at their disposal for earning their income. All of this changed radically when the Wall came down. The first fall-out of unification measures was sudden unemployment of classically trained musicians. The Eastern and Western orchestras were soon amalgamated into one orchestra, and as a consequence many classical musicians lost their employment. Peter Jahns, who worked as an actor and as a singer/songwriter in community music performances [5], spoke to me in the late 1990s, at a time when he was employed in a community historical re-enactment project, for which he had contributed some light musical compositions. He explained to me that the labour exchange had placed some of the recently turned-unemployed classical musicians as actors in this historical re-enactment project because it was regarded as ‘artistic

[3] Freie deutsche Jugend.
[4] Festival of political song.
[5] For instance in the legendary Go-In.

employment.' Peter described how these highly trained musicians felt utterly frustrated since there was no possibility for them to use any of their special skills in this project, and he said he saw them spending a lot of their time in the downstairs bar, consuming alcoholic drink.

A very similar picture emerged from descriptions of the community of Irish musicians. Some of the former classical musicians were employed in bars that offered mixed genre programmes, and the Irish community described to me how at this time they noticed classical musicians arriving in the community music scene and offering to play 'sets of jazz music' for a small fee, which they then used to spend the rest of the night at the bar, consuming alcoholic drink. This squeezed the already contracting market of employment opportunities for the Berlin folk musicians depending on this employment even further, because it reduced the work available for them.

A second effect that made itself felt in the 1990s was that low-budget premises in former back streets facing the Wall were suddenly catapulted into fashionable areas and steeply rose in expenses. Little back street community music pubs turned into fashionable street cafés, and therefore more community musicians lost their income. This was a point mentioned more or less by all the Berlin community musicians that I spoke to during my research project about the Irish music community. They wistfully related to me that lots of these small-scale live music venues closed in the years following the fall of the Wall, forcing them to reconsider how to plan and budget while they were losing one after another of their regular employers.

Strategies to Find New Employment

Not so easily defeated, most local community musicians took to seeking employment in venues in surrounding areas, which had now become accessible through the fall of the Wall. This turned out a rather insufficient measure, however, as travelling adds to the expenses of the musicians, and travelling home after a gig in the early hours of the morning can be quite a stressing experience. Staying overnight at the performance location, on the other hand, cuts even more into the meagre income of these musicians, and so it is often not even an option.

A further aspect, which is often forgotten, is that these musicians have also aged over the last four decades. So their requirements for living expenses have risen, in some cases also for health reasons, but their actual income has fallen. During follow-up fieldwork in Berlin in the summer of 2016, I spoke to local Irish musicians, John Shanahan and his wife Regina Tichel, who had tried over the years to support their diminishing income by setting up a local independent recording label for Berlin community musicians. This plan seems to have faltered because these very community musicians had just lost a significant part of their income as well through the political-economic development in the region, and so they could not afford to spend money on professional recordings. Rather, they would now record demo-CDs of their live music

and sell these to their fans at community performances. It is a cheaper way of recording their music, and it has the potential to supplement their meagre income at least a little.

During my visit in 2016 John and Regina told me that they now found it impossible to survive on their music, and that this was the first time in their lives that they depended on income support. They had to struggle hard to make this decision because it affects the core of musicians' self-definition, but they were simply left with no other choice. This loss of their income comes at a time when the first signs of age-related health problems start to make themselves felt. Some other Berlin community musicians whom I met during my visit in 2016 told me that they now survive on their state pension, supplemented every now and then by the occasional paid community gig. It seems that this combination to support themselves is expected of them, since the state pension in present-day Germany is calculated at such a level that subsistence on the pension income is hardly possible, especially for people with health problems.

Theorising the Community Music Experience

So, what can be extracted analytically from this ethnographic study of the Berlin community music scene? For a start it becomes obvious that community musicians from former East and West have been severely affected, economically and psychologically, by the sudden changes following the disappearance of the Wall. The details described in relation to John Shanahan and Regina Tichel are just the tip of the iceberg, which they suggested I should include in my ethnography as a specific example that is representative for the experiences of the Berlin community music scene.

Niall MacKinnon (1994:15), who has looked in detail at the British folk scene, sees music-making as a 'quintessentially social activity.' A forced change in employment circumstances will therefore have wide-ranging effects on all areas of life of musicians and their perceptions of their environment. Ruth Finnegan (1989) had also observed that for folk musicians their music-making was perceived as very important for their identity constructions. From Peter Jahns' description of his former-classical musician colleagues working with him on a community historical re-enactment project it becomes obvious that the detrimental economic changes from the 'German unification' were also biting hard on their self-image.

Fred Woods (1979), who has investigated the international effects of the 1970s folk revival in Europe, observed that folk musicians tended to work very hard to make ends meet, because they were inspired by their music-making, which plays an important role for their self-perception (Woods 1979:89-91). As regards Germany, Wood points out that musicians were disadvantaged during the 1970s folk revival because of the Nazis having used folk melodies for their propaganda purposes, but that local musicians were developing a new image for their folk music, led by groups *Singspiel, Elster Silberflug, Fiedel Michel,* and solo performers like *Hannes Wader* and *Knut Kiesewetter*

(Woods 1979:69). This was certainly the case in Germany, but the Berlin folk scene was very multiculturally composed during the whole time of the 1970s and 1980s folk revival. Because of its special 'island-status' it held a magical attraction for musicians from all over the world.

The influence of past Nazi state propaganda purposes will have affected primarily musicians from the former West, while musicians from the former East will have memories of musical GDR state propaganda when the Wall came down. However, the economic changes in the 1990s affected musicians from both backgrounds, resulting in loss of employment and bruised self-perceptions. Diana Forsythe (1989) has observed in ethnographic detail that there is a considerable discrepancy between the outsider's and the insider's perspective concerning German identity constructions, and that the outsider's view is strongly coloured by the present national stereotype. The same appears to apply to the emic and etic perceptions of Germany's present economy. It is certainly not the case that because of Germany's alleged 'strong economy' musicians were inordinately affected when the Wall came down; quite a few audience members at community venues related to me how they were also having problems to make ends meet under the new socio-economic arrangements, and that they were not much pleased with the results of unification either. For residents of the former GDR the Western 'promised land' has not materialised, racist views and fear of 'foreigners' have increased, especially in small towns, and previous state support for some employment branches has disappeared with the fall of the Wall. The present situation of Germany's allegedly 'strong economy' reminds rather of the conditions of the 1990s 'Celtic Tiger': a few people find favourable employment conditions, but this does not apply to the many people at community level who do not benefit from the alleged 'strong economy' at all.

Ioannis Tsioulakis (2011a, 2011b) has looked at strategies that Greek jazz musicians have developed to overcome difficulties that arose from a diminished income through local and regional community performances. These strategies included: 1) Combining well-paid performances of little scope for individual creativity with little-paid enjoyable performances of another genre for furthering their musical creativity 2) Lifestyle changes to make it possible to live on considerably less money 3) Experimenting with combinations of traditional and modern instruments, so as to reach different audiences, and 4) Constructing specialised musical equipment for specific genres that is not mass-produced on the international music market.

When comparing these strategies with those of the Berlin community music scene, we can observe that they also apply here, but to a different extent. Combining well-paid, somewhat boring performances with little-paid enjoyable ones is part of many musicians' repertoire of economic survival – at least in Western countries. However, as regards Berlin Irish musicians, this applied rather to a choice of items of repertoire out of a more or less common genre. For instance, when under financial pressure to accept employment where offered, audiences may be inattentive, or

requested well-known Irish clap-along songs may make up a considerable part of a performance, rather than craftily arranged pieces displaying individual musical skills. Under unfavourable market conditions venues are rare and difficult to find that allow musicians to introduce their own compositions into their performance sets, because these are frequently of high musical quality and not much conducive to foot stamping and hand clapping, which proprietors of middle-of-the-road music bars tend to regard as preferable for selling beverages. So Berlin Irish musicians also have to negotiate compromises in their performances.

Lifestyle changes to accommodate living on less money have certainly been applied by the Berlin musicians, but in many cases this has turned out insufficient for providing a basic income necessary for survival. Experimentation with combinations of traditional and modern – as well as world music – instruments has been an integral feature of the Berlin music scene since the beginning of the 1970s folk revival, and it was at least partly motivated by the post-war population's desire to open up to everything musical that had been suppressed during the 'Germanification' attempts during the 1940s historical period. Cross-cultural cooperation is often accommodated by acclaimed musicians from widely different national backgrounds who settled in Berlin at the time of the folk revival, but it has to be cut back when these musicians are under increasing pressure to make a living.

Some Berlin examples of explorations for exciting cross-cultural musical cooperation spring to mind, such as the combination of American musician, Tom Cunningham, performing on an electrically amplified acoustic guitar with Iranian musician, Mohammad Tahmasebi, on Persian *dombac*, or Czech born jazz musician 'Saxophone Joe Kučera', who also came to live in Berlin in the 1970s, jamming with musicians of the most diverse genres. These performers had found enthusiastic audience attention, but such musical explorations were already in existence in West- Berlin before the Wall came down. Therefore, this avenue to widen out their musical offers was not available to the Berlin music community, as it was already part of the city's normal repertoire.

The construction of specialised musical equipment was not really called for during the folk revival and its associated musical genres, since most genres were performed on acoustic instruments, which were amplified in larger venues by means of microphones and pick-ups. Some musicians branched out into repair of musical instruments. However, repair of musical instruments is only called for if local musicians can afford to pay for such repair. The circle closes again: if the community musicians cannot earn a basic income for survival, then all branching out will only be a temporary measure for some musicians, because the root cause of their lack of a basic income still continues to exist at community level.

Preserving Irish Cultural Aspects in Berlin

As we have observed above, most folk musicians are serious about their music, which supports their identity constructions, and it also allows them interesting and educational forms for socialising and exchanging cultural knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that the Irish session scene in community Irish pubs still continues – at least at a few venues that still exist at the present point in time – although even these are getting fewer, despite Irish session playing being an unpaid form of music-making. These musical get-togethers are, however, essential for giving newcomers to this genre a chance for public performance, and in Berlin they have also played a vital role for integrating musicians from East and West of the former Iron Curtain to meet and play traditional Irish music together. Since these two groups of musicians had rather different background experiences as regards skills and knowledge about this genre, these community Irish pubs played an essential role in accommodating the coming together of these two different groups of musicians. Helpful was, of course, the arrival of Irish folk dancing with the international success of *Riverdance* in the 1990s. Quite a few present Irish session musicians from an East German background have come to enjoy playing this music through participating in community Irish dance workshops. In this way at least some of them have come to be very serious musicians as regards this genre, travelling to Ireland every year during their holidays, to participate in summer schools for improving their playing skills. So, the Irish session playing tradition in Berlin can be seen to be still alive and continuing well. However, for all newcomer musicians there will eventually come a day when they expect to receive some payment for offering their skills to entertain an audience. They will, after all, have acquired those skills by diligent practice, which deserves some kind of reward. It is at this point that they will discover that the general labour market conditions will produce an unpredictable result – whether satisfactory or unsatisfactory, it will be unpredictable.

Conclusion

When taking a long-term look at the Irish community music entertainment scene in Berlin, it becomes clear that the fertile ground it provided in the 1970s/80s for international cooperation was very much dependent on this specific historical period and the ‘island image’ of Berlin before the fall of the Wall. With the disappearance of the Wall socio-cultural and economic local conditions have changed considerably, leaving many underemployed and unemployed community musicians in their wake and their disappointed audiences are left within an insecure socio-economic environment as well. Change is always difficult, but it seems that substantial mistakes were made in the years following unification, and the resulting social disadvantages are still felt at community level today. It seems therefore that the macro-level interpretation of

Germany as a ‘strong economy’ does not translate to results at local community level at all.

On a personal level the socio-economic changes of German unification have had a number of detrimental effects on local community musicians in Berlin. They have lost many of their folk-pub type stage performance contexts, their social networks have been disrupted, their identities, motivations and musical aspirations have suffered, economic self-sufficiency has increasingly become harder, and their relationship with their long-term dedicated local audiences has also been disrupted. Life has become harder for them, not only from a financial point of view, and their efforts to widen their geographic range of travel for seeking employment have not been able to cover their losses. Additional travel to more distant venues has added stress to their work, and pressure to accept any available work because of increasing scarcity of employment opportunities has led to exhaustion and sometimes to frustration. It can, for instance, be extremely stressful when musicians are forced by financial considerations to play for unappreciative audiences at events for which they have been employed.

Mary Louise O’Donnell and Jonathan Henderson (2017) have described in ethnographic detail experiences of what they term ‘background musicians’ at locations in Britain and Ireland. They stress how important communication between musicians and audiences is for self-esteem of the performers and even for the technical quality of their performance. However, O’Donnell and Henderson focus on the specific role of background performers at venues such as restaurants and hotels, of whom a wide repertoire of diverse musical genres is expected, on which they can draw (2017:59). This is certainly not the case for folk musicians. The genre ‘folk’ may be seen a little flexible, but they would not be expected to have a multi-genre repertoire. The transferable significance from O’Donnell and Henderson’s ethnography is the all-important relevance of communication between musicians and their audiences, and their description how an unappreciative audience can leave the performers creatively unfulfilled, emotionally and physically drained, and with feelings of low self-esteem (2017:52). Henderson mentions that at some venues managerial staff have not only dictated what repertoire he should play, but that they gave him to understand ‘that he was overpaid and how grateful he should be to them to have a gig’ (2017:58). When such an experience combines with playing for an unappreciative audience, it can indeed have soul-destroying effects on the self-esteem of musicians who have spent many years to refine their repertoires and playing techniques.

In the years after the fall of the Wall Berlin’s community folk musicians were certainly severely affected, not just financially, but on many different levels that forced them to make radical changes to their lifestyles. When all these increasing difficulties add up, they will eventually also affect musicians’ motivation, their energy levels and their health. When looking at the enthusiastic vision of October 1989 from a community level point of view, it is clear that many of its expectations have not materialised: The

macro-level ‘opening up’ of German unification has resulted in a ‘closing down’ of employment opportunities for local musicians.

As a footnote comment it is worth pointing out that further complications developed from 2016 onward as a result of the UK Brexit decision, which affects not only international cooperation and travel of touring musicians, but also family relations and the retirement status of some of the Berlin community musicians. But this is a topic in its own right, the discussion of which will have to wait for another time.

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