

1980

Lyman H. Legters, ed.: The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society

John T. Walker
Fullerton College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/gdr>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Walker, John T. (1980) "Lyman H. Legters, ed.: The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 6: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v6i2.510>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *GDR Bulletin* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Geschichten aus der DDR. Ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979. 250 pages.

This anthology contains the following sixteen stories written in the second half of the 1970's by GDR authors, most of whom are also well known in the West: Günter Kunert, Lovestory--made in DDR; Fritz Rudolf Fries, Der Nachlaß von Raül; Klaus Schlesinger, Am Ende der Jugend; Stefan Heym, Mein Richard; Ulrich Plenzdorf, Kein runter, kein fern; Martin Stade, Exmatrikulation 68; Erich Loest, Zwei Briefe von Rohdewald; Thomas Brasch, Fastnacht; Bernd Jentzsch, Jungfer im Grünen; Werner Heiduczek, Das Schicksal treibt mit uns seinen Spott; Volker Braun, Unvollendete Geschichte; Hans Joachim Schädlich, Kurzer Bericht vom Todfall des Nikodemus Frischlin; Helga Schütz, Mittwoch im April; Christa Wolf, Selbstversuch; Karl-Heinz Jakobs, Kanal; Franz Fühmann, Spiegelgeschichte.

Looking at the contents list does whet the reader's appetite, because one is always eager to find new works by these authors, and stories that one has heard about but may not have easy access to (such as Braun and the excerpt from Heiduczek's Tod am Meer). Most of the stories treat past or present GDR problems. The situation of youth is the focus of several stories (Schlesinger, Heym, Plenzdorf, Braun). Stade's story tells of four students who are expelled for seemingly minor infractions (skipping a theater performance on a field trip); Loest's is about a radio announcer who meets, unexpectedly, a former colleague whose pleas for help he ignored when the latter was arrested years previously. Kunert notes ironically in his story, "Im System des organisierten Mangels waren Sekretärinnen knapper als öffentlich geäußerte Wahrheiten."

The stories are almost all interesting because of the personal perspective of the writers, which comes through strongly. This, in fact, is the unifying characteristic of the anthology, and the editor comments on it in his afterword, which, though brief, is a useful survey of trends in recent GDR fiction.

Turning to the source notes, however, one wonders--as one always does with anthologies published in the West--how many of

the stories were actually published in the GDR. The predominance of West German imprints and the note "unpublished" (for Stade, Loest, and Jakobs) is not very encouraging. I am certain in only five cases that they were published in the GDR, although a more thorough check might show others. The editor explains, "Wären die Rechte nicht in der Hand der Autoren oder bei Verlagen in der Bundesrepublik, ich hätte diese Auswahl nie zustande gebracht." And he points to the hardening in cultural politics that is demonstrated at the latest by the expulsion of Wolf Biermann.

Gail Huetting
University of Illinois
Library

The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society. Ed. by Lyman H. Legters. Westview Special Studies on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1978. xi & 285 pages.

In his preface to this volume Lyman H. Legters alludes to the "loneliness" perceived by specialists on the GDR up to very recent times. In fact, Legters and his ten fellow contributors, most of whom are political scientists, have made great strides toward overcoming the academic isolation of the recent past. These contributors have written on a variety of aspects of the GDR, from foreign policy and the National People's Army to the New Economic System and the growth of political culture.

It is obviously difficult to review such diverse contributions. However, the changing, dynamic character of the GDR is one of the recurrent themes of these essays. Kenneth Hanf discusses the governmental changes of 1972-74, more specifically, how GDR decision-makers intended to re-structure the relationship between central and local governmental organs. Michael Keren discusses the failure of the New Economic System and the increased state intervention in economic affairs in subsequent years. M. Donald Hancock shows how the planning functions and duties of GDR intellectuals have contributed to non-

conformist thought, though within the framework of Marxism-Leninism. Peter Ludz discusses "Continuity and Change since Ulbricht." Throughout this book it is clear that the GDR is a changing, dynamic society, though not without its problems. A second recurrent theme of these essays is the search for self-identity and the establishment of the "legitimacy" of the GDR government among the populace. Henry Kirsch analyzes the efforts to redefine national allegiance by emphasizing the developing "socialist human community" rather than traditional "national categories," such as language. He points out that the communications media and educational system plus economic successes have increased popular identification with the system. However, he warns that economic setbacks could undermine popular support, while the 'Federal Republic...continues to be the 'other' by contrast with which the GDR's own identity is established." Arthur Hanhardt, Jr. also argues that various factors have combined to increase identification with the regime, thereby creating a greater sense of self-assurance and stability. One could, of course, quibble with some aspects of this book. The editor of such collections is faced with the harrowing tasks of delineating themes and integrating diverse essays. Thus, Professor Legters writes in his introduction that the various contributors believe in the "primacy of domestic politics." However, it does not appear that all the writers are infused with this belief (e.g. Hanhardt, 176). The essays by Ludz and Anita D. Mallinckrodt are quite dated, as the editor recognizes, but this recognition did not prevent their inclusion in the book. Professor Keren's article on the New Economic System puts formidable demands upon the non-economist, though the essay is clearly worth the extra efforts. The book is generally free of traditional Cold War rhetoric, although Hanhardt may surprise some readers with his ungrounded and seemingly offhand reference to the "mentality and the venality of the functionaries," a statement that corresponds neither to the tone of the book nor to the generally high quality of his essay. However, these are minor points compared with the virtues of the book. These essays will partially alleviate the relative paucity of works on the GDR written in English. Moreover, the bibliography which

includes only works in English, and especially the notes following the articles, which also list works in German, will lead the reader to a variety of specialized works and articles on the GDR as well as some primary sources.

John T. Walker
Fullerton College

Momentaufnahme: Notate zu Musik und Musikern der DDR. By Frank Schneider. Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1979. 460 pages. 3,50 M.

Among the many acts of stock-taking prompted by the 30th anniversary of the GDR, Schneider's observations on New Music in that country is a feat of penetrating scholarship and aesthetic understanding deserving international readership.

Schneider concentrates upon production in instrumental music in the GDR during the past decade, a period in which New Music has come into its own both in terms of its role in the society of the Republic and of the serious international recognition which it has gained in West and East alike.

The book offers a collection of biographical and analytic studies--including exegeses of individual compositions; it is not intended as a work of music history, but rather as an assessment of the contemporary compositional scene, designed as a contribution to structuralist hermeneutics.

Schneider, who earns his daily bread as a Dramaturg at the East Berlin Komische Oper, is a man of radiant intellect and it is the filtering of data through his critically perceptive eye which gives this book its unique readability. He has organized his reflections according to the sonata principle--complete with exposition, development and recapitulation, giving the book something of that fascination with "verbal music" known from Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus.

Composers treated are Reiner Bredemeyer, Paul-Heinz Dittrich, Friedrich Goldmann, Georg Katzer, Siegfried Matthus and Friedrich Schenker. Excursions evaluate the contributions made by Hanns Eisler and Ernst Hermann Meyer to the development