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# From dance bands to radio and records:

## Pop music promotion in West Germany and the decline of the *Schlager* genre, 1945–1964

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### Abstract

This article traces key developments in the production and promotion of popular music in West Germany during the twenty years after the Second World War. Starting from the observation that performance royalties were a relatively important source of revenue from music, the article first describes how, around 1950, dance bands became the principal gatekeepers, before looking at the impact of radio and records on the musical production system. It shows that this structural change led to a marked concentration of the music business and argues that the immediate effect on the popular repertoire was moderate. The most consequential change was a widespread condemnation of *Schlager* and a growing sense of detachment from this genre among songwriters, which set the path for the further decline of this musical style in subsequent decades.

**Keywords:** dance bands; Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte (GEMA); music publishing; payola; *Schlager* music

In the history of popular music, the 1950s and '60s have mostly been studied as a period of transformation. The breakthrough of rebellious sounds like rock'n'roll, the rise of the independent record producer and his struggle against the homogenizing forces of the 'majors', and the growing relevance of popular music as a form of expression that has to be taken seriously in artistic as well as political terms, have so far been very much in the foreground of research on that era. One can think of many reasons for this preoccupation with the more exciting aspects of popular music history in the two decades after the Second World War. The fact

that research is most advanced in, and focused upon, the US and Britain, the two countries that pioneered the above mentioned transformations, is certainly one of them.

This article looks at the production and dissemination of popular music in West Germany, a case that is marked by continuities rather than revolutionary changes. Consequently, this article takes a different approach and focuses on different aspects to those that dominate studies on the US and Britain, aspects which may actually be typical for the history of popular music in continental Europe.

Most importantly, the article looks at the music industry as a licensing business and highlights the importance of performance royalties as a source of income for composers, authors and publishers. This trait seems essential to understand developments of the West German music business at least in the period under study. Initially, generating revenue from getting songs played in public made dance bands and orchestras the principal gatekeepers in the system. The first part of the article describes how this worked and assesses the consequences for the popular repertoire around 1950. The second part analyses the impact of first radio and then the growing record business on the musical production system during the 1950s and into the early '60s. While this brought about a structural change that shifted the principal gatekeeper role from dance band leaders to radio programme makers and record producers, the immediate impact on the popular repertoire was rather moderate, mainly because it brought certain networks of songwriters, performers, publishers and programme makers into key positions who had a similar background to the principal gatekeepers of the time (around 1950) or had already been around at that time. More consequential than actual changes in the music itself was the shift in the evaluation of *Schlager* ('hit music') that occurred during the decade. With 'payola' practices becoming public and a general suspicion that songs got played not because of their merit, but because their producers were connected to key gatekeepers casting a shadow over the industry, *Schlager's* reputation began to deteriorate. This development set the path for the decline of the genre's cultural and social capital for the coming decades.

This article begins with the first steps of commercial music suppliers after the Second World War and ends with 1964, a year after which new trends would have had to be taken into account, namely the triumph of English-language music in Germany and the accelerated growth of the record industry. This is not to suggest that the developments of the mid-60s caused a break in the history of popular music in Germany. On the contrary, one would be able to identify a lot of continuities that reach into the late 1970s. Instead, the concentration on the period from 1945 to 1964 is simply due to limited space.

## Dance bands as gatekeepers and the popular repertoire around 1950

Leaving out the neighbouring, yet interrelated, sectors like the musical instrument trade and the electrical goods industry, money from music can be earned in three ways: selling it in a conserved form as a physical item, offering it as a service, or trading it as a license (Laing 2008; Nathaus 2011). The first way to generate revenue from music includes the sale of sheet music and records; the second is the performance sector in the widest sense, including live concerts as well as the performances of disc jockeys and plays on juke boxes. While these goods and services are offered directly to listeners as end consumers, musical licenses are sold to music users like radio stations, record companies and concert venues. They are either sold by the proprietors of a musical copyright directly or, and this is important in the context of this article, by a collection society that represents copyright owners, negotiates with music users on their behalf, collects fees for music use and distributes them as royalties among members and affiliates in accordance with its distribution scheme. In West Germany, this task has been fulfilled for the area of performance as well as mechanical rights by a single organization, the *Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte* (GEMA), since its reconstruction from the remains of its predecessor, the STAGMA (*Staatlich genehmigte Gesellschaft zur Verwertung musikalischer Urheberrechte*) in 1947.

For the West German music business of the 1950s, GEMA collections were an important source of income, as other revenue streams were relatively small. In 1951, around eight million records were produced in a country of over fifty million people (Kayser 1975: 166). At the end of the decade, still only a third of German households owned a record player (Haertel 1959). Juke boxes as another potential source of income from music had not appeared in German pubs at that time. Sales from popular sheet music were so low that publishers often gave them away for free to band leaders, hoping that the tunes would be played in cafés, bars and restaurants to generate performance royalties which were due every time a song was played in public. In 1951, GEMA collected a gross total of more than 17 million DM, of which 5.8 million from proprietors of bars and dance halls and other organizers of live popular music was the largest segment, followed by performance royalties from radio and mechanical royalties for recordings (both 3.2 million each).<sup>1</sup> This income was distributed—very unevenly, of course—among 6,422 domestic publishers, composers and authors and foreign collecting societies that represented copyright proprietors outside the Federal Republic.

1. Bericht. GEMA-Prüfung 18. Geschäftsjahr 1951, Bundesarchiv Koblenz ('Federal Archive in Koblenz', hereafter: BArch KO), B141/2675, fol. 88.

As complaints in the trade press show, performance royalties attracted a number of publishers who simply sent masses of cheaply produced scores to professional associations and employment agencies to be distributed without charge among musicians who could not afford to pay for sheet music of a higher standard. Songwriters and publishers who brought out that kind of music, which was, according to critics, of low quality both in terms of print and the musical arrangement, hoped that royalties for live plays would exceed the costs for postage and production (Schrauth 1951; Heidemann 1953). Publishers who were in the business for the long haul, however, did not rely on such a 'shotgun' approach. They promoted their catalogues among bands by employing *Propagandisten* ('pluggers') who frequented live venues such as cafés, bars and variety theatres to introduce orchestra leaders to the publishers' latest releases. In early 1950s Berlin, there were around 440 venues where live music was played, most of them on every day of the week. Publishers like Will Meisel and Peter Schaeffers sent their 'pluggers' around the city with vans, offering sheet music on wheels. This form of song promotion had its own form of pre-release 'demo': the so-called *Gründrucke* ('green copies'), negative pre-prints with white notes on a green background. They served publishers as galley proofs and were issued to bands that wanted to be the first to present a prospective hit (Eidam and Schröder 1996: 75, 90).

For performance royalties to be earned, it was essential for publishers to motivate musicians to list their titles in the GEMA logs. These lists were taken by the collecting society to calculate how often individual compositions were played and to distribute fees accordingly. The logs required musicians to enter several dozen song titles together with the names of the composer, the arranger and the publisher as well as the 'character' of the piece (which meant the respective dance rhythm). Registering was clumsy and tedious and therefore ridden with practical problems. To begin with, some publicans banned their musicians from completing paper work during the set, as they saw it as a waste of the playing time which they had paid for and demanded that it was done in the musicians' spare time. Musicians themselves did not like to fill in forms on stage as they saw it as a distraction from their performance. And as they were often too tired to do it after the show, the accounting job tended to be put off to a later date when musicians had difficulties remembering what tunes they had played on that particular occasion (Franz 1959).

To ensure compliance, publishers tried to motivate musicians to log their songs in ways that sometimes overstepped the border of the legitimate. For instance, the publishing firm Vera in Hamburg awarded 50 DM to the orchestra that reported the highest number of performances of its songs in a month.<sup>2</sup>

2. Minutes of the advisory board of the GEMA, 5./6.5.1954 in Berlin, BArch KO, B141/2685, fol. 126.

GEMA urged their publisher members to refrain from such strategies and sent out field personnel to concert venues to check the reliability of logs, but could never stamp out attempts to manipulate the registering system (Valentin 1964). Tests revealed that ensembles as a rule registered songs from local publishers more often than titles from other catalogues, which proves that the publishers' promotional work certainly influenced the bands' playlists. But as this effect was observed in all major cities, the GEMA programming committee concluded that local influences balanced each other out and recommended giving up such tests altogether.<sup>3</sup>

Publishers did not only focus their attention on bands because of the way the accounting process was structured. They also addressed them as pivotal gatekeepers to audiences. As the popularity of their catalogues depended on the favour of bands and orchestras, publishers promoted songs that they thought would work at live concerts. They tried to gauge the demand for popular music by taking the viewpoint of bands and orchestras who catered to audiences in cafés, bars, restaurants, cabarets, variety theatres and similar venues. This perspective came almost naturally to the many publishers who not only were in close and regular contact with dance orchestras and show bands, but often had first-hand experience of working with such ensembles, either as performers, arrangers or employers. Peter Schaeffers, who founded his publishing firm in 1941, knew the musical stage from the *Kabarett der Komiker* ('Cabaret of Comedians') that his father Willi had led and which had been a springboard for show stars, composers and comères of the 1930s and '40s (Anon. 1956). Will Meisel, born into a family that ran a dance school, had been the proprietor of a concert café and bar before he began to publish his own work and that of colleagues in 1926 (Eidam and Schröder 1996: 12-13). Kurt Grabau, to name another example from Berlin, had taken over the concert café of his parents in the 1930s before he entered the publishing trade and promoted his songs as a singer at the same time (Mietzner 1950). Ralph Maria Siegel, who set up his Munich-based publishing firm in 1949, had worked as a singer at Berlin's top popular music theatres in the 1930s, had led an orchestra and wrote music and lyrics for popular tunes. An article in the trade press lauded him as the 'man of seven professions' (Weitze 1949). The professional roles in this web of publishing, songwriting and performance commonly overlapped, with publishers often being songwriters, and seasoned performers and band leaders working for publishers as composers, arrangers and 'pluggers'. Consequently, most men involved in this network had a good insight into the jobs of the people they

3. Minutes of the GEMA programming committee, 22.11.1954 in Berlin, BArch KO B141/2687, fol. 60.

dealt with. In addition to that, many of them shared a similar background, having received a formal musical training at an academy of music and acquired experience on the musical stage.<sup>4</sup>

Selecting and promoting music with the concert setting in mind, as well as the musical expertise of key producers and gatekeepers, shaped the popular repertoire of the day to a great extent. Popular music was being divided into two categories. On the one hand there was *Unterhaltungsmusik* ('light music') which encompassed works that contained elements of art music, adapted for popular entertainment, for instance operetta songs. This music was to be listened to not quite as attentively as in a classical concert setting, but was intended to appeal to listeners who appreciated well-crafted and well-played music of a 'higher' standard. Light music put the stress on the arrangement and required considerable musical knowledge to adapt the respective title to particular instrumentations and incorporate turns that would make the sound of the ensemble 'special'. It was also more taxing than the average popular tune and enabled musicians to showcase their instrumental skills. *Unterhaltungsmusik*, which sometimes came with the adjective *gehoben* ('elevated'), was perceived as a form that tried to close the gap between 'serious' and popular music (Mietzner 1949).

On the other hand there were *Tanz- und Schlagermusik* ('dance music and hits'), often referred to in the same breath, which made up the 'lower' part of the popular repertoire. Dance music was explicitly meant to be functional, written and performed to satisfy the demand of a clientele that frequented dance halls, tea dances and the like. It was differentiated horizontally into dance rhythms and therefore subject to fashions that changed every season. The dance repertoire was frequently renewed through new tunes involving the latest dance step that was introduced by leading dance teachers and disseminated via dance schools. So whereas standard pieces from the light music segment had matured into evergreens (Germans actually used the English term and continue to do so), contemporary dance tunes were cyclically renewed. Apart from the so-called 'standard dances' like the waltz, most dance music shared this periodicity with the *Schlager*, a form of music that aimed at a mass audience unable or unwilling to discriminate by means of artistic criteria. Hit songs were devised to charm, amuse or move the broadest possible spectrum of people with catchy melodies and uncontroversial lyrics. Most hit songs dealt with romantic love; other *Schlager* referred to sunny and more or less exotic places from Italy to Hawaii or latched on to novelties in a quirky way (Franz 1955: 27–30).<sup>5</sup> A particular type of *Schlager* was the humorous songs that came

4. The trade journal *Der Artist* frequently published short biographies of leading publishers, composers, lyricists and band leaders which confirm this characterization.

5. Exemplary titles can be found in the lists of new releases of dance and *Schlager* music that

out for the carnival season and which some publishers, authors and performers from the Rhine area like Karl Berbuer and Toni Steingäss specialized in.

The popular repertoire of the early years of the Federal Republic included foreign as well as domestic copyrights. Music had always travelled across national borders, and publishers re-established or made new international contacts soon after they had been given a publishing license by the occupation forces. Peter Schaeffers, for instance, undertook regular trips to Holland from 1949 on and met Dutch, French and British colleagues there (Schaeffers 1950; Swat 1950). His colleague Ralph Maria Siegel, one of the first German publishers after the war who made the exploitation of foreign catalogues on the German market a mainstay of his business, represented Peer's Southern Music in Germany and opened up Ralph Siegel Music, his American subsidiary in 1951 (Anon. 1951). Trade was done on the basis of sub-publishing agreements: A domestic publisher promoted a foreign copyright in Germany and shared the income of sales and royalties with the foreign publisher. This way, the importing sub-publisher acquired the exclusive right to exploit a song that was a hit elsewhere and which he hoped would work on the domestic market. The exporting original publisher, on the other hand, derived an additional income without having to do any promotional work in the foreign marketplace. Apart from the invisible import in the form of copyrights, foreign music also entered Germany in the form of sheet music. Due to paper shortage, lack of funds and the destruction of printing plates during the war, musical scores were scarce in Germany after 1945. In this situation, the so-called 'hit kits'—printed editions of American standard tunes—became widely distributed among German bands, not least because of the fact that military clubs of the Allied Forces were an important employer for dance musicians. Apart from that, the Allies seem to have promoted their songs among German musicians by way of command. In Hamburg, for example, the British military administration gave songwriter Heinz Woezel the task of producing German lyrics for 150 American and British tunes (Franz 1964a).

For the many ensembles that catered for a dancing audience, dance tunes provided the staple of their programmes. As they were commonly hired by the proprietor of a venue for a limited number of weeks, their success depended on happy and hopefully returning customers, and this meant that they perceived themselves first and foremost as craftsmen whose job it was to service the demand of a dancing and socializing audience. Pieces of light music and *Schlager* would be included more selectively. Musicians were certainly inclined to favour more challenging pieces, as these provided opportunities to show their skills. This motiva-

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appeared in every monthly issue of the journal *Musikhandel*, a periodical that primarily aimed at sheet music and musical instruments dealers.

tion became all the more important as professionally trained musicians worried about the competition of bands that played popular music on a semi-professional or amateur basis.<sup>6</sup> One way for the 'pros' to distinguish themselves was to raise the stakes by stressing virtuosity. This, however, had to be done within limits, because too many aspirational numbers could put off dancers and alienate employers (Mietzner 1952). At the other end of the quality scale, *Schlagers* were played at special request and would be thrown into the set to get the audience's attention. But they had to be measured carefully, because their effect would have worn thin if they were played too many times. In addition to that, there was always the danger that musicians would get bored by a *Schlager* themselves.

How the repertoire was balanced out ultimately depended on the particular context of an individual venue. The professional discourse, however, which was disseminated by *Der Artist*, the leading journal for performers, composers, authors, publishers and promoters of popular music, pointed musicians towards the 'higher' end of the spectrum. Besides advertisements of publishers and manufacturers of musical instruments, reviews of the latest sheet music releases and short biographies of prominent actors in the field, the journal discussed standards of performance in articles as well as in its reports from concert venues in bigger and smaller cities from Kiel in the north to Karlsruhe in the south. The main contributors to the *Artist* were authors and performers of light music who were engaged in keeping musical standards up, while also showing an awareness of the fact that their readers were primarily paid to provide entertainment. Consequently, the *Artist* appreciated musical expertise and skill, but judged these in the light of their functional value as *Gebrauchsmusik* ('music for use').

## **The impact of radio and records on industry structure and the popular repertoire during the 1950s and early 1960s**

In the course of the 1950s, radio and record promotion began to override the system of promoting music to local bands and earning money from live 'plugs'. The consequences of this shift were uneven. To begin with economics, changes were gradual rather than incisive. Looking at the figures, it becomes apparent that GEMA revenues in general, and performance royalties in particular, provided a substantial part of the income derived from music. In 1959, GEMA collections amounted to 77 million DM, more than half of which stemmed from

6. Complaints about unfair competition from dilettantes and 'also-musicians' were frequently published in the professional and trade press (see for instance Schwiegl 1949; Gudi 1949).

performance fees, with 11.6 million DM being collected from performances in live venues and another 14 million DM for broadcast performances.<sup>7</sup> This compares to a turnover of 129 million DM from record production (Engleder 1959), of which thirty to fifty per cent went to retailers (often electronic goods shops that sold records as a sideline) and distributors. Another third of the proceeds from record sales went to the record companies (W. E. 1959) which at the time still very much relied on music publishers and producers connected with them as sources of artists and repertoire.

A look at the income structure of the US music industry underlines the importance of license fees in the German case. According to semi-official statistics published in *Variety*, the US music industry in 1956 had earned nine hundred million dollars from juke box takings and record sales, but captured only about thirty million dollars from performance fees.<sup>8</sup> The relative importance of royalties from live performances in Germany owed not only to the still comparatively meagre income from other sources, but also to the fact that performance fees were generally higher than in the US and Britain. Moreover, local tax authorities reported all music events that were liable to entertainment duty to GEMA. This made collections far more efficient than, for instance, in Britain, where the continental European system of charging music users was regarded with envy (Whale 1963).

The resurgence of radio and the record as important music media during the 1950s only gradually changed the economic structure of the business, as a large share of the revenue from music still came from performance fees. More consequential was that the centralized method of promoting and exploiting songs via radio and records first complemented and then superseded the decentralized system of 'plugging' songs to live bands, as it shifted the gatekeeper role from dance bands to radio programme makers (Franz 1958). As the latter became the prime target of promotional efforts, a considerable number of radio employees used their position to their own financial benefit.

During the 1950s, radio employees were frequently accused of picking songs for popular programmes in which they had a personal interest, either as composer, author or producer. The first case of this kind that was exposed in the general press in 1949 involved Kurt Feltz, then editor in charge of light entertainment at NWDR, the public radio station based in Hamburg and Cologne. Feltz was said to have included a disproportionately high number of songs in his dance and entertainment programmes for which he had written the lyrics. The news magazine *Der*

7. GEMA, Bericht für das Geschäftsjahr 1959, BArchiv KO, B141/2725, fol. 141, 230 and 233.

8. Bericht des Leiters der Rechtsabteilung des BIEM J. Elissabide über eine Reise nach den USA, BArchiv KO, B141/2709, fol. 71.

*Spiegel* referred to statistics that showed a total of at least 1,796 plays of Feltz songs in 1950, making it five plays a day on average in a radio programme in which popular music was still restricted to certain slots. As programmes were exchanged between the seven regional public broadcasting of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (ARD), the association of West German public broadcasters, Feltz's tunes received another 4,391 plays within the country that year (Anon. 1950). Feltz, who had been writing film scripts, libretti for operettas and *Schlager* lyrics since the 1930s (Anon. 1955), made further profits in addition to the performance royalties gained when his tunes were broadcast in his programmes. As his critics pointed out, he also used the Cologne studios of the NWDR to produce master tapes for free which he then offered to record companies. These recordings were likely to be accepted, as they were guaranteed ample airplay. Finally, frequent broadcasts of his tunes enhanced the chances that Feltz's *Schlager* would become hits—which resulted in more airplay, record sales and live performances (Anon. 1949a).

With the press blowing the whistle and public pressure mounting, Feltz had to resign as a programme director for NWDR and started to work as an independent producer for various record companies. But even though he had left the broadcaster, he seemed to have retained very good connections with his former colleagues. In fact, the share of tunes that he wrote lyrics for—mostly under one of several pseudonyms—increased to an extent that public broadcasting authorities decided to curtail the share of Feltz's *Schlager* to no more than 25 per cent more airplay than the second most 'popular' author (Anon. 1950). In addition to that, the GEMA restricted the number of pseudonyms that a member could have to one, making it more difficult for radio employees to put their own songs on air without competitors and the critical public taking notice.

Nevertheless, 'payola' of this kind persisted, and stories of radio employees using their position for their own financial benefit frequently came to light. The case of Hans Ger Huber and his wife Fini Huber-Busch, who both worked for the *Bayerischer Rundfunk* (BR), was reported to the GEMA by the composers Walter Leschetizky and Alfons Schmidseider and illustrates in detail how the system worked. According to Schmidseider, whose statement was sent by Leschetizky to GEMA chairman Werner Egk in September 1953, Hans Huber, as the programme director in charge of the BR dance music department, favoured songs that featured lyrics written by his wife Fini. To this end, he manipulated the public vote for request programmes by throwing postcards that voted for other songs in the bin and instructing publishers to post a certain number of cards on behalf of the song they wanted to have on the programme. Schmidseider claimed that he had been instructed to drive to the town of Rosenheim and

post fake 'fan' mail outside of Munich in order to conceal the real sender of the cards. For their services, the Hubers not only received royalties that went to Fini Huber as a GEMA member, but also schnapps for Hans, skiing gear for Fini (from publisher August Seith as a reward for his most successful author) and a loan of 5,000 DM from the Quint publishing firm, allegedly for a car. This loan was to be paid back in royalties, and so Hans Huber calculated the exact minutes of airplay which songs from the Quint catalogue had to get every month. The network around the Hubers included at its core publishers and other employees of the BR, but was also extended to other regional stations as well as record producers. Huber intended to feature the records of producers Fritz Ganss, who worked for Electrola in Cologne, and Kurt Feltz at the Munich station to motivate them to record titles suggested by the Hubers and place them with 'their' broadcaster, the NWDR. According to Schmidseider, Fini Huber boasted that she already had received a GEMA account statement of 16,000 DM. She and her husband were said to have repeatedly stated that they aimed at an annual GEMA income of 20,000 DM.<sup>9</sup>

When these allegations were made public, the broadcaster fired Hans Huber. GEMA, on the other hand, was less swingeing with his wife. The society offered her to drop the expulsion charge if she made a charitable donation of 2,500 DM.<sup>10</sup> While Fini Busch was treated with leniency, Walter Leschetizky, the man who had sent the report to GEMA, found out that the case had backfired on him. Apparently, Schmidseider's statement and Leschetizky's covering letter had not been treated as confidential by the GEMA board and were leaked to Huber, whose lawyer sent a copy of the correspondence to the surprised Leschetizky, informing him that his client was suing him.<sup>11</sup> Fini Huber-Busch was far from being deterred from using her connections to make her authorship profitable. Quite the opposite, and so the GEMA had to take issue with her business conduct again in 1959, after she had accidentally sent an incriminating letter to the collecting society that had been intended to reach Joachim Balke, a freelancing disc jockey with Radio Salzburg. The letter revealed that Balke, Busch and her regular composing partner Werner Scharfenberger had made an agreement to share composer and author royalties for certain songs, which was interpreted as evidence of 'payola'.<sup>12</sup> Again,

9. Feststellungen über die Abteilung Tanz-u. Unterhaltung beim Bayerischen Rundfunk!, BArchiv KO B141/2683, fol. 44-45.

10. Protokoll über die Sitzung des Aufsichtsrates am 16./17.1.1958 in Berlin, BArchiv KO, B141/2710, fol. 15.

11. Protokoll über die Sitzung des Aufsichtsrates am 9.7.1955 in München, BArchiv KO, B141/2691, fol. 52-53.

12. Urteil des Landgerichts München im Fall Huber-Busch vs. GEMA vom 14.5.1959, BArchiv KO B141/2717, fol. 95.

Fini Busch was threatened with expulsion from GEMA, but escaped with a slap on the wrist. This time, she 'donated' 5,000 DM to GEMA's social fund.<sup>13</sup>

The networks that formed around radio stations created a bottleneck that allowed regular entry to publishers, composers and authors who were tied in to the networks, but excluded many more who had no connections to influential gatekeepers. Access to radio programmes was highly restricted for unknown authors and composers, but also for songwriters who had been successful in former times and now found that without connections their works received less airplay (Romeisen 1957; Franz 1964b).

The situation in the record industry was in some ways similar to that of radio. The extent to which the production and dissemination of music became concentrated on well-connected cliques becomes evident if one looks at the measures that the GEMA employed in the second half of the 1950s to 're-establish fair and honest competition in the area of dance and light music', as the campaign was called. The collecting society pressed for voluntary agreements to limit the share of songs by certain authors, composers and producers on recordings in order to free up capacities for other songwriters. In 1957 and in collaboration with the *Deutscher Komponisten-Verband*, the *Bund Deutscher Liederdichter und Librettisten* and the *Musikverleger-Union* (the respective professional associations of composers, authors and publishers), GEMA signed a contract with Kurt Feltz that curtailed the latter's production firm to no more than thirty per cent, but in no case more than 42 titles, to the repertoire of Deutsche Grammophon (DGG), the leading German record company.<sup>14</sup> Soon after that, GEMA approached DGG in order to persuade producer Gerhard Mendelson to commit to a similar self-restriction, taking the contract with Feltz as a model. Mendelson's *Musikproduktion Süd* delivered 100 to 120 titles per year to DGG and commissioned a few trusted composers and authors who worked under pseudonyms to conceal the level of concentration. GEMA suggested restricting the titles composed by Erwin Halletz, who was exclusively bound to *Produktion Süd*, to a maximum of 25 per cent, and the songs authored by writer Hans Bradtke also to 25 per cent. According to the plan, the contribution by all other authors and composers to the repertoire that Mendelson offered to DGG was to be capped at a maximum of ten per cent.<sup>15</sup>

Mendelson used his privileged connection with DGG, the firm that produced half of the West German record industry's output at the end of the decade, to

13. Protokoll der Aufsichtsratssitzung vom 7.12.1959 in München, BArchiv KO, B141/2719, fol. 101.

14. Urteil des Landgerichts Berlin im Streit GEMA vs. Ralph-Maria Siegel, 5.3.1959, BArchiv KO, B141/2716, fol. 46.

15. Urteil des Landgerichts Berlin im Streit Ralph-Maria Siegel vs. GEMA, 9.6.1958, BArchiv KO, B141/2712, fol. 167.

profit from publishing as well. He urged songwriters whose compositions he recorded to publish their works with the firm of Hermann Schneider in Vienna, of which his wife was a junior partner. Publishing works with an Austrian—that is: foreign—company reduced the income for composers and authors, as a German sub-publisher had to get involved to exploit the rights in Germany and demanded a share of the royalties. For the Schneider publishing firm, however, the deal was highly profitable, as it received a substantial income while it could rely on the German sub-publisher and the record release to do the promotional work.<sup>16</sup> Besides publishing, Mendelson's gatekeeper position in the record industry allowed him to become a leading player in the film music business which he turned to in the second half of the 1950s. As he was able to guarantee a record release of film tunes, and as he could offer package deals that included the service of songwriter, performer, musicians, studio and advertising, he undercut his competitors who could not mobilize such ample resources.<sup>17</sup>

Kurt Feltz and Gerhard Mendelson are the most prominent cases to illustrate that German music production became far more concentrated in the course of the 1950s. The condition for this trend was that the pivotal gatekeeper roles shifted from a rather large number of band leaders who were in close contact with local, decentralized publishers to a much smaller number of programme directors in radio and the record industry. These programme makers in turn had ties to an equally limited number of publishers who were primarily based in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne and Munich. And as electronic media rather than dance ensembles made hits, bands increasingly orientated their playlists towards the songs that could be made popular via radio and records, but also film, which has to be mentioned as another important factor in the production of stars and hit songs.<sup>18</sup> Around 1960, every fourth movie produced in West Germany was a musical (Hart 1959), and the music featured in these movies increasingly stemmed from commercial recordings.

While the German music business was restructured during the 1950s, changes in the popular repertoire were moderate. The basic distinction between a 'higher' and a 'lower' form of popular music remained in place, with the upper strata being more demanding and intrinsically rewarding for musicians and the lower part

16. Urteil des Landgerichts München im Streit Mendelson vs. Sikorski, 27.1.1959, BArch KO, B141/2715, fol. 106-108.

17. Urteil des Landgerichts München im Streit Musik-Produktion Süd/Gerhard Mendelson vs. Heino Gaze, Günther Schwenn, Hans Sikorski and Erich Schulze, 26.4.1960, BArch KO, B141/2721, fol. 32-33.

18. A list of the fifty songs most played by bands and orchestras in 1961 shows mostly overlaps with the *Musikmarkt* charts of that year and includes many songs featured in films. Kapellen-Bestseller für das Jahr 1961, BArch KO, B141/2733, fol. 146-149.

considered as functional and formulaic. However, there were changes in detail that deserve mentioning. A first contrast to 1950 is that light music made way for jazz as 'musicians' music'. While light music stagnated and faded to a point at which even its proponents found it hard to say what its characteristics were and what it stood for, jazz became the style that musicians invested in. Throughout the 1950s, the *Artist* in nearly every issue published articles about jazz, introducing German musicians to the American terminology and the various sub-styles, recommending recordings of US bands and books on how to learn to play jazz, and generally highlighting the artistic value of the genre. This was done by differentiating jazz from rowdy rock 'n' roll as well as from dance music, with which it was once associated, and re-contextualizing it in the sphere of art music (Zahn 1997).

The shift from light music to jazz was to a huge extent brought about by performers, composers and critics who entered important positions in broadcasting and the record industry after the war. Most of the dance bands employed by public broadcasters were led by men who either had been involved in jazz during the National Socialist regime or were born in the 1920s and acquired the taste a little bit later. Willi Stech, Franz Thon, Willy Berking and Adalbert Luczkowsky, the older cohort born in the 1900s, were former members of the *Goldene Sieben* and the *Deutsches Tanz- und Unterhaltungsorchester*, two bands that had been assembled in Nazi Germany as an alternative to American jazz (Kater 1995: 95–97, 241–43). After the war, they became leaders of dance and entertainment ensembles at (N)WDR, Südwestfunk and Hessischer Rundfunk. Similar positions were held by Erwin Lehn, Werner Müller, Kurt Edelhagen, Helmut Zacharias, Max Greger, Paul Kuhn and Hans 'James' Last, all of them born between 1919 and 1929. These band leaders, as well as the members of their ensembles, not only exerted a strong influence on popular music programmes in radio, but also supplied the record industry with arrangers and session musicians (Last 2006; Kuhn 1988; Wohler 2010). Radio band leaders interacted with men who had similar musical tastes. At *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, for instance, the above mentioned Hans Ger Huber was a jazz aficionado who had fronted the Hot Club in Munich (Anon. 1949b), and his colleague Werner Götze, who, according to Schmidseider, had been aware of the 'payola' goings-on at the station, promoted jazz as a broadcaster and publicist. Dietrich Schulz-Köhn, nicknamed 'Dr. Jazz', worked for public broadcasting stations as a freelancer, as did other proselytizers of the genre. The third group of actors to share the preference for jazz were younger composers like Werner Scharfenberger (b. 1925), songwriting partner of Fini Busch and a former member of the band of Max Greger, and Heinz Gietz (b. 1924). The latter was a former student of the conservatoire in Frankfurt/Main and owed much of his rise to Kurt Feltz, one of the most popular *Schlager* composers of the early 1960s, with whom

he collaborated (Anon. 1964). Gietz's and Scharfenberger's songs were recorded by Caterina Valente, Peter Alexander, Peter Kraus, Peggy March, Conny Froboess, Rex Gildo and other *Schlager* stars of the 1950s and 1960s.

These and other composers, radio editors and broadcasting orchestra members who were tied into the networks of a popular music business which was becoming more concentrated, put to one side their musical preferences when they wrote, performed, recorded and programmed music for the masses. Consequently, the repertoire of dance and *Schlager* music, as it was still called, contained jazz elements only in homeopathic doses (Pfarr 2008), if it showed any influences at all. As craftsmen, leading producers separated the music they liked from the sounds that they thought a musically uneducated mass would appreciate. With their background of conservatoires and the musical stage, music producers around 1960 orientated themselves towards a similar perception of the audience as the dance bands leaders a decade earlier. In fact, most of them had been around at that time. This, firstly, left the 'dance paradigm' unchallenged: radio programmes were labelled *Tanzsendungen* ('dance programmes') and occasionally dedicated to a particular dance step (Anon. 1963). Records, as a rule, had the name of the appropriate dance step printed on their labels (a practice that began to peter out after 1964), and music films contained sequences which obviously served to introduce viewers to dance routines. Germany's dance teachers continued to meet every year at the beginning of the summer in the spa resort of Bad Kissingen to try out new dance fashions and decide which steps would be taught in the approximately one thousand dance schools of the country (von Kayser and Schnitzer 1960). The 'dance paradigm' also allowed German producers to slot foreign genres into the German repertoire. Rock 'n' roll and beat were stripped of their distinct images and sounds and were adapted as dances, as can be gleaned from combinations like 'rock-' and 'skiffle-fox'.

Secondly, the *Schlager* formula remained intact, with catchy melodies and lyrics about romantic love and exotic places aiming at a common denominator. Yet again, there were changes in nuance that turned out to be consequential. The clandestine practices that surrounded the production and 'plugging' of *Schlager* and the resulting concentration of people who had 'connections' bred a lot of cynicism and frustration among those who were excluded. The *Artist* took sides with the unknown songwriters and voiced anger that was rooted in the widespread perception that songs became hits not because of their inherent merit, but because of the fact that its authors were 'connected' (Mietzner 1958; Friemel 1958). It would be very difficult to assess if and to what degree *Schlager* actually deteriorated in aesthetic terms towards the end of the 1950s, as critics claimed referring to a new dominance of the 'tearjerker'. Be that as it may, the debates about *Schlager* them-

selves require a closer look as they clearly went beyond the familiar complaint about contemporary pop fare, accompanied by a nostalgic view of a better past. There were panel discussions and conferences about the state of *Schlager* (Loss 1960) and books and articles decried popular songs as an instrument in the hands of 'big business' aimed at deluding the people (Schmidt-Joos 1960). Jazz publicist Alfred Baresel went as far as to state that the tearjerker had actually been invented by Joseph Goebbels, suggesting that the organization *Kraft durch Freude* ('Strength through Joy') had promoted sentimental *Schlager* in wartime in order to keep the population calm (Baresel 1964). While *Schlager* had been dismissed as frivolous before, the criticism of the late 1950s and early 1960s further undermined its reputation, aiming at the political economy of popular music and turning *Schlager* from something 'worthless' into something harmful.

On the production side, the politicization of *Schlager* must have nurtured a sense of detachment among songwriters who, tellingly, often worked under pseudonyms. With cynicism growing, producers may well have ceased to care both for the music and the audiences when they wrote and promoted music that they, as musicians, did not particularly like and when they could not even expect appreciation for songs being well-crafted, as a general suspicion overshadowed the *Schlager* business. On top of that, the success of Anglo-American imports like Elvis Presley and Bill Haley and later The Beatles, whom classically trained German songwriters saw as mere amateurs and classified as performers of the latest fad, seemed to support a very negative view of the audience as 'mindless'.

The assumption that all of this resulted in a lack of motivation among established *Schlager* producers is not only likely, but could also be part of the explanation for the continuing stability of the *Schlager* formula even when the popularity of the genre rapidly declined during the 1960s and 1970s: authors and producers of *Schlager* may simply have not cared enough to register that listeners of popular music actually responded to music that deviated from the old formula.

On the reception side, the overall condemnation of *Schlager* laid the ground for a separation of taste cultures which corresponded with a social division among listeners. While it has been studied how genres with artistic aspirations like rock music (Regev 1994), but also dance, theatre and opera (DiMaggio 1992) lent social capital to their recipients, German *Schlager* seems to stand for the reverse development—a cultural genre that became de-legitimized. With *Lieschen Müller* (the name represented a type of thoughtless, uneducated and easily manipulated young female) becoming the quintessential *Schlager* listener, the value of the social capital attributed to the genre was in freefall.

The stigmatisation of *Schlager* also had repercussions for the relationship between German music and Anglo-American imports, as it impeded domestic attempts

to engage with new styles from the US or Britain in a creative way. During the period under study, the people who published, produced and disseminated popular music in Germany treated the Anglo-American import simply as another form of *Schlager*. This was, firstly, because with few exceptions US hits were re-recorded in Germany by domestic performers with a new arrangement and German lyrics and released with a German title, making them nearly indistinguishable from songs written by domestic composers. The rationale behind this was that German tastes were different from that of the American audience, and so the original sound as well as the English language would not appeal to domestic listeners. Secondly, categories like 'authenticity' and 'sound' which were necessary to understand rock'n'roll and its successors as something distinct from the familiar dance and entertainment music were alien to most German music producers as well as listeners. These categories became established in Germany towards the end of the 1960s as a kind of rock canon which distinguished between a body of 'authentic' works by American and British bands on the one side and music from a different social background on the other side, which could almost by definition only be a copy of the Anglo-American original. This meant that domestic rock musicians were caught between established and well-connected *Schlager* producers who disregarded rock music as below professional and craft standards and tastemakers who dismissed attempts by German bands to create rock music as imitative *per se* (Nathaus 2012).

## Conclusion

This article has traced the development of the popular music business in Germany from the era of the dance band to the establishment of radio and records as the primary media to disseminate music. Starting from the question of how money was earned from music and focusing on gatekeepers, I have shown that beyond changes in the industry structure the popular repertoire on the whole remained stable. The basic distinction between a somewhat more artistically valuable form of popular music and songs that were functional and formulaic (dance music and hits) remained intact. The principal explanation for this is that the shift from dance bands to radio and records did not open up space for newcomers as in the US, where commercial radio stations had to look for cheap content and where independent record producers waiting in the wings were quick to respond (Peterson 1990), but retained it for the members of the 'old guard' of publishers, composers, authors and performers of whom a smaller number got 'plugs'.

Looking at the history of popular music with the focus on the production side uncovered a basic problem of German *Schlager*, a genre that became a kind of laughing stock among serious music fans because of its predictable melodies

and harmonies, the vacuousness of its lyrics and its overall lack of authenticity in any sense. Firstly, and in view of the way revenue was generated from music, it becomes clear that *Schlager* music in the 1950s was promoted to music users rather than listeners. On top of that, the dubious practices of how producers got songs into the channels of dissemination further nurtured a sense of detachment and frustration. 'Payola' allegations, the debate about possible ways to restrict the number of titles which the leading producers could get on air or on record, as well as the aesthetic criticism directed at 'tearjerkers', politicized music production. This in turn dampened any intrinsic interest that *Schlager* producers may once have had in this kind of music. Without intrinsic motivation, resonance from peers and sensitivity to evolving audiences, *Schlager* was bound to become an empty formula, highly stable, but unable to adapt to new tastes and to the discourse about the artistic and political relevance of popular music.

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