

MICHAEL RAUHUT, *Ein Klang Zwei Welten—Blues im geteilten Deutschland, 1945 bis 1990* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), 366 pp.

This book is the latest addition to Michael Rauhut's series of publications on the topic of Blues and popular music in cold-war Germany. In contrast to most of the author's previous works, *Ein Klang – Zwei Welten* sets out to examine the reception of Blues music not just in a specific area of Germany but seeks to compare the respective scenes in East and West Germany that formed around this music. After a brief introduction, Rauhut dedicates a short chapter to frequent misconceptions about Blues music and where these biases come from. The text's main part is structured into four chapters, each of which is divided into five thematically linked subchapters, discussing and comparing key players of the German Blues scene, modes of interpretation and their political potential.

Even though Rauhut makes clear from the beginning that his angle is very much that of a fan, he largely manages to convert his "subjective experience to scientific insight" (13). Except for the occasional romanticization of key figures like Günther Boas (54), he succeeds in not letting his fandom cloud his vision (13) but uses his exceptional knowledge of the German Blues scene to deliver an abundance of relevant information. The author excels when he compares different interpretations of Blues music; his assessment of the West German authenticity debates is especially interesting. By juxtaposing the various stances on what authentic Blues music is supposed to sound like (and how bizarrely they are intertwined with race) without explicitly voicing his own opinion, Rauhut's bird's eye view-style of writing cleverly exposes the absurdity of how a few white, privileged European music critics claimed absolute authority not just over the interpretation of Blues music but black experience as well. He does so by unearthing various Blues magazines and newsletters in order to shed light on the West German scene and by plowing through the vast amount of GDR-surveillance data available to him, thereby demonstrating how massively different and ideologically informed these individual networks of fans and musicians were. For example, the effort the intelligence agency of the Socialist Unity Party put into keeping such a marginal music at bay is quite impressive. Rauhut's text, then, can be seen as a strong argument for the politically subversive poten-

tial of popular music, discarding the idea that it is too standardized and repetitive in order to have any effect of the sort. However, the meticulous research that must have preceded this book is both its greatest quality and flaw, as it frequently delivers more details than necessary. While the comparisons of the exact fees musicians were paid for their performances are intriguing to know when examining their economic circumstances, the lists of authors, musicians and radio personalities (e. g. 168-169) that appear throughout the text can become disorienting, since they are of no consequence to the narrative and would have made more sense as footnotes.

Since the topic of race dominates much of the book's subtext, it is appropriate that a subchapter is dedicated to the problematic but at the time widespread notion that Blues music's authenticity hinges on a performer's skin color. However, while Rauhut devotes considerable space to the topic of racial discrimination, he treats the fact that women were often relegated to the fringes of the West German Blues scene without going into detail. The few examples the text provides of the blatant sexism that was part of the network (particularly in West Germany) are downright bizarre (258) and left me wondering about the scale of sex discrimination in the Blues music scene. Therefore, dedicating a more comprehensive subchapter to gender discrimination would have been highly desirable.

The author states in his introductory remarks that his study does not aim to be a comprehensive guide to Blues music (15), and while it surely would need to cover much more ground to deserve that predicate, it definitely is an extremely helpful introduction to its subject matter. Rauhut recognizes the value of cold-war era Germany as a natural experiment on the reception of music and largely succeeds in painting a vivid picture of the two different scenes. He convincingly demonstrates that the very same music can be associated with vastly different meanings depending on its cultural and political context. The author arrives at the conclusion that the West German Blues scene was a male-dominated environment of "collectors and connoisseurs" (301) fighting for interpretative authority of a music they perceived to be the "anticapitalist mouthpiece" (*ibid.*) of the social precariat. In contrast, the GDR-based Blues fans experienced it as an escape from the bleak reality of socialism. Rauhut proves himself to be a

true specialist with outstanding expertise in this particular area of German music history, capable of compiling massive amounts of research data and, for the most part, presenting it in a comprehensible and useful manner. While Blues music, in terms of commercial appeal and audience is certainly a marginal

music, the insights provided by this book are universally applicable to any form of popular music. In any case, for anyone seeking a basic understanding of Blues music in Germany Rauhut's study is indispensable.

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