

Editorial introduction

The initial idea for a German issue of *Popular Music* was proposed by Alenka Barber-Kersovan back in 1995 on behalf of the German Association for the Study of Popular Music. Popular music studies has become a flourishing field in Germany in the last decade, with a steady increase in the number of courses and theses, conferences and seminars, and books and papers. But little of this work is known to Anglophone readers, and in Germany itself there's a perceived difference between German and Anglo-American approaches to popular music issues. If the latter (particularly in work on rock music) is obviously influenced by cultural studies and tends to mean an implicit identification between analyst and consumer/fan, in Germany, objective musicological and/or sociological description remains the academic ideal, and popular music study continues to be related to pedagogical concerns – to the problems of music teaching itself, to more general questions about the role of popular music in young people's cultural development.

It is arguable, then, that 'the German study of popular music' describes a particular kind of academic approach, and it is certainly true that 'German popular music' describes a specific – and specifically unusual – national cultural formation. This might immediately seem surprising. Of all continental European countries, Germany seems the most comfortably part of the global market. It is one of the largest outlets for Anglo-American rock music, for example (alongside the USA, Britain and Japan); in the Bertelsmann Group it has one of the world's big 5 leisure/media companies; and its musical institutions (whether dedicated music television channels or lande-subsidised radio orchestras, heavy metal rock festivals or studio-based dance music producers, specialist music magazines like *Spex* or record labels like ECM) are familiar enough examples of contemporary cultural practice. As Reiner Niketta's survey here of German musicians suggests, at a local level, at least, the rock scene is not much different in Germany or Britain, in Australia or Finland, in the USA or Poland (even if Niketta's policy approach to it is distinctly German).

That said, there is an important reason why German popular music has to be understood differently to popular music elsewhere: twentieth century German history has posed German musicians and audiences particular problems of national identity. On the other hand, the question has to be asked: what is the relationship of the popular German musical tradition, of the *schlager*, to the Nazi era, to 'National Socialism', anti-Semitism and Aryanism? Both Fred Ritzel's article here on the popular songs in the immediate aftermath of Germany's 1945 defeat and Mechtild von Schoenbeck's analysis of the contemporary 'folk-like song' (which is for non-Germans perhaps the strangest example of popular German television taste!) question the ways in which certain sorts of song and performing style have been used to construct a sense of 'Germanness' which avoids historical reality and responsibility. On the other hand, the postwar division of the country into two Germanies, each of which (from the 1960s on) developed its own account of rock culture, made the meaning of 'German rock' itself particularly complex. Reunification has changed the nature of the political fissures involved, but not the

differences between what it means to be a 'West' or 'East' German rock musician, as is clear in Georg Maas and Hartmut Reszel's interviews below. The problem of 'German rock', in other words, has less to do with the question of how to give a national shape to an American (or culturally imperialist) form than with the question of how to determine the meaning of Germanness in the first place. Dietmar Elflein thus provides an illuminating account of the way in which rap music has been adapted in Germany to contrasting (and conflicting) 'Kraut' and 'Turkish' national ends.

The only previous issue of *Popular Music* devoted to a country (rather than to a region) treated Japan and, interestingly, raised similar questions about the ambivalent relationship with American culture after 1945, about national musical traditions and historical evasions. Popular music is a uniquely powerful cultural force in giving emotional shape to people's sense of their social identity and so it is perhaps not surprising that all five articles in this German issue of *Popular Music*, although they cover different musics from different perspectives, seem to come to the same conclusion: from 1945 to the present, Germans (West Germans and East Germans, ethnic Germans and Turkish Germans) have looked to popular song (to schlager and 'folk-like songs', to rock and rap) for a sense of social reassurance which, in the end, always evades them.