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Performing Diplomatic Relations: Music and East German Foreign Policy in the Middle East during the Late 1960s

ELAINE KELLY

Introduction: A Pericentric Perspective on Music Diplomacy

On the afternoon of January 6, 1967, the national airline of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Interflug, made its first ever landing in Lebanon. On board the flight were the conductor Heinz Bongartz and the members of the Dresdner Philharmonie, who were embarking on the first tour to the Middle East by an East German orchestra. The musicians were greeted at the airport in Beirut by a reception committee that included members of the Lebanese press, and later that evening they played to a sold-out house at the city's Piccadilly Theatre. They departed for Egypt the following day, and on January 8 performed the first of three concerts at the Cairo Opera House. Although attendance at this event was poorer, audience numbers increased over the course of the orchestra's stay in Egypt, and when the tour, which included a concert in Alexandria, ended on January 13, it was hailed in the GDR as an unmitigated success. A jubilant welcome from party officials and the East German press awaited the orchestra on its return to Dresden airport.¹

This tour was not an isolated event. It was a key moment in the short-lived but intense cultural program that the GDR directed at the Middle East in the late 1960s in the hopes of expediting diplomatic relations with the Arab nations. Targeting Egypt in particular but also Lebanon and Syria, the GDR's ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of

Thanks are due to Anthony Gorman for being a willing sounding board on Egypt, and to the *Journal's* anonymous reviewers for their extremely sharp insights. Translations from German and French are my own; those from Arabic are by Mikko Lehikoinen, who also assisted with the location of Arabic sources. The article uses the simplified International Journal of Middle East Studies system for the transliteration of Arabic.

1. For details of the tour, see "Konzertreise in der Orient: Unsere Musikrezensentin Ilse Löwe sprach mit der Potsdamer Sängerin Adele Stolte über ihre Eindrücke im Libanon und in der VAR," *Märkische Volksstimme Potsdam*, January 21, 1967, and Dieter Härtwig, "Reise der Dresdner Philharmonie: Tagebuchnotizen aus der VAR und der Republik Libanon von Dr. Dieter Härtwig," *Wir*, February 3, 1967, 5.

Germany, SED) sent an array of musical acts on official tours to the region. These included variety ensembles, popular singers such as Chris Doerk, Frank Schöbel, Rosemarie Ambé, and Armin Mueller-Stahl, jazz musicians such as Fips Fleischer and Alfons Wonneberg and their bands, and the artistic wing of the East German army, the Erich-Weinert-Ensemble. GDR officials assigned pride of place to Western art music, making copious efforts to deploy “expert” East German performers and music teachers to shape musical life in Cairo and Damascus. Recordings and scores of East German compositions were sent to Cairo to be broadcast on national radio and performed by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, while prominent figures in the cultural life of Egypt and Lebanon were invited on all-expenses-paid trips to the GDR to experience East German musical life firsthand. A small number of Arab musicians were invited to perform in the GDR, and numerous East German musicians traveled to the Middle East. Most significant of all were the large-scale classical ensembles that traveled in quick succession to the region. Following in the wake of the Dresdner Philharmonie’s tour of January 1967 came the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig (RSO Leipzig), which performed concerts in Damascus and Cairo and at the Baalbeck Festival in Lebanon in August 1967. The Deutsche Staatsoper also gave a series of performances in Cairo as part of the city’s millennial celebrations in March 1969, and the Gewandhausorchester featured at the Baalbeck Festival in August 1969. The Kammerorchester des Berliner Rundfunks gave concerts in Beirut, Cyprus, and Cairo in November 1970, and, lastly, the Gewandhaus’s Bach Orchester played two concerts in Lebanon in December 1971, the final leg of a tour that had taken in Manila, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Mumbai.

This brief musical incursion offers a rich site of study for what Tony Smith has termed a “pericentric” approach to the Cold War.² There has been a proliferation of research on the topic of Cold War music diplomacy in recent years. The majority of this has been conceived in terms of a Washington-Moscow power axis: the focus is on the activities of the superpowers, scholars seeking to demonstrate how the United States and the USSR used music either against each other or to exert influence on a global scale.³ Some of this work takes account of the perspectives of what are generally termed periphery states—that is, states that were implicated in the Cold War but located at the peripheries of power, either in Europe or in the global south. Periphery states have, however, generally only been examined in terms of their interactions with the superpowers.⁴

2. Smith, “New Bottles for New Wine.”

3. See, for example, Ansari, *Sound of a Superpower*; Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad*; Crist, “Jazz as Democracy?”; Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*; and Carr, “Diplomatic Notes.”

4. See Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, which is particularly illuminating in the extent to which it focuses on the reception of the United States’ diplomatic endeavors in postcolonial countries, and Fairclough, “Détente to Cold War.” One notable exception to the center-periphery paradigm is Jakelski, *Making New Music*.

In the wider field of Cold War studies, there has been a growing impetus to refocus the geopolitical orientation of the Cold War away from this center-periphery model. As David C. Engermann observes of the USSR, the view that “Moscow directed all of its allies’ actions in the Cold War is no longer sustainable.”⁵ Recent scholarship makes clear that periphery states played an active role in the global Cold War. Nonaligned states often exerted considerable agency in their dealings with the superpowers, adopting a stance of “positive neutralism” that essentially involved playing one superpower off against the other.⁶ Similarly, in their dealings with nonaligned states, Eastern European countries and Soviet allies such as Cuba demonstrated high levels of autonomy. They established international relationships, instigated trade deals and intervened in political conflicts of their own volition, and frequently pursued agendas that served their own rather than Soviet interests.⁷ A pericentric conceptualization of the Cold War complicates established narratives of the period significantly. For one thing, as Engerman points out, the “Cold” War was far from cold for the many regions who were engaged at some point or other in military conflicts with global resonances.⁸ The geopolitical reorientation necessitated by a focus on periphery states also reveals the multiplicity of ideologies and agendas that were actually at play. Relations between the GDR and the Arab nations at the center of this article, for example, unfolded against escalating Arab-Israeli tensions and the standoff between the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and were shaped more by discourses of nationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-Zionism than by any binary opposition of Marxist-Leninism and capitalist democracy.

East German foreign policy was dominated in the 1950s and 1960s by the SED’s quest to assert the GDR’s legitimacy. Founded in 1949, the state did not achieve sovereignty until 1955, when the USSR ceded any plans it had had for a united Germany and signed the Treaty on Relations between the USSR and the GDR. This granted the GDR a level of autonomy on a

5. Engerman, “Second World’s Third World,” 184.

6. On the concept of positive neutralism, see Sayegh, “Anatomy of Neutralism,” 70. For reconsiderations of the balance of power between the superpowers and nonaligned states, see Engerman, *Price of Aid*; Boden, “Cold War Economics”; and Matusevich, *No Easy Row*.

7. See, for example, Mazurek, “Polish Economists in Nehru’s India”; Dragostinova, “Natural Ally”; Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa*; and Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*. It is worth providing some context at this point for the geopolitical terminologies used in this article. The term “third world,” which was coined by the French scholar Alfred Sauvy in 1952, has long been contested. Equally, the terms “developing countries” and “developing world” are problematic in the extent to which they privilege the “developed” West; the World Bank notably dropped the classification “developing country” in 2016. I opt instead for the terms “postcolonial” and, where appropriate, “nonaligned.” The nonaligned movement, which originated in 1956 and was formalized in Belgrade in 1961, consisted of mostly post-colonial states who sought to assert their independence from and navigate a third way to the major power blocs of the USSR, the United States, and China.

8. Engerman, “Second World’s Third World,” 183.

par with neighboring People's Republics. It did not, however, enhance its international standing; quite the opposite in fact. The FRG refused to acknowledge a second German state, and responded by issuing the Hallstein Doctrine, which stipulated that all countries that had diplomatic relations with West Germany do likewise. This isolationist tactic was successful: Western states shunned the GDR on the grounds that the FRG was a Cold War ally, while many nonaligned countries did the same for fear of being seen to side with the USSR and thus risk losing the often substantial development aid they received from the West.⁹ As a result, beyond the realm of the Sino-Soviet Bloc, the GDR found itself out in the cold. This pariah status was a significant affront to the dignity of the SED. More practically, as William Glenn Gray observes, it "placed substantial barriers on the GDR's freedom to maneuver."¹⁰ It impeded the state's ability to conduct trade deals abroad; it precluded it from entry to bodies such as the United Nations; it resulted in external restrictions on foreign travel for GDR citizens (in addition to the internal controls implemented by the SED); and it undermined the SED's uphill struggle to convince citizens at home of the validity of the East German state. Consequently, until the early 1970s, when the FRG relented its hard-line stance, the SED's foreign policy focused exhaustively on the issue of international recognition.

With conventional channels of international engagement severely restricted, many of the foreign-policy strategies adopted by the GDR in the late 1950s and 1960s focused on diplomatic soft power, mobilizing elite artists and athletes as de facto ambassadors.¹¹ The SED intended its soft power activities to present the GDR in a positive light and thus as a legitimate player on the world stage, and to negate the Federal Republic's claims to represent the entire German nation. It also hoped to facilitate relationships with non-aligned states, by supporting them in the construction of their own national cultures and by standing in solidarity with them through acts of cultural diplomacy against imperialist oppression.¹² Uniting all of these aims was the drive to counter the Hallstein Doctrine by establishing the GDR in the eyes of the world as an explicitly *German* rather than Soviet state. In musical terms, this involved asserting the GDR's ownership of Germany's rich cultural heritage. The Ministry for Culture declared in 1964 that state-directed cultural diplomacy should endeavor to "spread the truth abroad that the

9. See Winrow, *Foreign Policy of the GDR*, 43, and Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 227.

10. Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 223.

11. See, for example, Barnett, "Politics of an International Reputation"; Smith, "Brecht, the Berliner Ensemble"; and Yaeger, "Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra."

12. These aims were set out explicitly by the Ministry for Culture in 1964. See Bundesarchiv (hereafter BArch) DR 1/8651, "Vorlage für den Beirat für Auslandsinformation bei der Agitationskommission des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands über die Ausnutzung der kulturellen Potenzen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der Auslandsinformation," August 21, 1964, 1–2.

GDR is the true protector and champion of the great cultural heritage of the German nation.”¹³

The GDR was fortunate in housing within its borders some of Germany’s oldest orchestras and opera companies, including the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, and the Deutsche Staatsoper and its partnering Staatskapelle Berlin. The majority of these ensembles had resumed foreign tours of their own accord after the Second World War, and by the mid-1950s included Western venues in their annual performing schedules as a matter of course. Initially, in stark contrast to the approach taken by the USSR, political oversight of these tours was light-touch.¹⁴ Ensembles frequently negotiated their own engagements, and as long as concert tours broke even and conductors were not deemed to be flaunting their independence, the Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten (State Commission for Artistic Affairs) and later the Ministry for Culture functioned largely as validating rather than prescriptive bodies.¹⁵ As the GDR’s governing structures matured over the course of the 1950s, the SED began to exert more control over foreign tours and to exploit their diplomatic potential. At first, it concentrated its efforts on Western Europe and on Japan, where there was a significant appetite for Western art music.¹⁶ In the mid-1960s, however, it extended its remit to the nonaligned states and to the Middle East in particular.

The SED had long had its sights set on the Middle East. The strong Soviet presence in the region boded well for the GDR’s prospects, and the SED campaigned throughout the 1950s and 1960s to establish East rather than West Germany as the natural ally of the Arab nations, appealing to shared revolutionary and anti-imperialist proclivities. At first, music diplomacy featured only minimally in this strategy. The Erben String Quartet, which comprised members of the Deutsche Staatsoper, gave concerts in Egypt and Syria in 1958,¹⁷ and in 1959 the East German Ministry for Culture sent conductor Udo Nissen, pianist Siegfried Rapp, and singer Ruth Glowa-Burkhardt to perform two concerts with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra to draw attention in Egypt to the tenth anniversary of the GDR.¹⁸ East German artists continued to perform

13. Ibid., 1: “im Ausland die Wahrheit zu verbreiten, daß die DDR der wahre Hüter und Sachwalter des großen kulturellen Erbes der deutschen Nation ist.”

14. For a comparison, see Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad*.

15. The interactions between the Dresdner Philharmonie and government officials surrounding the orchestra’s foreign tours in the early 1950s as documented in BArch DR 1/180 and BArch DR 1/6189 are particularly illuminating in this regard.

16. On the demand for Western art music in Japan, see Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, 51–56.

17. See the archive of the Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (hereafter MfAA), A 12235, for correspondence between the GDR Ministry for Culture and the GDR trade mission in Cairo regarding the tour.

18. See MfAA A 12238, Alfred Marter (attaché), “Einschätzung des politischen und künstlerischen Erfolges des Auftretens von Künstlern aus der DDR in zwei Konzerten des Kairoer Sinfonie-Orchesters,” Cairo, October 13, 1959.

sporadically in the region in the early 1960s but received little financial support from the state. Indeed, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs stipulated in 1963 that performances by GDR artists in the Middle East would be approved if and only if no government subsidies were required.¹⁹ The SED concentrated instead on presenting the GDR as a paragon of industrial modernism, and attempted to curry favor in the Middle East through trade deals and the granting of credit.²⁰

This approach was moderately successful, particularly in the wake of the Suez crisis, when support for the Soviet Bloc surged in the Middle East. The GDR signed trade deals with Egypt and Lebanon in 1953 and with Syria in 1955. An East German trade mission opened in Cairo in 1954, and in 1959 the East German prime minister Otto Grotewohl made an official visit to the city, following which the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, upgraded the East German trade mission in Cairo to a consulate general, albeit an unofficial one with limited privileges. Further unofficial consulates, which brought with them some symbolic status as well as facilitating easier exchange between countries, opened in Damascus in 1961 and in Iraq in 1962. Yet despite such steps, progress toward the GDR's goal of full diplomatic recognition was slow. If states such as Egypt and Syria were more sympathetic to the Soviet Bloc than they were to the West, they nevertheless wanted to keep their Western options open and were unwilling to defy the Hallstein Doctrine outright.²¹

The GDR's prospects in the Middle East improved in 1964, when the Arab nations discovered that the FRG had been sending weapons surreptitiously to Israel. Nasser responded to the revelation by inviting the East German First Secretary, Walther Ulbricht, to Cairo in February 1965 for a "friendship visit," which, as Hermann Wentker observes, had all the trappings of a state visit.²² Over the course of Ulbricht's stay the two leaders signed treaties aimed at closer cultural, scientific, and economic engagement, and Ulbricht pledged loans to Egypt totaling \$81 million.²³ Determining this heightened engagement with the GDR to be in contravention of the Hallstein Doctrine, the FRG retaliated by suspending future aid to Egypt and offering diplomatic recognition to Israel. This in turn prompted

19. See MfAA B 3016, Norbert Jaeschke, "Kulturelle Beziehungen im Jahre 1964—Ihre HM vom 8.4.1963," April 30, 1963, 6.

20. In 1958, for example, the GDR made two significant loans to Egypt to facilitate the country's industrial modernization; see Winrow, *Foreign Policy of the GDR*, 54. On East Germany's attempts to present itself as a paragon of industrial modernism, see Pence, "Showcasing Cold War Germany."

21. For an overview of the GDR's relations with Egypt and other Middle Eastern nations during this period, see Winrow, *Foreign Policy of the GDR*, 33–55; Timm, *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern*, 171–84; Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*; Trentin, "Modernization as State Building"; and Müller, *Spectre Is Haunting Arabia*.

22. Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 281: "Freundschaftsbesuch."

23. See Winrow, *Foreign Policy of the GDR*, 69.

ten of the thirteen states of the Arab League to break their relations with Bonn. Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen all closed their embassies in the FRG in May 1965, Kuwait following suit shortly thereafter.²⁴ This chain of events augured well for the GDR, and at first it seemed that offers of diplomatic recognition would be quick to materialize. When, however, Nasser proposed the idea of consolidating relations with the GDR to the Arab League, he received support only from Algeria, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Seeking consensus, he shelved the proposition and stopped short of granting the GDR full diplomatic recognition.²⁵ Suspended in limbo but with the end goal tantalizingly close, the GDR threw all the resources it could muster at the region. The process of acquiring diplomatic recognition proved to be a costly business. The Arab nations made enormous demands, expecting that the shortfall in trade credits and financial aid they had incurred by breaking from West Germany would be made up by the GDR. From 1965 the GDR sent millions of dollars' worth of weapons and military equipment to Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, and increased its trade to the region significantly.²⁶ It simply did not have the capacity, however, to match the level of aid that was being requested of it; as a point of comparison, the FRG had supplied DM 51,735 million in development aid to the postcolonial world by 1969, and the GDR only DM 530 million.²⁷ Consequently, the GDR turned to forms of diplomacy with which it was more at home, and began to supplement its monetary payments by offering the region German cultural, scientific, and sporting capital.²⁸

The GDR was by no means unique among Soviet Bloc countries in marketing an image of itself to postcolonial countries that was inherently national rather than pan-Soviet. Theodora Dragostinova describes, for example, how Bulgaria presented itself to Mexico and India as one of the "cradles of European civilization."²⁹ This kind of branding had resonances for the non-aligned world. Leaders of nonaligned states did not pursue relationships with Eastern European countries purely or even primarily as a means of ingratiating themselves with Moscow. On the contrary, they were often interested in the specific resources that these countries had to offer in their own

24. Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya retained their embassies.

25. See Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 282.

26. For details of financial aid and arms deliveries, see Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*, 135. Regarding trade credits offered, see Lamm and Kupper, *DDR und Dritte Welt*, 133–39.

27. See End, *Zweimal deutsche Außenpolitik*, 127.

28. Gray explains that in the case of Syria, instead of sending fighter planes and pilots as requested, "the GDR sought to deepen ties in the realms of education, commerce, and propaganda by replacing 'bourgeois' Western advisers with East German experts": Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 202.

29. Dragostinova, "Natural Ally," 670. See also Dragostinova and Fidelis, "Introduction," 582–83.

right, be it ideals of Europeanness, technical expertise, or goods, the latter often at better rates than or of superior quality to those available from the USSR.³⁰ Interest from nonaligned states in acquiring resources—of the cultural as well as the physical variety—was integral to the effectiveness of the GDR's soft power in the Middle East. Janice Bially Mattern conceives of soft power in terms of a "social relationship." "Soft power," she explains, "only works on those who are attracted to the aspiring power holder."³¹ This is particularly the case when the balance of power between the parties involved is relatively equal, as was often true of periphery states. Cultural diplomacy was not something that the GDR could "do to" or bestow on Arab nations: its aspirations in this regard were constrained by the recipients' specific needs and demands.

The GDR notably targeted its music diplomacy only at countries in the Middle East that already had a Western art music culture, namely Egypt—or the United Arab Republic (UAR), as it was then known—Syria, and Lebanon. These countries differed both in what they wanted from the GDR and in what they could offer in terms of political returns. The Egyptian and Syrian regimes were in many ways natural partners for the GDR: their pro-revolutionary, anti-imperialist stance resonated with that of the SED, as did their approach to the arts. Both countries, inspired by Soviet Bloc models, had implemented centralized state systems for controlling the production of culture in the 1950s, and were keen to receive support from Soviet Bloc states for the development of state-sponsored culture.³² Of the two, Egypt had far greater financial resources to divert toward culture than Syria, so was more responsive to the GDR's attempts at music diplomacy. This undoubtedly suited the East German government: although Nasser's star had dimmed somewhat by the late 1960s, Egypt remained the symbolic center of the pan-Arab movement, and Nasser continued to exert considerable influence in the region.³³

The extent to which cultural activities in Egypt and Syria were state controlled was particularly conducive to the GDR's brand of diplomacy. Dealing in music necessitated liaising directly with the Egyptian and Syrian culture ministries, which created significant opportunities for GDR officials to establish high-level relationships. Lebanon was an entirely different matter. In contrast to its neighbors, it remained, as Fawaz A. Gerges details, "within the

30. See Dragostinova, "Natural Ally," 667. On the resources and expertise offered by individual states, see, for example, Mazurek, "Polish Economists in Nehru's India"; Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa*; Hong, *Cold War Germany*; Trentin, "Modernization as State Building"; and Hilger, "Revolutionsideologie, Systemkonkurrenz."

31. Bially Mattern, "Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft," 590–91. On the concept of soft power more generally, see Nye, *Bound to Lead*, and Nye, *Soft Power*.

32. See Winegar, *Creative Reckonings*, 143–48, and Dragičević Šešić, "Opening Horizons."

33. See, for example, Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, 135–59.

Western economic and cultural orbit.”³⁴ Factional politics dominated the country throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and state control was weak. Culture was a privatized affair—Lebanon did not have a ministry for culture until the mid-1990s—and followed what Milena Dragičević Šešić describes as a “market-driven model.”³⁵ As a result, what the GDR could achieve in terms of its cultural diplomacy remit was limited. There was a significant appetite for Western art music among the Lebanese intellectual elite, and Beirut and the Baalbeck Festival were very much part of the international concert circuit for top Western musicians.³⁶ As such, securing performances in the country was a useful way for the GDR to demonstrate the ability of its ensembles and, by implication, the state itself to compete with the best that the West had to offer. Incorporating concerts in Lebanon into tours to the region also made good financial sense. The lack of government involvement in the arts, however, made it difficult for GDR officials to establish meaningful relationships with those in power.

In what follows, I explore how the GDR used the cultural capital it possessed in the form of Western art music to strengthen relationships with Egypt, in particular, but also with Syria and Lebanon in the period between 1965 and 1970. I examine the way this form of cultural diplomacy was perceived by the different partners, and analyze what we can learn about the relationships that evolved between periphery states such as the GDR and Egypt from the ways in which they negotiated cultural diplomacy, and from the discourses that these exchanges inscribed. The research draws predominantly on government archives and newspapers. Unfortunately, I have not been able to access official archives in Egypt, Syria, or Lebanon. As a result, I have constructed the narrative that unfolds here primarily through the archives of the GDR’s Ministry for Culture (held in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin), its Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and its unofficial consulates in Cairo and Damascus (housed in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes in Berlin). These repositories contain correspondence and official directives from the Egyptian and Syrian governments and from those involved with the organization of concerts in Lebanon. Inevitably, however, the emphasis on German archives results in an imbalance of voices. Homi Bhabha warns that in studies involving a Western perspective on postcolonial nations, “the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power. . . . The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment . . . [but]

34. Gerges, “Lebanon,” 90.

35. Dragičević Šešić, “Opening Horizons,” 237. See also Maltzahn, “Ministry of Culture.”

36. For details of the numerous international musicians, ensembles, and composers that visited Lebanon in the 1950s and 1960s, see Mainguy, *La musique au Liban*, 59–77.

loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse.”³⁷ I have endeavored, at the very least, to keep this warning in mind. It remains the case, however, that there will be yet more stories to be told if access to archives in Egypt and Syria becomes possible.

Western Art Music as a Symbol of Modernity

That a market existed for the GDR’s musical offerings in the Middle East is indicative of what Dipesh Chakrabarty has described as the “uncritical emphasis on modernization” that dominated the discourse of postcolonial nations in the 1950s and 1960s.³⁸ This was a conception of modernization that, to quote Chakrabarty again, “saw an imaginary Europe as the major agentive force in the world.” Newly independent nations such as Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon rarely rejected existing colonial cultures outright; instead, they reproduced them in hybridized form to create new national cultures.³⁹ Thus, the escalation of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s did not impede the Western art music scene in Egypt. On the contrary, although the Egyptian Ministry for Culture committed itself to the development of both the national heritage and Western art music, it diverted considerably more funds toward the latter.⁴⁰ It took the Egyptian Radio Orchestra—which had been founded in 1956—under its auspices in 1959 and renamed it the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, and in the same year established the Cairo National Conservatory.⁴¹ Subsequently, various measures were implemented that would increase the prevalence and accessibility of Western art music. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, for example, included in its remit an outreach program that involved free concerts for young people and occasional tours to the provinces.⁴² The Ministry for Culture attempted to increase exposure to high-quality performances by ensuring that “cultural agreements with friendly countries always include a clause which encourages the visits to Egypt of well-known musical *ensembles* and orchestras,”⁴³ and in 1968 a new radio station was established under the auspices of the Cairo Broadcasting Services, which for twelve hours each day broadcast “the works of the classical composers, the recordings of concerts and recitals and works by Egyptian composers in the Western musical idiom.”⁴⁴

37. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 46.

38. Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung,” 53.

39. *Ibid.*, 55. On the phenomenon of cultural hybridity, see in particular Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.

40. See El-Shawan, “Al-Mūsīka al-‘Arabiyyah,” 122.

41. See El-Shawan, “Western Music and Its Practitioners,” 145–46.

42. See Wahba, *Cultural Policy in Egypt*, 65.

43. *Ibid.*, 66.

44. *Ibid.*, 67.

The prominence assigned to Western art music reflects the cultural demography of those who ascended to power following the collapse of colonialism in the Middle East. The new ruling class emerged by and large from a European-educated intellectual elite committed to a construct of modernity that found its apotheosis in European culture. Jonathan Holt Shannon describes the tendency of Syrian intellectuals in this period to view Arab music as “a ‘primitive’ stage of a musical and civilizational progression of which European art music represented both the greatest achievement and the standard to be emulated.”⁴⁵ In Egypt, the equation of Western art music with progress dated back to the nineteenth century. Isma‘il Pasha’s commissioning of the Cairo Opera House to coincide with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 was an explicit statement of the country’s coming of age.⁴⁶ In the decades that followed, the venue assumed utopian qualities for many upper-class Egyptians, functioning as something of a unique space in cosmopolitan but segregated Cairo. Writing in 1984, the English literature scholar Magdi Wahba, who served as Undersecretary of State to the Egyptian Ministry for Culture from 1966 to 1970, recalled that in the 1930s “this bastion of Western culture . . . was (apart from the cinemas) one of the few venues where Europeans, Levantines and Egyptians mingled freely. They found a common language in opera.”⁴⁷ After the revolution in 1952, the perception of Western art music as a universal phenomenon became more pronounced. Previously referred to as “al musika al-urubiyya” (European music), it was reclaimed in the 1950s as “al musika al-alamayyia” (universal music),⁴⁸ a shift in terminology that was implicitly bound up with the spirit of the post-independence Egyptian nation. Indeed, Ali Jihad Racy claims that the quest for “international music” acquired revolutionary undertones, and that during the 1960s Egyptian symphonic works written in an “international” style “emerged as a politicized art form . . . considered indispensable for the construction of a new progressive national image.”⁴⁹

Ultimately, the Nasser government envisaged an international music scene in Egypt that was an implicitly national affair. The Egyptian Ministry for Culture intended, for example, that the Cairo National Conservatory would serve as a feeder for the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, anticipating that by 1975 there would be “enough qualified Egyptian musicians to Egyptianize the Cairo Symphony Orchestra entirely.”⁵⁰ In the short term, Egypt, like most Arab nations, needed foreign assistance to fulfill such goals. The departure following the 1952 revolution of the Italian musicians who had

45. Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees*, 76.

46. See Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*, 97–133.

47. Wahba, “Cairo Memories,” 74.

48. See El-Shawan, “Al-Mūsika al-‘Arabiyah,” 83. See also Racy, “Music in Contemporary Cairo,” 11.

49. Racy, “Musical Aesthetics in Present-Day Cairo,” 403.

50. Wahba, *Cultural Policy in Egypt*, 64.

dominated the Western art music scene in the 1930s and 1940s had left a large void.⁵¹ Foreign musicians were required to staff the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and National Conservatory, and there was an urgent desire for visits by elite international performing ensembles to raise the quality of musical life and, more importantly, to validate the new republic as a modern, cosmopolitan state. The GDR had much to offer in this context, not only in terms of its tangible musical assets, but also in the extent to which it, and Germany more generally, could provide a model for the way in which Western art music might contribute to Egypt's nation-building project. Revealing, for example, is Mahmud Khattab's review in *al-Jumhuriyya* of one of the Dresdner Philharmonie's Cairo concerts in 1967, in which he locates the orchestra's origins in the revolutionary beginnings of a new state:

One of the oldest and most famous orchestras in Germany, its founding and the stages of its artistic development reflect the development of modern Germany itself. It was founded in 1870, which was also the decisive year that witnessed the unification of Germany and the confirmation of its political existence in Europe, thus reaffirming the close link between a state's political growth and its artistic renaissance.⁵²

A Middle East for the GDR

For its own citizens the GDR packaged its musical endeavors in the Middle East very much as an ideological exercise. Press coverage of state-sponsored activities was steeped in the tropes of anti-imperialist solidarity that characterized attitudes to the postcolonial world across the Soviet Bloc from the Khrushchev era onward. Stalin had adhered rigidly to Marx's five-stage model of societal evolution, which spanned from primitive communism through slavery, serfdom, and capitalism to socialism, and justified his lack of support for radical movements in Africa and Asia on the basis that postcolonial states had not yet progressed far enough through this model for an effective transition to socialism. Khrushchev adopted a more pragmatic approach. Sensitive to the growing power of the nonaligned states and the need to present socialist modernism as a desirable alternative to Western capitalism, he argued for a model of historical development in which the

51. On the role played by the Italian diaspora in shaping Egypt's musical life in the first half of the twentieth century, see El-Shawan, "Western Music and Its Practitioners," 143–45.

52. Mahmud Khattab, "Bunjarts Yaqud al-Urkistra min al-Dhakira!" [Bongartz conducts the orchestra from memory!], *al-Jumhuriyya*, January 12, 1967: "Wa-huwwa min ashhar wa-aqdam al-urkistrat fi almaniya.. bal anna nashatah wa-marahil tatawwurih al-fanniyya in'ikas li-marahil tatawwur almaniya fi tarikhiha al-hadith, fa-qad ta'assasa 'am 1870, wa-huwwa al-'am al-hasim alladhi shahida iktimal wahdaha wa ta'kid kayaniha al-siyasi fi uruba kulliha wa-huwwa amr yu'akkid al-sila al-wathiq bayn al-numuwu al-siyasi li-dawla ma wa-l-nahda al-fanniyya biha."

capitalist stage could be avoided altogether with the help of Soviet intervention. As he explained at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, "In order to create an independent national economy and to raise the living standards of their peoples, these countries, though not part of the world socialist system, can benefit by its achievements."⁵³ This perspective was very much in evidence in the East German press coverage of the Deutsche Staatsoper's 1969 visit to Cairo. The Egyptians were portrayed as a modernizing nation, whose capacity for socialist enlightenment was reflected in their appreciation of the Germanic musical heritage. Newspapers gleefully compared the Staatsoper's sold-out run with the failure a month earlier of the Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris to sell tickets, and provided effusive accounts of the warm reception accorded to the opera company.⁵⁴ The *Berliner Zeitung* revealed that the Egyptian Minister for Culture, Tharwat Okasha, had declared himself upon meeting the company to be a "long-standing friend of the German art of opera."⁵⁵ The Staatsoper's conductor Otmar Suitner meanwhile was generous in his praise of the Cairo audience. He observed in *Neue Zeit* that "the level of attentiveness and deep understanding moved us all a great deal. For us it is a joy to play here, because such a strong response is unrivaled in other concert halls."⁵⁶ Yet if the Egyptians were depicted as kindred spirits, press reports did not present the partnership between Egypt and the GDR as being one of equals. In the spirit of Khrushchev's interventionist model, the GDR invariably cast itself in a benevolent, paternalistic role: it was assisting the development of the Arab nations from its position of cultural superiority. Several newspapers, for example, recounted that Okasha during his meeting with the Staatsoper had acknowledged that "it is not for the first time that the GDR helps the UAR, not only culturally but also politically."⁵⁷

This political help was framed by the East German media as support for the Arab nations in their struggle against Israel, which Ulbricht dismissed as a colony of the United States.⁵⁸ When the Six-Day War broke out in

53. Quoted in Westad, *Global Cold War*, 68. Westad provides an excellent summary of the theoretical and practical contexts of Soviet foreign policy in the early Cold War (39–72).

54. See, for example, Karl-Heinz Werner, "Kairo, im März 1969: Staatsoper begeistert am Nil," *Neues Deutschland*, March 18, 1969, 4.

55. "Staatsoper in Kairo gefeiert: erfolgreicher Beginn des Gastspiels," *Berliner Zeitung*, March 7, 1969, 1: "ein langjähriger Freund der deutschen Opernkunst."

56. "Begeisterungsstürme am Nil: zum erfolgreichen Kairo-Gastspiel der Deutschen Staatsoper," *Neue Zeit*, March 12, 1969, 4: "Eine solche Aufmerksamkeit und ein solch tiefes Verständnis haben uns alle sehr bewegt. Für uns ist es eine Freude, hier zu musizieren, denn eine solch starke Resonanz dürfte ihresgleichen in anderen Konzertsälen suchen."

57. Horst Richter, "Mit Mozart und Strauss in Kairo: nach dem Gastspiel der Deutschen Staatsoper in der VAR-Hauptstadt," *Berliner Zeitung*, March 26, 1969, 6: "nicht zum ersten Mal, daß die DDR der VAR hilft, nicht nur kulturell, sondern auch politisch."

58. See "Walther Ulbricht erklärt in der VAR-Zeitung *Al Abram*: Ziel des Staatsbesuchs ist die Festigung der Freundschaft und der Zusammenarbeit," *Neues Deutschland*, February 24,

June 1967, the *Berliner Zeitung* notably brought home the relevance of the conflict for GDR citizens by publishing statements of support by East German artists who had performed in the region. Friedrich-Carl Erben, leader of the Erben String Quartet, gave a personal slant to events, commenting, "I am doubly hit by the news of the war in the Near East, because I have made many good friends on my tours to the UAR and Syria, about whom I am very worried."⁵⁹ The baritone Günther Leib meanwhile emphasized the threat to those aspects of Egypt that resonated most closely with the GDR's own self-image—cultural heritage and revolutionary progress. He denounced the "interference of the USA, who are supporting the Israeli aggressor," and expressed dismay that, "as a result of the aggression, not only the old cultural monuments are in danger but also the great social and cultural achievements that the Egyptian people have realized since the revolution of 1952."⁶⁰ Such rhetoric set the stage for the RSO Leipzig's tour to the Middle East two months later, which was billed explicitly as a gesture of solidarity. The East German Deputy Minister for Culture, Kurt Bork, traveled with the orchestra, and introduced the concerts in Damascus and Cairo with a speech—widely reported in the East German press—in which he declared the GDR's support for the Arab nations in their anti-imperial struggle.⁶¹

The idealistic rhetoric that pervaded East German media reports was often at odds with the realities of the GDR's actions in and attitudes toward the Middle East. One of the most striking aspects of the state's foreign policy is the extent to which it was devoid of the ideological concerns that dominated domestic politics.⁶² The SED's drive at home to make culture accessible to the masses, for example, did not extend in any sincere way to its diplomatic programs. In the case of Egypt, the SED was in theory assisting the Nasser government with its civilizing mission to bring high culture to the Egyptian subaltern. In practice, however, the drive to reclaim Western art music for the postcolonial state had done little to change the demographic of concert audiences. Despite attempts by the Egyptian Ministry for Culture to make events accessible through heavily subsidized or free tickets, attendance at concerts by the Cairo Symphony

1965, 3. On the GDR's stance vis-à-vis Israel, see Timm, *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern*, and Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*.

59. "Empörung trifft die Friedensbrecher: DDR-Künstler an der Seite der arabischen Völker," *Berliner Zeitung*, June 7, 1967, 5: "Ich bin doppelt betroffen von der Nachricht des Krieges im Nahen Osten, da ich auf meinen Gastspielreisen in die VAR und nach Syrien gute Freunde gefunden habe, um die ich sehr besorgt bin."

60. Ibid.: "Die Einmischung der USA, die den israelischen Aggressor unterstützen. . . . Durch die Aggression sind sowohl die alten Kulturdenkmäler in Gefahr als auch die großen sozialen und kulturellen Errungenschaften, die das ägyptische Volk seit der Revolution von 1952 erzielt hat."

61. See "Konzert-Gastspiel," *Berliner Zeitung*, August 29, 1967, 6.

62. See Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 2.

Orchestra and visiting ensembles was generally poor and, as Salwa Aziz El-Shawan notes, restricted to an exclusive club of “European-educated Egyptians and foreigners.”⁶³ Concerts were broadcast on Egyptian radio and television, which gave them a reach beyond the concert halls,⁶⁴ but the listenership for these was again limited. Writing in 1985, El-Shawan notably observed that “[f]or a small elite, Western music and Egyptian symphonic compositions continue to symbolize modernity and progress, but for most Egyptians, these are alien traditions to which they can relate only with difficulty.”⁶⁵ This circumstance did not give East German politicians particular cause for concern. On the contrary, as noted in a 1969 report by Horst Winter, the official in charge of culture at the GDR consulate in Cairo, “classical music and opera speak to a relatively small portion [of the population], which comprises, however, the ruling classes of the country and is therefore of vital importance, not least from the perspective of the diplomatic effects of such cultural events.”⁶⁶

In Lebanon, the division between classical music audiences and the general populace was even more pronounced. Here concerts of classical music were generally well attended.⁶⁷ In the absence of any public subsidies for culture, however, they were organized by and for the wealthy elite and were largely the preserve of the state’s French-speaking rather than Arabic population. This phenomenon was particularly manifest where the prestigious Baalbeck Festival was concerned. In order to ensure an East German presence at the festival, GDR officials found themselves wooing the very cultural imperialists they were supposed to be fighting against. The irony was not lost on them. The Ministry for Culture official who accompanied the RSO Leipzig on its 1967 tour took the opportunity to negotiate further openings

63. El-Shawan, “Al-Mūsīka al-‘Arabīyyah,” 124–25.

64. See, for example, the letter from Horst Winter of the GDR consulate in Cairo to Kurt Walter of the GDR Ministry for Culture, December 19, 1967, in which he reports that all of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra concerts conducted by the East German conductor Gerhart Wiesenhütter in the final months of 1967 had been broadcast on Egyptian radio: MfAA B 1003/69. Similarly, the first of the RSO Leipzig’s concerts in Cairo was recorded for broadcast on Egyptian television; see Salah Darwish, “Na’ib Wazir al-Thaqafa al-Almani Yaql: al-Musiqa Wasila li-Tarbiyat Ruh al-Wataniyya lada al-Sha’b .wa-Qa’id Urkistra Laybzij Yaql: al-Sha’b al-Masri ladayh Hassa Musiqiyya Tafuq Hassat al-Shu’ub al-Urubīyya” [German Deputy Minister of Culture says, “Music is a way to foster a spirit of nationalism among the people”; conductor of the Leipzig Orchestra says, “Egyptians have a sensitivity for music that surpasses that of European peoples”], *al-Jumhuriyya*, August 23, 1967.

65. El-Shawan, “Western Music and Its Practitioners,” 151.

66. MfAA B 1304/76, “Ergebnisse und Probleme der kulturellen und wissenschaftlichen Auslandsbeziehungen der DDR in der VAR im Jahre 1969,” 28: “Klassische Musik und klassisches Musiktheater sprechen einen relativ kleinen Teil an, der sich aber zusammensetzt aus den Führungsschichten des Landes und deshalb von großer Bedeutung ist auch im Hinblick auf die auslandsinformativische Wirkung solcher künstlerischen Ereignisse.”

67. See, for example, MfAA B 1147/75, “Auszug aus dem Bericht des Genossen Rudolf Greiser über die Tournee des Bachorchesters des Gewandhauses zu Leipzig nach Manila, Singapur, Kuala Lumpur, Bombay, Beirut,” 1.

for the GDR in the region; describing the Baalbeck Festival committee as comprising “reactionary circles,” he conceded that “as long as we have few other means of gaining a foothold in Lebanon with artistic performances, we need to take advantage of the committee.”⁶⁸

If the selective targeting of the GDR’s musical activities in the Middle East was at odds with socialist ideology, it was in keeping with wider patterns of public diplomacy. Nicholas Cull describes public diplomacy, of which music diplomacy can be considered a subset, as “an international actor’s attempt to conduct its foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics (traditionally government-to-people contact).” As he explains, however, “despite addressing publics, public diplomacy does not necessarily engage a mass audience. Public diplomats have always spent some—or sometimes most—of their energy focusing on significant individuals in the knowledge that they can, in their turn, either communicate to the wider public . . . or become the government insiders in time.”⁶⁹ Such a circumstance is illustrated vividly by the surviving photographs of the first concert that the East German conductor Gerhart Wiesenhütter gave with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra in October 1967 (see Figures 1–3).⁷⁰ The concert took place in Cairo’s brand-new Sayed Darwish Hall, which was located on the outskirts of the city near the Giza pyramids and, as Wiesenhütter noted, accessible only by car.⁷¹ As demonstrated by the numerous empty seats visible in Figure 2, the hall was far from filled to capacity. Moreover, the audience members captured in the photograph are, without exception, attired in Western dress, which in 1960s Egypt was synonymous with the urban elite.⁷² The success of the concert from an East German perspective, meanwhile, is captured in Figure 3. Here the GDR’s unofficial ambassador to Egypt, Ernst Scholz (second from the right), assumes a very official position alongside Tharwat Okasha (center) and the Soviet ambassador to Egypt, Boris Vindarov (far right).⁷³

A GDR for the Middle East: Programming for Diplomacy

The question of what role music plays, or is perceived to play, in effecting soft power is one that invariably needs to be asked in studies of music diplomacy.

68. MfAA B 1003/69, Kurt Walter, “Bericht über eine Dienstreise in den Libanon, die SAR und die VAR vom 16.8 bis 27.8.1967,” October 2, 1967, 4–5: “aus reaktionären Kreisen zusammengesetzt. . . . Solange wir aber nur geringe andere Möglichkeiten haben, mit künstlerischen Leistungen im Libanon Fuß zu fassen, müssen wir das Komitee dazu ausnutzen.”

69. Cull, *Cold War*, xv–xvi.

70. The photographs are located in BArch DR 1/27073.

71. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Werner Rackwitz, November 9, 1967, 1.

72. See Abaza, “Shifting Landscapes of Fashion,” 286–88.

73. Günther Drefahl (seen on the far left in Figure 3) led the GDR delegation of the joint GDR-UAR scientific council.



Figure 1 Gerhart Wiesenhütter and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra in Sayed Darwish Hall, Cairo, October 7, 1967. Bundesarchiv, Berlin. Used by permission.

Notably, GDR officials do not seem to have assigned music any transcendental properties in this regard. Discussions surrounding its efficacy in foreign policy were generally prosaic: it was valued primarily as a tool for raising the state's profile. The Ministry for Culture declared in 1964 that "music is not bound to language. There are thus many opportunities to publicize our achievements abroad."⁷⁴ Yet an examination of what East German ensembles actually performed in concerts in the Middle East indicates that music served as far more than a blunt tool of advertising. The repertoire that was programmed, as laid out in the Appendix below, functioned to articulate common ground—both existing and potential—between states. Concerts offered sonic enactments of the diplomatic relations to which the GDR

74. BArch DR 1/8651, "Vorlage für den Beirat für Auslandsinformation," 2: "Die Musik ist nicht an die Sprache gebunden. Deshalb gibt es viele Möglichkeiten, unsere Leistungen im Ausland bekannt zu machen."



Figure 2 The audience at the Cairo Symphony Orchestra concert in Sayed Darwish Hall, Cairo, October 7, 1967. Bundesarchiv, Berlin. Used by permission.

aspired, they illuminated shared cultural synergies, and they conveyed affinities with the political concerns of Arab nations, at least to the extent that these concerns were understood by GDR actors. Western art music represented a particularly useful site for emphasizing the clear congruencies that existed between the cultural politics of the Ulbricht and Nasser governments. Both regimes assigned an inherently conservative role to culture within their revolutionary ideals, locating the impetus for sociocultural progress in existing traditions. In the GDR, socialist enlightenment and the much-vaunted Communist utopia was predicated not on cultural revolution, but on building on the achievements of the Germanic cultural heritage.⁷⁵

75. See Kelly, *Composing the Canon*.



Figure 3 (From left to right) Günther Drefahl, Mrs Okasha, Tharwat Okasha, Ernst Scholz, and Boris Vindarov at the Cairo Symphony Orchestra concert in Sayed Darwish Hall, Cairo, October 7, 1967. Bundesarchiv, Berlin. Used by permission.

This same heritage resonated in Egypt not for its latent socialist potential but for the ways in which it might illuminate a musical path to nationhood. It also, crucially, embodied an ideal of Europeaness that was distinct from the country's largely Italianate colonial cultural past.

Such congruencies were key to music's potential for fostering interstate allegiances. Yet apparent cultural proximities could also be deceptive and open to misinterpretation, particularly given the numerous actors involved in determining what was played by GDR ensembles. The Egyptian Ministry for Culture, for example, sometimes made requests; East German staff at the state's unofficial consulates offered advice; officials in Berlin advised and dictated in varying measures; and artists themselves exerted some autonomy.

This array of voices, and the ensuing combination of responsive and anticipatory programming, worked both for and against the effectiveness of concerts. At times, the music performed, enhanced, and even preempted political relationships; at other times, East German assumptions about the aesthetic appetites or cultural needs of Arab audiences missed the mark. The aspects of concerts that proved most problematic were paradoxically often those that were most clearly signposted as acts of cultural diplomacy. The packaging of the RSO Leipzig tour in terms of anti-imperialist solidarity was given credence by the inclusion of Syrian violinist Nejmi Succari as the soloist in the first Baalbeck and Damascus concerts, and by the programming for the second Baalbeck concert of Cypriot-Lebanese composer Anis Fuleihan's *Baalbeck Overture*, which was commissioned by the Baalbeck Festival committee especially for the event.⁷⁶ Fuleihan had been instrumental in establishing the Beirut Conservatory in the 1950s.⁷⁷ He was also, however, a US citizen who, as the East Germans discovered when they arrived in Lebanon for the concert, had spent time in Israel. This prompted Kurt Bork to approach the Lebanese Minister for National Education to inquire if there would be any opposition to the RSO Leipzig performing one of Fuleihan's works. Encapsulating the separation of culture and state in the country, the Lebanese minister reportedly responded that "the Festival committee was an independent institution, which determined the festival program itself, and that misunderstandings would therefore be ruled out."⁷⁸ Consequently, the concert went ahead as planned, but without the political impact that GDR officials had doubtless intended for it.

Other similar attempts to program compositions by Arab composers failed to come to fruition. The Staatskapelle Berlin invited the Egyptian composer Gamal Abdel-Rahim to send a piece for soprano and chamber orchestra—*Das Feuer und die Worte*—to be performed during its Cairo residency. Several weeks before the trip was due to commence, however, he was informed that the orchestral parts had arrived in Berlin too late for the piece to be rehearsed to a sufficient standard.⁷⁹ The Dresdner Philharmonie, meanwhile, made no approaches to Arab composers; the orchestra alluded instead to more general themes of international solidarity through the inclusion in two of its Egyptian concerts of Bongartz's own symphonic poem *Patria o muerte: Fidel Castro und dem kubanischen Volk in aufrichtiger Bewunderung* (Fatherland or death: For Fidel Castro and the Cuban people

76. See MfAA B 1003/69, Kurt Walter, "Bericht über eine Dienstreise in den Libanon," 2–3.

77. See Mainguy, *La musique au Liban*, 41–42.

78. See MfAA B 1003/69, Kurt Walter, "Bericht über eine Dienstreise in den Libanon," 3: "daß das Festivalkomitee eine selbständige Institution sei, das den Inhalt des Programms des Festivals selbst bestimme und daß Mißverständnisse daher ausgeschlossen seien."

79. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 3, letter from Horst Richter to Gamal Abdel-Rahim, February 19, 1969.

in sincere admiration). Bongartz had composed the work to conduct during a visit to Havana in 1961.⁸⁰ If, however, the Dresdner Philharmonie's performances of it in Egypt were intended to invoke the spirit of international solidarity, the message was lost in translation. Only the first part of the work's title ("Patria o muerte") was actually listed in the program, and no program notes were provided. Writing in *Le Progrès Égyptien*, the critic Albert Bajocchi admonished that "where a piece of program music is concerned, it would perhaps have been useful to reveal its subject to the public."⁸¹

Notably, the absence of a program was not Bajocchi's primary objection to Bongartz's composition. In an otherwise glowing review of the orchestra's Cairo concert of January 8, he complained that "whether the subject be the Spanish Civil War or the Cuban Revolution, this symphonic poem bewilders with its deliberate opposition of styles, which do not seem very felicitous. A heroic exposition with modernist pretensions that employs bold means of execution is followed by a second section of appalling banality: a typically trivial military march in a perfectly conventional style."⁸² The style of internationalism that was favored by Egyptian composers in the 1950s and 1960s had resonances with socialist realism. Writing in 1981, Racy explained that "the main vision for Egypt's 'international music' has been the emulation of the late and post-Romantic symphonic models." He described as major inspirations "composers such as Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Khachaturian, who composed elaborate programmatic symphonic works, and who often utilized folk musical elements," and explained that "such works are considered best suited for combining 'internationalism' with the depiction of national and political ideas."⁸³ Characteristic of this trend are the compositions of 'Azīz Al-Shawān, who studied in Moscow with Khachaturian and whose symphonic works introduce Arabic inflections into a musical language that is inherently grounded in the Western art music tradition. Despite some general aesthetic parallels, however, socialist realism in its broader political sense was not a particularly appealing ideology in Egypt. Kurt Bork, for example, found himself challenged in relation to its repressive nature in an interview for *al-Jumhuriyya*, published shortly after the Deutsche Staatsoper's visit to Cairo. The interviewer, Fawzi Sulayman, countered Bork's claim that "we [in the GDR] are open to all artistic directions," by asking, "Even for avant-garde

80. See "Tabletten zur Schnelldiagnose," *Neue Zeit*, January 6, 1962, 1.

81. Albert Bajocchi, "Heinz Bongartz dirigé à l'Opéra la Philharmonie de Dresde," *Le Progrès Égyptien*, January 11, 1967, 5: "S'agissant d'une œuvre à programme, il aurait été utile peut-être d'en révéler l'argument au public."

82. Ibid: "Quel qu'en soit le sujet guerre d'Espagne ou révolution cubaine ce poème symphonique surprend par des oppositions de style certes voulues, mais qui ne semblent pas très heureuses. A un exorde héroïque de prétentions modernistes et qui fait recours aux grands moyens d'exécution fait suite une deuxième partie d'une banalité consternante: une marche militaire comme toute assez triviale et d'une écriture parfaitement conventionnelle."

83. Racy, "Music in Contemporary Cairo," 19.

theater? Beckett and Ionesco for example?” and proceeded to probe Bork about socialist realism under Zhdanov, arguing that it “was not open to the horizons of human potential that you are now talking about, especially in the period 1945–56.”⁸⁴

The new music that the GDR exported to Egypt cannot have done much to assuage doubts about the potential of socialist realism. Bajocchi was not the first to question the quality of East German works selected for performance in Egypt. The inclusion of Hans-Georg Görner's *Ei du feiner Reiter: Variationen zu einem Landsknechtslied von Samuel Scheidt (1624) für großes Orchester*, op. 25, in the concerts conducted by Udo Nissen with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra in 1959 had met with an unenthusiastic response from the GDR's unofficial vice-consul to Egypt, Alfred Marter. Reporting to the GDR Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Marter observed that the piece was “politely received,” but “appealed to hardly anyone here. It is too flat and uninteresting for the Egyptian taste.” As a consequence, he concluded, “we issued no propaganda to the effect that a living GDR composer is the creator of these variations. That would not have been of use to us.”⁸⁵ Görner, a church composer who had joined the Nazi party in 1930 and served from 1933 as church music advisor in Alfred Rosenberg's Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur (Militant League for German Culture), was hardly a prototypical socialist realist composer.⁸⁶ Indeed, with the exception of Hanns Eisler, East Germany's most prominent composers were conspicuous by their absence from performances in the Middle East (see the Appendix). While the RSO Leipzig showcased Soviet socialist realism, programming works by Prokofiev and Shostakovich, other orchestras featured works by GDR composers of national rather than international renown. At one level, this can be ascribed to the predilections of individual conductors. The Dresdner Philharmonie and Gewandhausorchester were supporting local Saxon composers in promoting respectively Siegfried Kurz and Otto Reinhold: Kurz was a prominent Dresden figure, who was better known as Staatskapellmeister of the Semperoper, while Reinhold's *Triptychon* was a work that Kurt Masur had

84. Fawzi Sulayman, “Ma'a Na'ib Wazir al-Thaqafa fi Almaniya al-Dimuqratiyya” [With the Democratic German Republic Deputy Minister of Culture], *al-Jumhuriyya*, March 24, 1969: “Innana naftah abwaban li-kull al-ittijahat”; “Hatta al-masrah al-tali'i. Bikit wa-Yunisku mathalan?”; “Fa-kana . . . ghayr muftahayn li-l-afaq al-insaniyya allati tahaddathta 'anha . . . wakhassa fi-l-fitra bayn 1945–1956.”

85. MfAA A 12238, Alfred Marter, “Einschätzung des politischen und künstlerischen Erfolges,” 6: “Die Variationen von Goerner auf ‘Ei du feiner Reiter’ wurden höflich aufgenommen. Das Stück hat hier wohl kaum jemandem gefallen. Es ist zu flach und uninteressant nicht nur für den ägyptischen Geschmack. Deshalb haben wir auch keine Propaganda in der Richtung gemacht, daß ein lebender DDR-Komponist Schöpfer dieser Variationen ist. Das hätte uns nicht genützt.”

86. See Klingberg, “Die Göttinger Händel-Gesellschaft,” 127.

conducted on a number of occasions in the 1960s and recorded with the Dresdner Philharmonie on the GDR's Eterna label in 1971.⁸⁷

The programming of new music was likely also shaped by political tensions in the Middle East. At home, the SED was adamant that its anti-Zionist stance did not equate to anti-Semitism. In the case of the Six-Day War, it emphasized this point by publishing in the main SED newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, statements of support for the Arab nations that were penned by some of the GDR's most prominent Jewish intellectuals.⁸⁸ Where the state's dealings with the Middle East were concerned, the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism was less clear-cut. Eager to circumnavigate potential obstacles in their quest for diplomatic recognition, East German officials were quick to downplay any vestiges of Jewishness in GDR culture. Revealing, for example, is the invitation that the unofficial GDR consulate in Cairo extended to musicologist Samha El-Kholy and composer Abdel-Rahim to attend the Musik-Biennale in Berlin in 1967. The program for the event included the 1961 cantata *Jüdische Chronik* composed by Paul Dessau, Rudolf Wagner-Régeny, Boris Blacher, Hans Werner Henze, and Karl Amadeus Hartmann in response to a resurgence of anti-Semitism in the FRG. Apprehensive about the way in which the Egyptian guests might react to the work, the consulate produced for them a tailored copy of the program in which the title "Jüdische Chronik" was blanked out, leaving only the generic heading "Chorsinfonisches Konzert." As Horst Winter explained to the GDR Ministry for Culture, "We did not think it was appropriate to disclose to the guests what the concert on 11/3 is actually called."⁸⁹

More pernicious was the stipulation by the GDR Ministry for Foreign Affairs that East German citizens of Jewish descent and works by Jewish artists should not be sent to the Middle East in an official capacity. This caused some consternation where literature was concerned. The arm of the Ministry for Culture responsible for book production in the GDR (the Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel) argued that the removal of Jewish writers such as Johannes R. Becher, Anna Seghers, and Arnold Zweig from a list of works selected for translation into Arabic would result in an "unacceptable distortion of the profile of our contemporary literature."⁹⁰ The Ministry for

87. Masur performed the work, for example, with the Prague Symphony Orchestra at the Prague Spring Festival in 1960; see H.B., "Musik verbindet die Völker: Erlebnis vom Prager Frühling / Erfolg Kurt Masurs," *Berliner Zeitung*, May 28, 1960, 6.

88. See Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*, 51–52.

89. MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Herbert Geerhardt, Department of Cultural Relations, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, February 28, 1967: "Wir hielten es nicht für zweckmäßig, hier den Gästen mitzuteilen, wie das Konzert am 11.3. tatsächlich bezeichnet ist."

90. Reported in BArch DR 1/18876, vol. 1, letter from Köhler, Department of International Relations, Ministry for Culture, to Helmut Tautz, Department of Cultural Relations, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, January 6, 1966: "eine unvermeidbare Verzerrung des Profils unserer Gegenwartsliteratur."

Foreign Affairs, however, argued for the necessity of such measures, explaining that,

because of the role that Israel plays in the Arab world, these problems posed by the relations of the GDR to the Arab states merit particular care and must be handled with extraordinary sensitivity. The situation remains that an awkward confrontation with the Egyptian side in relation to such issues (the sending of persons of Jewish descent within the framework of the official culture working plan, literary propaganda involving works by Jewish writers, or works concerned with Jewish issues, etc.) could have a negative effect on relations with Egypt.⁹¹

This policy, which was by no means unique to the GDR—the United States had adopted a similar approach in the 1950s⁹²—could perhaps explain the omission from concert programs of works by prominent Jewish composers such as Dessau and Ernst Hermann Meyer. It is true that Eisler was also Jewish, but the context in which he was presented by the Staatskapelle Berlin was a specifically *German* one. Uniting the works by GDR composers that were performed in the Middle East was a strong historicizing bent, be it Görner's neoclassical tribute to Scheidt or the echoes of Max Reger in Reinhold's *Triptychon*. Eisler's cantata *Das Vorbild* is particularly conspicuous in this regard. A composition that opens with a reworking of the Fugue in G Minor from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, its positioning in an otherwise all-Bach program evoked a historical Germany,⁹³ which, as William Glenn Gray notes, was held in esteem by many Arabs.

Opera for Export

The Egyptians were most interested in hearing works from the German musical canon, the German operatic canon in particular. Opera enjoyed much greater popularity in Egypt than symphonic music. Since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, however, Egyptian operatic culture had been an exclusively Italian affair. Audiences were introduced to the art form in the 1840s through works by Donizetti, Luigi Ricci, Bellini, Rossini, and Verdi at

91. BArch DR 1/18876, vol. 1, letter from Helmut Tautz to Köhler, January 19, 1966: "Auf Grund der Rolle, die Israel im arabischen Raum spielt, verdienen diese Probleme in den Beziehungen der DDR zu den arabischen Staaten eine besondere Beachtung und müssen mit außerordentlichem Fingerspitzengefühl behandelt werden. Die Situation ist noch immer so, daß eine ungeschickte Konfrontation der ägyptischen Seite mit solchen Fragen (Entsendung von Personen jüdischer Abstammung im Rahmen der staatlichen Kulturarbeitspläne, Literaturpropaganda mit Werken jüdischer Schriftsteller oder mit Werken, die jüdische Probleme betreffen usw.) sich nachteilig auf die Beziehungen zur VAR auswirken könnte."

92. See Carr, "Diplomatic Notes," 45.

93. Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 89.

the Teatro del Cairo and the Italian theater in Alexandria,⁹⁴ and Italian opera cemented its stronghold on the country when the Cairo Opera House opened in 1869. The inaugural performance there of *Rigoletto*, followed two years later by the world premiere of *Aida*, set the stage for an annual opera season that showcased touring companies from Italy for the next century.⁹⁵

The extent to which opera had become synonymous with Italy was in part a legacy of the specifically Italianate nature of Isma'il's vision of Europeanization.⁹⁶ It also reflected the influence of the Italian diaspora in pre-revolutionary Egypt, which at its peak in the early 1930s numbered over 50,000 members.⁹⁷ In post-revolutionary Egypt, opera retained its prestige. Ministry officials seem, however, to have been keen to divest it of its khedival and colonial associations by weakening the Italian dominance of the art form. In 1961, for example, Okasha oversaw the first opera production in Arabic at the Cairo Opera House—a staging of Franz Lehár's *Die lustige Witwe*, translated by Abdel-Rahman Al-Khamissi and starring Egyptian soprano Ratiba El-Hefny.⁹⁸ The Egyptian government was especially eager to introduce German opera and specifically Richard Wagner to Cairo. In 1958, Mahmoud Nahas, an officer in the Ministry for Culture and National Guidance and the general manager of the Cairo Opera House, approached the GDR trade mission to inquire about the possibility of bringing over an East German opera company to stage some of Wagner's works. The trade mission deemed this request unfeasible, reporting back to the GDR Ministry for Culture that Wagner's operas were unlikely ever to be performed in Egypt given that the orchestra pit of the Cairo Opera House could hold only sixty-five players. They also argued that it would be “truly paradoxical, if we were to implement our cultural propaganda with Wagner of all things, and then perhaps with the introduction of *Lohengrin* and *Tristan und Isolde!*”⁹⁹ The question of Wagner's relevance was the subject of much debate in the GDR in the mid-1950s, the cultural intelligentsia being undecided as to whether the pessimism and irrationalism of his works could be reconciled with Marxist aesthetics.¹⁰⁰ Notably where cultural diplomacy was concerned, the ideological obstacles surrounding his operas proved less of a barrier than the practical ones; in

94. See Mestyan, “Sound, Military Music, and Opera,” 650–51.

95. See Wahba, *Cultural Policy in Egypt*, 62.

96. See Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*, 119.

97. See Gorman, “Italians of Egypt,” 141.

98. See Ati Metwaly, “The Life and Times of an Arab Soprano: Ratiba El-Hefny and *The Merry Widow*,” *Abram Online*, April 3, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/68393.aspx>.

99. MfAA A 12235, letter from Treitschke to Ingeborg Lockhoff, Department of Cultural Relations, Ministry for Culture, August 30, 1958, 3: “Andererseits wäre es ja gerade Paradox, wenn wir zur Durchsetzung unserer Kulturpropaganda ausgerechnet mit Wagner, und dann vielleicht noch mit *Lohengrin* und *Tristan und Isolde* aufwarten würden!”

100. See Kelly, *Composing the Canon*, 64–95.

1959, the composer featured prominently in Nissen's concert with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, which included both the prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and Elisabeth's aria "Dich, teure Halle" from *Tannhäuser*.¹⁰¹

Egyptian officials began a more concerted drive to bring German opera to Cairo as relations between Egypt and the GDR strengthened in the late 1960s. In 1966 Samha El-Kholy visited the GDR on behalf of the Egyptian Ministry for Culture to ascertain, among other things, whether the Deutsche Staatsoper might send a chamber ensemble to Cairo to lead an Egyptian orchestra and choir in a number of stagings. El-Kholy suggested as possibilities the following productions—all requiring small forces—from the Staatsoper's repertoire: *Così fan tutte*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Die Walküre*, and Dessau and Brecht's *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus*.¹⁰² (The inclusion of *Lukullus* suggests that the issue of artists' Jewishness was perhaps of greater concern for the East Germans than it was for the Egyptians.) No agreement was reached, but El-Kholy returned to Egypt full of praise for German music and musical life in the GDR. In an article for *al-Akhbar* about the International Bach Festival in Leipzig, which she also attended during her visit, she described with admiration the reverence demonstrated in the city toward Western art music. One of the "most beautiful features" of the Leipzig Opera House, she observed, "is the way the public stands in very long queues in front of its entrances, as refined music is spiritual nourishment for civilized peoples."¹⁰³

Okasha broached the topic of German opera for Egypt again a year later when the RSO Leipzig visited Cairo. He met with Bork and asked that the GDR support his desire to see Wagner's operas in Egypt.¹⁰⁴ The logistical problems of staging Wagner in the Cairo Opera House remained insurmountable, but some compensation was provided in the conspicuous number of overtures by Wagner, Weber, and Beethoven that were performed in Cairo that year by German orchestras. As can be seen in the Appendix, the Dresdner Philharmonie included the overture to *Der Freischütz* in their main program and offered as encores the overtures to *Rienzi*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Oberon*, while the RSO Leipzig performed the prelude to *Die Meistersinger* and the overture to *Fidelio*. The overture to *Der fliegende Holländer*

101. See MfAA A 12238, letter from Alfred Marter to the Egyptian Ministry for Culture and National Guidance, September 23, 1959, 2.

102. See BArch DR 1/18876, vol. 3, "Abschlussbericht über den Aufenthalt der Gäste aus der VAR: Aufenthaltsdauer: 24.5–5.6.1966," June 22, 1966, 2.

103. Samha El-Kholy, "Ajmal Dar Ubira fi Uruba.. wa-Urkistra 'Bayt al-Tarziyya!'" [The most beautiful opera house in Europe . . . and the "House of Tailors" orchestra!], *al-Akhbar*, July 13, 1966: "Wa-min ajmal malamih hadhihi al-dar anna al-jumhur yaqif fi tawabir tawila jiddan amam abwab al-dukhul, li-anna al-musiqa al-raqiyya, ghidha" ruhi li-l-shu'ub al-mutahaddira."

104. See MfAA B 1003/69, Kurt Walter, "Bericht über eine Dienstreise in den Libanon," 11–12.

was also notably included by Wiesenhütter in the concert that is the subject of the photographs shown in Figures 1–3.¹⁰⁵

While Wagner productions remained out of reach, the plan to stage German opera in Egypt finally came to fruition under the auspices of the year-long festival of international culture that was organized to celebrate the millennium of Cairo in 1969. The Egyptian Ministry for Culture invited twenty “friendly countries” to send ensembles and exhibitions to showcase their national cultural achievements as a gift to the Egyptian people,¹⁰⁶ and explicitly requested that the Deutsche Staatsoper represent the GDR and perform the Egyptian premieres of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Così fan tutte*.¹⁰⁷ This generated vast amounts of positive publicity: Winter reported to the GDR Ministry for Culture shortly after the visit that forty-two articles on the company had appeared in the Egyptian daily press, with further coverage in weekly newspapers and on the radio.¹⁰⁸ A performance of *Così fan tutte* was also broadcast on Egyptian national television together with an interview with the Staatsoper’s intendant Hans Pischner, in which he extolled the government support provided for opera in the GDR.¹⁰⁹

For both the Egyptians and the East Germans, the significance of the Deutsche Staatsoper’s visit and the wider festival of which it was a part went far beyond the performances themselves. From the Egyptian perspective, the country’s ability to host such a large-scale international event involving a lineup of world-leading ensembles was an impressive statement of defiance in the wake of its recent defeat in the Six-Day War, and was perceived as such in many quarters. The *New York Times* notably declared that “[t]his is not, perhaps, the best time for birthday parties,” and opined that “for the capital of a nation shamed by its recent past and desperately anxious about the immediate future, this is surely a gesture on a grand scale.”¹¹⁰ For the GDR meanwhile, the opportunity for the Staatsoper to perform alongside ensembles such as the Bolshoi Ballet and London’s Royal Ballet at a festival on which the world’s eyes were trained was a significant coup. It was not only an affirmation of the state’s ability to hold its own in artistic terms on an international stage. More importantly, the designation of the GDR as a “friendly

105. See Mahmud Khattab, “al-Layla Yaqud Nihaytar al-Urkistra al-Simfuni” [Tonight Wiesenhütter conducts the Symphony Orchestra], *al-Jumhuriyya*, October 7, 1967.

106. See Wahba, *Cultural Policy in Egypt*, 51.

107. See MfAA C 1233/70, letter from Horst Winter to Kurt Walter, January 16, 1968, 1, and letter from Magdi Wahba to Horst Winter, May 14, 196[8] (the latter is dated 1969 but given the contents was clearly written in 1968). Wahba initially requested that Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill’s *Die sieben Todsünden der Kleinbürger* be performed, too, but the Staatsoper ultimately decided against it.

108. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 3, Horst Winter, “Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Deutschen Staatsoper Berlin in der VAR vom 1.3.1969–12.3.1969,” April 3, 1969, 1.

109. See *ibid.*

110. Anthony Carthew, “Cairo’s ‘Blue Period,’” *New York Times*, August 17, 1969, SM6.

country” and the absence from the festival of any West German ensemble was a clear indicator of the state’s growing political acceptability.

The Economics of Music Diplomacy

One of the most distinctive features of the relationships that evolved between Soviet Bloc and nonaligned states is the extent to which the balance of power did not reinscribe the usual inequalities between the global north and south. The cultural capital that the GDR possessed did not equate to political capital. As a result, any progress that it achieved in the Middle East on the back of music diplomacy was hard won. While the Egyptians certainly looked to the GDR both for assistance in their quest to modernize and for support against Israel, they were far from beholden to the East German state; on the contrary, as Gray observes, the GDR’s precarious political status cast it in the role of “petitioner.”¹¹¹ This position is reflected in the negotiations that surrounded the implementation of cultural diplomacy. Danielle Fosler-Lussier describes the way in which music diplomacy was deployed by the superpowers in third-party countries as a form of “gift economy,” which “defined social and power relationships among nations.”¹¹² The GDR certainly framed some of its activities in the Middle East in terms of gift giving. The RSO Leipzig donated the income from the first of its Cairo concerts to the war effort,¹¹³ and, as described above, the visit by the Deutsche Staatsoper to Cairo was a gift in a literal sense, albeit one that was partly funded by the Egyptian state. Gifts by their nature demand reciprocity, and, as Aafke Komter observes, an “aspect of the principle of reciprocity is its implicit assumption of the recognition of the other person as a potential ally.”¹¹⁴ The GDR, unlike the superpowers, did not have the financial resources to fund large-scale gifts in their entirety. Instead, in its dealings with nonaligned states it enacted this principle of reciprocity by engaging in a model of economic cooperation that took the form of trade “in the mutual interest,” or, as Berthold Unfried aptly terms it, “aid by trade.”¹¹⁵ The GDR’s commitment to international solidarity rarely translated into donations of goods or experts. It expected nonaligned states to pay for commodities, either at subsidized rates or through barter. The export of music to the Middle East worked very much along these lines. In providing visiting ensembles, and deploying experts to develop the musical cultures of Egypt and Syria, the GDR was supplying a wanted resource at preferential rates. As in many such

111. Gray, *Germany’s Cold War*, 4.

112. Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, 26.

113. See Darwish, “Na’ib Wazir al-Thaqafa al-Almani Yaql.”

114. Komter, “Gifts and Social Relations,” 102.

115. See Unfried, “Friendship and Education,” 18.

subsidized trade deals, however, haggling was often required. East German officials had to work to assert a musical presence for the GDR in the region.

The financial negotiations that surrounded visits by East German ensembles are illuminating in this context. All musical activities between Egypt and the GDR came under the auspices of the Joint Cultural Commission GDR-UAR (Die gemeinsame Kulturkommission DDR-VAR), which was set up following the signing by the two states of the Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation in March 1965. The terms of the commission stipulated that the costs incurred by visiting delegations, exhibitions, and experts would be defrayed according to a “principle of reciprocity,” whereby international travel expenses would be borne by the sending party, and subsistence and internal travel costs by the receiving party.¹¹⁶ Things rarely worked like this in practice, however, and the GDR was frequently obliged to supplement shortfalls on the Egyptian side in order for tours to proceed.

The 1967 visit by the Dresdner Philharmonie is a case in point. The tour was first mooted in an addendum to the Joint Cultural Commission’s “Culture Plan” for 1965–66 and given the go-ahead at the commission’s annual assembly, which took place in Cairo in July 1966.¹¹⁷ In the weeks that followed, however, the Egyptian side began to waver. On August 7, Horst Winter wrote to the Deutsche Künstler-Agentur (German Artists Agency, DKA), the body charged with securing contracts for foreign guest performances by East German musicians and ensembles, noting that the Egyptian Ministry for Culture had yet to approve the tour officially, and surmising that it could well happen “that the UAR side turns to us to ask for financial support for the visit.”¹¹⁸ No such request was forthcoming. Yet when the Egyptian Ministry for Culture gave the green light for the concerts in October and issued its terms, it was clear that the GDR would have to provide a substantial subsidy to cover costs. The fees for the performances—800 Egyptian pounds for each of the three Cairo concerts and no honorarium whatsoever for the concert in Alexandria—were lower than anticipated; it was uncertain whether the Egyptian side would cover the orchestra’s travel costs between Cairo and Alexandria; and the proposed blanket per diem for rank-and-file musicians, soloists, and conductor alike was inadequate. As the

116. See MfAA A 13859, “Direktive für die Delegation der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zu den Verhandlungen der ‘Gemeinsamen Kulturkommission Deutsche Demokratische Republik—Vereinigte Arabische Republik’ in der DDR,” [1966], 4.

117. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 1, “Direktive für eine Reise des Direktors der Deutschen Künstler-Agentur, Günther Weber, zu Verhandlungen in der VAR, Libanon und Syrien,” prepared on behalf of Irene Gysi, Head of the Department of International Relations, Ministry for Culture.

118. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 1, letter from Horst Winter to Günther Weber, DKA, August 7, 1966, 2: “daß die VAR-Seite sich an uns wendet und um finanzielle Unterstützung für den Aufenthalt bittet.” The DKA changed its name in 1968 to Künstler-Agentur der DDR. For clarity, I refer to it using the acronym DKA throughout.

director of the DKA, Ernst Zielke, pointed out to the Ministry for Culture, it was out of the question “that Professor Bongartz would travel to Egypt for three [Egyptian pounds] a day.”¹¹⁹

The ensuing conversations on the GDR side demonstrate the tensions that often existed between the various East German government bodies responsible for implementing foreign policy strategy. The DKA was concerned primarily with economic viability. Accordingly, it recommended that the tour should not proceed on these terms, explaining, “We do not consider the potential cultural-political gains of the tour to be such as would justify the financial risk and loss of hard currency.”¹²⁰ The DKA was overruled by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, however, who saw the tour as a vital means of developing GDR-Egyptian cultural relations. Stressing “the need to do everything possible to facilitate the appearance of the Dresdner Philharmonie in the United Arab Republic,”¹²¹ it ultimately ordered the Ministry for Culture to subsidize any shortfall on the Egyptian side to the value of 2,000 Egyptian pounds.¹²² Thus, the tour went ahead. This was a pattern that was to occur repeatedly, and one that the East Germans were generally prepared to tolerate, as the political benefits associated with performances by elite ensembles abroad were thought to outweigh any financial losses. In the case of the Deutsche Staatsoper’s Cairo visit, for example, the DKA concluded to the Ministry for Culture that “the great success of the guest appearance in cultural and political spheres vindicates the extraordinarily high expenditure for the visit and in my opinion also justifies the high financial costs in West German marks, about which there were obviously certain doubts.”¹²³

The GDR’s willingness to subsidize cultural activities did not result in Arab nations accepting whatever was sent their way, however. The Egyptian Ministry for Culture was wont to curtail the number of visiting ensembles proposed by the GDR in the annual plans of the Joint Cultural Commission,¹²⁴ and attempts to instigate cultural collaborations met with

119. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 1, letter from Ernst Zielke to Irene Gysi, November 29, 1966, 2: “daß Herr Professor Bongartz nicht für 3.- pro Tag nach Ägypten reisen wird.”

120. Ibid.: “Wir halten den möglichen kulturpolitischen Nutzen für nicht so hoch, als daß damit gerechtfertigt wäre, ein derartiges finanzielles Risiko und Valutaverlust einzugehen.” “Valuta” was the term used in the GDR to refer to hard currency (usually West German marks).

121. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 1, letter from Christian Fichte to Irene Gysi, December 5, 1966, 2: “die Notwendigkeit, alles zu tun, damit das Auftreten der Dresdner Philharmonie in der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik möglich wird.”

122. See *ibid.*, 1.

123. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 3, Gerhard Heinemann, “Bericht über das Gastspiel der Deutschen Staatsoper Berlin in Kairo/VAR vom 3. bis 12. März 1969,” April 25, 1969, 3: “Der große Erfolg des Gastspiels auf künstlerischem und politischem Gebiet bestätigt die Richtigkeit des außergewöhnlich hohen Aufwandes für das Gastspiel und rechtfertigt meines Erachtens auch die hohen finanziellen Ausgaben in Mark, über die es offensichtlich gewisse Zweifel gab.”

124. See, for example, MfAA C 657, “Bericht über die 3. Tagung der ‘Gemeinsamen Kulturkommission DDR-VAR,’” [1967], 3.

variable responses. The GDR's State Broadcasting Committee struggled, for example, to engage Radio Cairo in an exchange of materials. In 1965, they sent over twelve hours of taped music programming for broadcast on Radio Cairo, which went unacknowledged. They also received no response to requests that the Egyptians send music for East German children's choirs to perform and scores of symphonic works by Egyptian composers to be recorded for broadcasting in the GDR.¹²⁵

The varying degrees of enthusiasm with which the GDR's endeavors were greeted can be ascribed to a number of factors. First and foremost, Western art music, while certainly valued by those in power, was simply not as much of a priority for Arab nations as it was for the GDR. This was particularly the case at a time of escalating tensions with Israel, as Bork discovered when meeting the Syrian Minister for Culture, Zuheir Akkad, after the RSO Leipzig's concert in Damascus. On the back of the performance, Bork offered further cultural support to the Syrian state, volunteering, among other things, to send instrumental teachers and a film director to Damascus and to fund a residency for a Syrian theater director at the Berliner Ensemble. Akkad reportedly responded that "Syria gratefully acknowledges every act of solidarity," but also that "the Syrian government would be particularly appreciative of military support" in the battle against Israel.¹²⁶

It was also the case that the GDR was attempting to enter a market in which other countries, Soviet Bloc states in particular, already had a sizable stake. This being so, it sometimes happened that what the GDR had to offer was simply not competitive. Zielke's attempts on behalf of the DKA to organize a second tour in the Middle East for the Dresdner Philharmonie in 1968, for example, were not received favorably. The Egyptians, Zielke reported, conceded that they might consider another concert if the orchestra was already on tour in the region but were otherwise prepared to host only elite ensembles such as the Gewandhausorchester or the Staatskapelle Dresden.¹²⁷ The Baalbeck Festival committee, meanwhile, declined the Dresdner Philharmonie on the grounds that it had already performed in Beirut and thus would not be novel enough for the festival's audience. The committee did express an interest in engaging the Gewandhausorchester for the 1969 festival.¹²⁸ There was, however, a catch, in that the Moscow Philharmonic

125. See MfAA A 17032, "Bericht über die Zusammenarbeit mit dem Rundfunk der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik im Jahre 1965," February 10, 1966, 1–2.

126. See MfAA B 1003/69, Kurt Walter, "Bericht über eine Dienstreise in den Libanon," 8: "daß Syrien jede Solidaritätsaktion dankbar anerkenne, daß die syrische Regierung aber besonders dankbar für militärische Unterstützung sei."

127. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 3, Ernst Zielke, "Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Dienstreise in die VAR und den Libanon vom 23. September bis 30. September 1968," October 3, 1968, 5.

128. *Ibid.*, 9. The festival committee notably had the Berliner Philharmoniker under Herbert von Karajan lined up for 1968.

Orchestra had already been contracted for the event. Consequently, the committee agreed to host the Gewandhaus only on condition that the DKA convince the Moscow Philharmonic to withdraw. Zielke accordingly pleaded the Gewandhaus's case with his counterpart at Goskontsert, the USSR's State Concert Agency, citing the event's exceptional importance given that it would coincide with the GDR's twentieth anniversary.¹²⁹ On this occasion the Soviets were prepared to make way. Zielke secured two dates for the Gewandhaus at the 1969 festival. His attempts to expand these dates into a regional tour failed, however, as Egypt declined to host the orchestra.¹³⁰

At other times, the presence of the USSR and other Soviet Bloc members proved more of a challenge. This was particularly true of the GDR's attempts to populate the Western art music scene in Cairo with East German experts. The sending of experts was a strategy employed extensively by countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. The deployment of health workers, engineers, teachers, arts and culture specialists, lawyers, government advisors, and military specialists to nonaligned states was viewed as an effective means of fostering allegiances, influencing policy, and spreading ideology.¹³¹ The USSR granted Eastern Bloc states considerable autonomy in this regard. As long as their activities did not contravene Soviet foreign policy, they were essentially free to further their own interests. Czechoslovakia, for example, operated with remarkable independence in Egypt throughout the 1950s and 1960s. It signed a crucial arms deal with Nasser in 1955, founded Egypt's first military college in 1958, and supplied the teaching staff for the college until 1960.¹³² The country also played a vital role in keeping the Cairo Symphony Orchestra afloat throughout the 1960s: Czechoslovakian players, who were apparently offered by their government at very reasonable rates, made up almost a third of the orchestra in 1967.¹³³

129. See *ibid.*, 10.

130. See MFAA C 1354/76, "Bericht der Delegation der DDR in der 'Gemeinsamen Kulturkommission DDR-VAR' über den Stand der Erfüllung des Arbeitsplanes für kulturelle und wissenschaftliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und der VAR für die Jahre 1969 und 1970 mit dem Stand Ende November 1969," 5. No reasons are given. The report simply states, "The visit of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig in August was not accepted by the UAR" ("Der Aufenthalt des Leipziger Gewandhausorchesters im August wurde von der VAR nicht akzeptiert").

131. See Hong, *Cold War Germany*, 13–48. For a discussion of the American Specialists program, see Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 47–76.

132. See Muchlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa*, 94.

133. A report from 1967 gives the demographic makeup of the orchestra's ninety-six members as follows: thirty-nine Egyptian musicians, thirty-one Czechoslovakian, fourteen Bulgarian, three Yugoslavian, three Italian, two Polish, two Greek, one French, and one Ghanaian; see BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Werner Rackwitz, November 9, 1967, 1.

From the GDR's perspective, the long leash granted by the USSR was conducive to its bid to assert independence, and by 1967 the state had deployed almost 300 experts to the Middle East.¹³⁴ East German advisors received a particularly warm welcome in Syria, where they helped to shape the emerging policies of the new Ba'ath government.¹³⁵ The lack of top-down Soviet control, however, also meant that the GDR found itself having to compete with allies for opportunities.¹³⁶ Despite repeated efforts, it struggled, for example, to break the Soviet monopoly on the Cairo Conservatory. In 1965, the Egyptian Ministry for Culture rebuffed the GDR's offer of a singing teacher, a violin teacher, and a teacher of harmony, aural skills, and music history, citing sufficient cover in these areas.¹³⁷ When the Egyptians expressed a wish for a teacher of organ and composition, the East Germans tried to secure the post for Leipzig-based organist Lorenz Stolzenbach, but extensive negotiations, which began in April 1966 and lasted over a year, came to nothing. The Egyptian Ministry for Culture rejected the GDR's initial offer, countering that the Soviets provided better financial terms where the sending of specialists was concerned.¹³⁸ Subsequently, when a contract with Stolzenbach appeared to have been secured, the Egyptians gave the position at the last minute to a Yugoslavian organist.¹³⁹ Similarly fruitless was the GDR's proposal of the Schwerin conductor Werner Schöniger for the rectorship of the conservatory, which became vacant in the spring of 1967.¹⁴⁰ Schöniger was overlooked in favor of a Soviet candidate, who upon his appointment brought with him a further ten teachers from the USSR, leading Winter to conclude that, "with eleven posts in the conservatory occupied by Soviet experts, the question of teachers from the GDR is finished."¹⁴¹

134. See Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*, 62.

135. See *ibid.*, 61, and Trentin, "Modernization as State Building," 500–504.

136. The GDR was not unique in this respect. Hilger details, for example, the competition between the USSR and Czechoslovakia for the tractor market in India, in which Czechoslovakia notably had the upper hand: Hilger, "Revolutionsideologie, Systemkonkurrenz," 406.

137. See MfAA A 13859, "Bericht der Delegation der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der 'Gemeinsamen Kulturkommission DDR-VAR' über den Stand der Erfüllung des 'Arbeitsplanes der kulturellen und wissenschaftlichen Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Vereinigten Arabischen Republik für die Jahre 1965 und 1966' mit dem Stand vom 31. März 1966," 10.

138. See MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Rudolf Greiser, Department of International Relations, Ministry for Culture, January 12, 1967, 2.

139. See MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Christian Fichte, consulate general, to Rudolf Greiser, May 30, 1967, 2.

140. See MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Kurt Walter, Department of International Relations, Ministry for Culture, March 20, 1967, 2.

141. MfAA C 657, letter from Horst Winter to Rudolf Greiser, August 2, 1967, 7: "Wir schätzen ein, daß mit der Besetzung von 11 Stellen im Konservatorium durch sowjetische Experten die Frage nach Lehrkräften aus der DDR gesunken ist."

Perspectives from the Ground

The GDR finally managed to secure a prestigious musical post in Egypt for one of its citizens in the summer of 1967. Impressed by the visit of the Dresdner Philharmonic and in anticipation of the impending RSO Leipzig tour, the Egyptian Ministry for Culture approached the East German consulate about the possibility of engaging an East German conductor to direct the Cairo Symphony Orchestra.¹⁴² The GDR Ministry for Foreign Affairs proposed Gerhart Wiesenhütter, conductor of the Loh-Orchester in Sonderhausen, and on this occasion their offer was accepted. Wiesenhütter traveled to Cairo in September 1967 to take up his new post. His appointment was a significant triumph in terms of raising the GDR's international profile, and was noted warily in West Germany as evidence of a growing alliance between the GDR and Arab nations. *Der Spiegel* reported in 1968 on the sudden surge in cultural exchange, noting of recent events that "in Cairo the GDR Kapellmeister Gerhart Wiesenhütter kept Egypt's Symphony Orchestra in time. In Leipzig, meanwhile, the Egyptian singer Ratiba El-Hefny warbled German arias."¹⁴³ The article continued with a long list of cultural and sporting collaborations between the GDR and the Middle East, including the appointment of an East German sports doctor to the Egyptian team at the Mexican Olympics, and concluded that "for Egyptians, Iraqis, and Syrians, Germany's capital is now East Berlin."¹⁴⁴ Outward appearances were often deceptive, however, and the public manifestations of cultural solidarity that were drawing the attention of the FRG were not necessarily replicated on the ground. In the case of Wiesenhütter, while the act of his appointment was rightly counted by the GDR as a success, his tenure with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra was anything but. He struggled to negotiate the politics involved with the post, and his one-year contract, which the Egyptians had initially planned to extend for a further two years, was terminated after only seven months.

This episode illustrates the different ways in which success can be measured where international diplomacy is concerned. It also illuminates some of the more problematic aspects of East German attitudes toward the Middle East. The GDR's public commitment to Khrushchev's interventionist international policy and its fluid constructs of social development coexisted

142. See MFAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Irene Gysi, July 25, 1967.

143. "DDR: El-Safara el-Almania," *Der Spiegel*, November 11, 1968, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-45922030.html>: "In Kairo brachte DDR-Kapellmeister Gerhart Wiesenhütter Ägyptens Symphoniker in Takt. In Leipzig trällerte derweil die ägyptische Sängerin Ratiba el-Hefni [*sic*] deutsche Arien." The title of the article ("GDR: German Embassy") refers to the fact that taxi drivers in Damascus, when directed to the "German embassy," were apparently taking passengers to the East German consulate rather than the West German embassy.

144. *Ibid.*: "ist für Ägypter, Iraker und Syrer Deutschlands Hauptstadt heute Ost-Berlin."

with a much more static perception of socialist evolution, one shaped by the legacy of colonialism rather than by Marxist ideology. As Gregory Witkowski argues, East Germans, despite their support for anti-imperial solidarity, “continued to define themselves in a national and racial hierarchy in juxtaposition to the developing world.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, for example, East German officials deemed the Western-orientated Lebanese to stand apart from the other Arab nations in terms of their capacity to appreciate the finer points of Western culture. The Ministry for Foreign affairs counseled in 1963 that “it must be taken into consideration that, with regard to its high cultural standards, Lebanon is not to be compared with the other Arab nations. It is therefore essential to ensure that only top performers and artistic work of the highest standard be sent there.”¹⁴⁶ Conversely, the unofficial GDR consulate general in Syria ascribed the success there of the Erich-Weinert-Ensemble in 1968 to the “Arabic mentality for exhibition, turbulence, color, etc.”¹⁴⁷

Assumptions about what Arab nations might be prepared to accept in terms of Western culture represented the GDR’s first error where Wiesenhütter was concerned. The Egyptians had set their sights high in their search for a conductor. When Magdi Wahba, Samha El-Kholy, and the manager of the orchestra, Rashad Badran, met with Horst Winter to discuss the matter in July 1967, they requested “a very experienced and artistically highly qualified person,” and suggested Herbert Kegel of the RSO Leipzig for the position.¹⁴⁸ Wiesenhütter had a reasonable pedigree, having briefly led both the RSO Leipzig and the Dresdner Philharmonie after the war. His current position as director of the Loh-Orchester, which he had held since 1959, did not, however, match the international profile that the Egyptians had in mind, and he struggled from the outset to exert his authority.¹⁴⁹ His appointment provoked resentment among the Egyptian conductors who had to work under him for considerably less money,¹⁵⁰ and was viewed unfavorably by

145. Witkowski, “Between Fighters and Beggars,” 73. On the wider question of race in the GDR, see Piesche, “Black and German?”

146. MfAA B 3016, Norbert Jaeschke, “Kulturelle Beziehungen im Jahre 1964,” 9: “Es ist zu beachten, daß der Libanon hinsichtlich des hohen Kulturniveaus keineswegs mit den anderen arabischen Ländern zu vergleichen ist. Es ist daher darauf zu achten, daß nach dem Libanon nur Spitzenkräfte und künstlerische Arbeiten mit höchstem Niveau entsandt werden können.”

147. MfAA C 52973, “Bericht über die Ergebnisse und Probleme der kulturellen und wissenschaftlichen Auslandsbeziehungen der DDR zur SAR im Jahre 1968,” December 22, 1968, 7: “der arabischen Mentalität zu Schaubedürfnis, Turbulenz, Farbenpracht usw.” The tendency to refer to an Arabic or oriental “mentality” extended far beyond matters of culture. See, for example, Pence’s discussion of similar remarks made in the context of industrial exhibitions in Cairo in the 1950s: Pence, “Showcasing Cold War Germany,” 82–83.

148. MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Irene Gysi, July 25, 1967, 1: “einen sehr erfahrenen und künstlerisch hochqualifizierten Mann.”

149. See Burchartz, “Wiesenhütter, Gerhart Wilhelm Robert.”

150. See MfAA C 1234/70, “Information zur bevorstehenden Ablösung des Generalmusikdirektors Wiesenhütter,” May 12, 1968, 1–2. Winter reports in this brief (2) that Ahmed Ebeid was paid 110 LE (Egyptian pounds) a month and Youssef El-Sisi only 60 LE a month.

certain factions in the Egyptian Ministry for Culture. Ratiba El-Hefny, reporting to Winter in her capacity as a member of the ministry's music committee, relayed that Wiesenhütter's work was not well regarded there, commenting that "this was not surprising, given that the GDR had sent a conductor who wasn't as good as had been expected."¹⁵¹

Wiesenhütter's musical credentials were not the only problem. In an interview with *Neue Zeit* to mark his departure to Cairo, he dutifully declared his new appointment to be "an expression of solidarity by the socialist countries for the UAR in the construction of its culture."¹⁵² In fact, his motivations were less high-minded. He had come to the attention of the SED as a result of a letter he had sent to SED Politbüro member Paul Verner in July 1967, bemoaning his position with the Loh-Orchester and asking that he be assigned to an elite orchestra that better befitted his talents.¹⁵³ Consequently, as was often true of such postings, he appears to have accepted the job in Cairo purely in the hopes of advancing his career, likely having been promised a more illustrious position in the GDR upon his return. He was not, however, terribly well suited to the role: unable to accept the Egyptians on their own terms, he struggled to deal with the working conditions there. The practical challenges he faced were, it must be said, significant at times. He spoke only German and the interpreter who had been promised by the Egyptian Ministry for Culture failed to materialize. As a result, he was obliged to communicate with the orchestra via the Egyptian conductor Youssef El-Sisi, who had trained in Vienna and, according to Winter, used the opportunity to inject his own musical opinions into Wiesenhütter's commands.¹⁵⁴ The orchestra's library was also seriously understocked, such that Wiesenhütter had to source scores from the GDR in order to ensure a varied program.¹⁵⁵ And the circumstances in which he was forced to lead rehearsals were trying. This was particularly the case once the ballet and opera season began in January 1968 and the orchestra was divided into two ensembles—a chamber orchestra, which fell under Wiesenhütter's remit, and a separate orchestra for the ballet and opera. They rehearsed at the same time in the Cairo Opera House,

Wiesenhütter, by comparison, was paid in the region of 300 LE a month. On Wiesenhütter's salary, see MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Rudolf Greiser to Borowski, Ministry for Foreign Trade, August 21, 1967.

151. MfAA C 1234/70, "Information zur bevorstehenden Ablösung des Generalmusikdirektors Wiesenhütter," 3: "daß das ja nicht verwunderlich sei, da die DDR ja einen nicht so guten Dirigenten, wie erwartet, hergeschickt habe."

152. "Diplomat mit Dirigentenstab: NZ-Interview mit Gerhart Wiesenhütter über seine Berufung nach Kairo," *Neue Zeit*, September 29, 1967, 4: "als Ausdruck solidarischer Hilfe der sozialistischen Länder für die VAR beim Aufbau ihrer Kultur."

153. See BArch DR 1/27073, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Paul Verner, July 5, 1967.

154. See MfAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Irene Gysi, October 25, 1967, 2.

155. See *ibid.*, 3, and BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Kurt Bork, undated but stamped as received by the Ministry for Culture on March 14, 1968, 4.

and Wiesenhütter was assigned a room that was too small to accommodate all thirty-four musicians of his ensemble at once, so that he was forced to rehearse the sections separately.¹⁵⁶

In addition to the practical difficulties, Wiesenhütter struggled to get on with Badran, the orchestra manager, who, he reported, regularly undermined his decisions, changing the content of programs without consulting him and supplying soloists only for the concerts directed by the Egyptian conductors.¹⁵⁷ Badran, who had expressed reservations about Wiesenhütter's appointment from the outset, does seem to have made life difficult for him. The consulate ascribed Badran's behavior to his purported allegiances with the West,¹⁵⁸ a line of argument Wiesenhütter similarly employed in order to explain the negative reception accorded to him in other quarters.¹⁵⁹ Yet Wiesenhütter's low opinion of the Egyptians he was supposed to be assisting in the spirit of solidarity cannot have helped his situation. In a letter outlining his grievances written to Bork in the spring of 1968, he complained, "That's the Egyptians; on the one hand they are so in need of help, on the other so cocky and unjust that they acknowledge well-intentioned help with arrogance and kicks in the face."¹⁶⁰ Those working in the rarified conditions of the consulate, he opined, were oblivious to the difficulties facing experts on the ground in Egypt. "The specialists, who are directly dependent on Egyptians, all complain," he noted, claiming that the situation was worst for those involved in the arts: "My superiors are unstable Egyptians, who through their behavior reveal huge sympathies with Western [i.e., non-Soviet-Bloc] countries. Egyptian musicians, who are always tired, form the core stock on which I am artistically dependent. Two-thirds of my concert audience are Egyptians. There is also the problem that the critics are for sale, and that makes my work particularly difficult."¹⁶¹ In stark contrast to

156. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Kurt Bork, stamped March 14, 1968, 2-3.

157. See *ibid.*, 4-5.

158. See MFAA B 1003/69, letter from Horst Winter to Irene Gysi, October 25, 1967, 3.

159. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Kurt Bork, stamped March 14, 1968, 4.

160. *Ibid.*: "Das sind die Ägypter, auf der einen Seite sind sie so hilfsbedürftig, auf der anderen so anmassend und ungerecht, dass sie ehrlich gemeinte Hilfe mit Überheblichkeit und Fusstritten quittieren." Such perspectives were by no means unique among GDR experts. For similar comments made by experts working elsewhere in Africa, see Unfried, "Friendship and Education," 28-29.

161. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Gerhart Wiesenhütter to Kurt Bork, stamped March 14, 1968, 4: "Aber die Spezialisten, die unmittelbar auf Ägypter angewiesen sind, klagen alle. . . . Meine Vorgesetzten sind labile Ägypter, die in ihrer Haltung grosse Sympathien für die westlichen Länder zeigen. Ägyptische Musiker, die immer müde sind, bilden den Grundstock, auf den ich künstlerisch angewiesen bin. 2/3 meines Konzertpublikums sind Ägypter. Dazu kommt, dass die Kritiker käuflich sind, und das macht meine Arbeit besonders schwer."

the glowing reports of Egyptian audiences attributed to Otmar Suitner in the GDR press following the Deutsche Staatsoper's performances, Wiesenhütter deemed his audiences to be "not in a position to accurately assess performances. The Egyptians are overjoyed if it's really loud, they don't grasp the subtleties."¹⁶²

The chasm that existed between official narratives of solidarity and the perceptions of the people involved in its implementation was not confined to the situation in Egypt. The reception accorded to Ratiba El-Hefny in the GDR exposes particularly clearly the tensions created at home by the SED's foreign policy. El-Hefny was one of the most prominent figures in Egyptian musical life. She was the country's preeminent opera singer, but also served as dean of the Higher Institute for Arabic Music throughout the 1960s and, crucially, had the ear of Tharwat Okasha.¹⁶³ In the late 1960s she was writing a doctoral dissertation on Egyptian folk music at the Humboldt University and was eager to spend more time in Berlin, a request that the unofficial consulate in Cairo recommended it would be prudent to facilitate.¹⁶⁴ To this end, the GDR Ministry for Culture created various opportunities for her in 1968. These included a series of performances in small venues across East Germany, and a concert for her and her husband, the conductor Ahmed Ebeid, with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin.¹⁶⁵ Most notably, the Ministry for Culture persuaded the intendant of the Deutsche Staatsoper, Hans Pischner, to offer El-Hefny a guest performance: on January 12, 1968, she appeared as Gilda in a production of *Rigoletto*.¹⁶⁶

While this strategy was effective in generating international publicity, as witnessed by the *Der Spiegel* article cited above, it drew a cooler response on the domestic front. The GDR's opera critics were noticeably silent on El-Hefny's Staatsoper premiere, no reviews appearing in the usual venues. Extensive feedback was, however, provided by members of the Staatsoper, which Pischner collated and sent to the Ministry for Culture.¹⁶⁷ The most

162. Ibid.: "Das Publikum ist nicht in der Lage, Leistungen richtig zu beurteilen. Die Ägypter sind begeistert, wenn es recht laut zugeht, die Feinheiten erfassen sie nicht."

163. See Metwaly, "Life and Times of an Arab Soprano."

164. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Horst Winter to Kurt Walter, August 20, 1967, 2.

165. See Ahmad 'Abd al-Hamid, "Awwal Masriyya Tughanni fi Ubira Barlin" [First Egyptian woman to sing at the Berlin Opera], *al-Jumhuriyya*, February 7, 1968; "Konzertgäste aus Kairo," *Neue Zeit*, January 14, 1968, 7; and BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, "Akttenotiz zum Aufenthalt des Gastes: Frau Ratiba El Hefny," August 20, 1968.

166. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Irene Gysi to Hans Pischner, May 24, 1967.

167. See BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Hans Pischner to Irene Gysi, February 6, 1968, and accompanying "Anlage: Abschrift der Urteile über das Auftreten der Sängerin Ratiba El-Hefny in der Partie der Gilda in der Oper 'Rigoletto' am 12. Januar 1968 in der Deutschen Staatsoper Berlin."

positive comment described El-Hefny as having a “fine, but not outstanding voice.”¹⁶⁸ Other responses were less charitable. The director Werner Stolze, for example, observed that “Frau El-Hefny must have been very nervous—otherwise I can’t explain such an absence of musicality.”¹⁶⁹ Feedback on her stage presence, or the lack of it, was particularly harsh, attracting comments such as “boring and colorless” and “very pallid. No personality on the stage.”¹⁷⁰ Pischner also forwarded to the ministry a letter from a regular audience member, Ilse Richter, which denounced El-Hefny’s performance as a “fiasco,” complaining that “the singer stood rigidly on the stage like a doll—almost without any external movement, as if indifferent to all events.”¹⁷¹ Although El-Hefny had studied singing in Munich, she had little familiarity with the emphasis on staging in East German opera production, and was likely not equipped to appear at the Staatsoper with minimal preparation, having made herself available for rehearsal only three days prior to the performance.¹⁷² The reflections of Arthur Apelt, the Staatsoper’s general music director, were to the point in this regard: “Not experienced enough for guest performances at the Staatsoper. Should ‘learn to walk’ first in the provinces.”¹⁷³

It was also the case, however, that, for some, El-Hefny represented an undesirable other. Ilse Richter notably described her as a “foreign body” (“Fremdkörper”), a term that had accrued pointed pejorative connotations in twentieth-century German discourse.¹⁷⁴ El-Hefny, Richter complained, was a “foreign body in a perfectly harmonized community—the ensemble.” This, she continued, was something she had never before observed of a guest performer: “on the contrary—I’m thinking especially of the different Soviet singers who have performed Amneris here, of [the German singer] Ruth-Margret Pütz in *Rosenkavalier*, and many others.”¹⁷⁵

168. Ibid., “Anlage,” 1: “Schöne, aber nicht überdurchschnittliche Stimme.”

169. Ibid.: “Frau El Hefny muß sehr nervös gewesen sein—anders kann ich mir soviel Unmusikalität nicht erklären.”

170. Ibid.: “langweilig und farblos”; “Sehr blass. Auf der Bühne keine Persönlichkeit.”

171. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Ilse Richter to Hans Pischner, January 17, 1968: “Die Sängerin stand steif wie ein Puppe—fast ohne jede äußere Regung, wie unbeteiligt an allen Vorgängen—auf der Bühne.”

172. See Margrit Steger, “Bericht über die Proben mit Frau El Hefny, January 15, 1968,” included in BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Hans Pischner to Irene Gysi, February 6, 1968.

173. Ibid., “Anlage,” 2: “Für Gastspiele an der Staatsoper noch nicht erfahren genug. Müsste erst in der Provinz ‘laufen lernen.’”

174. See, for example, Neumann, “Phenomenology of the German People’s Body.”

175. BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 2, letter from Ilse Richter to Hans Pischner, January 17, 1968: “Fremdkörper in einer tadellos aufeinander abgestimmten Gemeinschaft—dem Ensemble”; “im Gegenteil—ich denke da an verschieden sowj. Sängerinnen, die als Amneris hier gastierten, an Ruth-Margret Pütz im ‘Rosenkavalier’ u. viele andere.”

Conclusion

Following the tours of the Deutsche Staatsoper and the Gewandhausorchester in 1969, the GDR's musical program in the Middle East lost its intensity. East German artists continued to perform in the region into the 1970s, and further attempts were made by East German officials to secure concert dates for East German ensembles in Egypt and Lebanon.¹⁷⁶ Yet the last performance by an East German orchestral ensemble in Cairo was that by the Kammerorchester des Berliner Rundfunks in 1970, while the final such performance in Beirut was given by the Bach Orchester of the Gewandhaus in December 1971. The most obvious explanation for this turn of events was the sudden movement on the question of diplomatic recognition. The impasse on this front was breached unexpectedly on April 30, 1969, when Iraq announced its decision to initiate diplomatic relations with the East German state. Cambodia followed suit in May, and over the next few months Sudan, Syria, and Egypt all recognized the GDR. This wave of acceptance signaled the beginning of the end for the Hallstein Doctrine. Unwilling to grant the GDR free rein in the increasing number of countries that were prepared to defy the Doctrine, the FRG began to relent its hardline stance, and in 1972 it abandoned the Doctrine altogether, enabling states across the world to recognize the GDR without the risk of repercussions.¹⁷⁷

With normal diplomatic channels increasingly available, music diplomacy lost its importance, and the escalating costs of sending artists to perform in the Middle East became unpalatable.¹⁷⁸ Other factors also conspired to curtail the GDR's musical activities, chief among them being the sudden death of Nasser in September 1970. Nasser's successor in Egypt, Anwar Sadat, was far less well-disposed toward the Soviet Bloc. He expelled more than 10,000 Soviet military experts from Egypt in 1972,¹⁷⁹ and in 1977 closed numerous Eastern European consulates and cultural centers—including the GDR consulate in Alexandria and the GDR cultural centers in Cairo and Alexandria—in response to Soviet disapproval at his rapprochement with Israel.¹⁸⁰ The breakdown of cultural ties that accompanied the collapse of political relations with the Soviet Bloc reflects the wider shift away from the Western

176. The possibility was explored, for example, of sending the Dresden Staatskapelle to the Baalbeck Festival in 1974 but it came to nothing; see MfAA C 7573, letter from Müller to Hermann Falk, DKA, April 9, 1974.

177. On the West German perspective, see Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 217–19.

178. See, for example, MfAA B 1304/76, "Bemerkungen zum Erfüllungsstand des Arbeitsplanes I/1970 für die Sektion Kultur," June 26, 1970, 3.

179. See Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 469.

180. See Winrow, *Foreign Policy of the GDR*, 102.

ideals of modernity that had dominated the aspirations of Arab nations in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁸¹ Writing of Syria, Shannon explains that the country's defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967 "dispelled the optimism about modernization that characterized the early post-Independence era," and "encouraged calls for a renewal of Arab culture from the 'slumbering' and decadence into which it had fallen—this time because of an over-reliance on Western conceptions of culture and society."¹⁸² In the case of Egypt, El-Shawan notes that "policy makers, producers, musicians and audiences were all affected by the questioning of Western values and influence and the search for a new Egyptian national identity during the 1970s."¹⁸³ Funding for foreign performances dried up and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra temporarily disbanded over the course of the early 1970s.¹⁸⁴ In this climate, there was little scope for the GDR to exert any cultural influence. Reporting in 1974, the GDR embassy in Cairo offered a glum overview of the current state of cultural relations between the two countries and predicted that "it is to be expected that the operating conditions of the collaboration with the Ministry for Culture will deteriorate further."¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the onset of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 put an end to any GDR cultural presence there.

The efficacy of cultural diplomacy is notoriously difficult to assess. Numerous factors contributed to the defeat of the Hallstein Doctrine, and despite the GDR's own foreign policy initiatives, many of the events that culminated in its achieving international diplomatic recognition took place outside its sphere of control. Iraq's unexpected offer of diplomatic relations was in exchange for increased Soviet support,¹⁸⁶ and Nasser appears to have been likewise swayed, as Gray observes, by "Soviet pressure in conjunction with a pending arms sale."¹⁸⁷ It was also the case that the acquisition of diplomatic recognition ultimately involved parting with large amounts of hard currency. The GDR paid over \$84 million to Iraq in exchange for diplomatic relations and \$50 million to Syria.¹⁸⁸ The role that cultural diplomacy played in this process should not, however, be underestimated. The relationships that evolved through music and other forms of cultural exchange initiated by the GDR undoubtedly helped to create conditions that were conducive to political deals being struck. Joseph Nye has observed of soft

181. Chakrabarty observes the death of "the theme of European imperialism" across the developing world during this period: Chakrabarty, "Legacies of Bandung," 58.

182. Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees*, 78.

183. El-Shawan, "Western Music and Its Practitioners," 151.

184. See *ibid.*, 149, 151.

185. MfAA B 1329/76, "Information zu einigen neuen Aspekten der Kulturpolitik der Arabischen Republik Ägypten," February 19, 1974, 3: "Es ist zu erwarten, daß sich die Arbeitsbedingungen in der Zusammenarbeit mit dem Ministerium für Kultur weiter verschlechtern."

186. See Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 284–85.

187. Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, 215.

188. See *ibid.*, 214–15.

power that “[w]hen a country’s culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes.”¹⁸⁹ While this statement is problematic in its assumption that universal values actually exist, it is nevertheless useful for considering how music diplomacy functioned in such a way as to create synergies between the countries at the center of this article. The functions and values that the GDR, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon ascribed to Western art music were often quite distinct. All four countries were united, however, by the fact that their ruling elites esteemed this cultural tradition. It thus served as something of a common space in which the GDR could present itself as a viable partner and develop political allegiances.

Appendix Programs of concerts given in the Middle East by the Dresdner Philharmonie, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, the Deutsche Staatsoper, and the Gewandhausorchester, 1967 and 1969¹⁹⁰

January 1967: Dresdner Philharmonie, Lebanon and Egypt

Heinz Bongartz, conductor; Adele Stolte, soprano; Wolfgang Stephen, trumpet

Beirut, January 6, and Cairo, January 9:

Weber	Overture to <i>Der Freischütz</i>
Haydn	Symphony no. 88 (replaced by Strauss’s <i>Don Juan</i> in Cairo)
Kurz	Concerto for Trumpet and Strings
Dvořák	Symphony no. 8

Cairo, January 8, and Alexandria, January 10:

Strauss	<i>Don Juan</i>
Mozart	“A questo seno deh vieni—Or che il cielo a me ti rende,” K. 374; “Bella mia fiamma—Resta, o cara,” K. 528
Bongartz	<i>Patria o muerte: Fidel Castro und dem kubanischen Volk in aufrichtiger Bewunderung</i>
Brahms	Symphony no. 1

189. Nye, *Soft Power*, 11.

190. The programs for the Dresdner Philharmonie concerts have been compiled from BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 1, “Direktive für das Gastspiel der Dresdner Philharmonie in der VAR und der Republik Libanon vom 6. bis 13. January 1967,” 1, and Härtwig, “Reise der Dresdner Philharmonie.” Details of the concerts given by the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig are provided in MfAA B 1003/69, Kurt Walter, “Bericht über eine Dienstreise in den Libanon,” 2, 4, 10, 11. The Deutsche Staatsoper’s programs can be found in BArch DR 1/18881, vol. 3, Ernst Zielke, “Direktive zur Durchführung des Gastspiels der Kammeroper der Deutschen Staatsoper Berlin vom 1. bis 13. März 1969 in Kairo,” January 31, 1969, 2–3. Details of the concerts performed by the Gewandhausorchester at the Baalbeck Festival have been drawn from the festival program book: *Quatorzième festival international de Baalbeck*, 134–35.

Cairo, January 12:

Beethoven *Egmont* Overture
 Beethoven Symphony no. 2
 Beethoven Symphony no. 5

Encores:

Wagner Overture to *Tannhäuser* (Beirut, January 6)
 Wagner Overture to *Rienzi* (Cairo, January 9)
 Weber Overture to *Oberon* (Cairo, January 12)

August 1967: Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt

Herbert Kegel, conductor; Nejmi Succari, violin (Baalbeck and Damascus); Samson François, piano (Baalbeck); Dieter Zechlin, piano (Cairo)

Baalbeck Festival, August 17, and Damascus, August 20:

Wagner Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
 Brahms Violin Concerto
 Shostakovich Symphony no. 1

Baalbeck Festival, August 19:

Beethoven Overture to *Fidelio*
 Fuleihan *Baalbeck Overture* (premiere)
 Prokofiev Piano Concerto no. 3
 Schumann Symphony no. 4

Cairo, August 22, and Alexandria, August 23:

Wagner Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
 Beethoven Piano Concerto no. 5
 Shostakovich Symphony no. 1

Cairo, August 26:

Beethoven Overture to *Fidelio*
 Beethoven Piano Concerto no. 3
 Beethoven Symphony no. 3 (*Eroica*)

Encore:

Dvořák Two of the *Slavonic Dances* (all except Cairo, August 26)

March 1969: Deutsche Staatsoper and Staatskapelle Berlin, Cairo

Operas:

Mozart *Così fan tutte* (March 3, 4, 6, 7); directed by Erich-Alexander Winds; conducted by Otmar Suitner
 Strauss *Ariadne auf Naxos* (March 10, 12); directed by Erhard Fischer; conducted by Joachim Freyer

Concerts:

1. A Mozart evening (March 5) conducted by Otmar Suitner with Sylvia Geszty (soprano), Peter Schreier (tenor), and Siegfried Vogel (bass)

Mozart	Overture to <i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>
Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Viola, and Orchestra in E-flat Major, K. 364
Mozart	“Schöne Donna, dies genaue Register” (<i>Don Giovanni</i>)
Mozart	“Vedrò mentr’io sospiro” (<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>)
Mozart	“Mia speranza adorata,” K. 416
Mozart	Serenade no. 13 for Strings in G Major, K. 525 (“Eine kleine Nachtmusik”)

2. An evening of J. S. Bach and Hanns Eisler (March 9) conducted by Otmar Suitner with Hans Pischner (harpichord) and Annelies Burmeister (contralto)

Bach	Brandenburg Concerto no. 3
Bach	Harpichord Concerto no. 1 in D Minor, BWV 1052
Eisler	<i>Das Vorbild: Triptychon für Altsolo und Orchester nach Worten von Goethe</i>
Bach	Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, BWV 1043

August 1969: Gewandhausorchester, Lebanon

Kurt Masur, conductor; Mstislav Rostropovich, cello; Sviatoslav Richter, piano

Baalbeck Festival, August 7:

Reinhold	<i>Triptychon für Orchester</i>
Dvořák	Cello Concerto
Schumann	Symphony no. 1

Baalbeck Festival, August 9:

Beethoven	Symphony no. 7
Brahms	Piano Concerto no. 2

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Abstract

Music provided the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with a crucial international platform during the Cold War. Denied diplomatic recognition by most Western nations until the early 1970s, the state depended on artists to negotiate its image abroad and channeled considerable resources to this end. This article explores how the GDR tried to expedite diplomatic relations with Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon in the late 1960s through an intensive program of musical activity, which included attempts to send East German musical "experts" to Cairo and Damascus, and the organization of state-funded tours to the region by high-profile ensembles such as the Dresdner Philharmonie, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, and the Deutsche Staatsoper. Examining variously the politics of cultural transfer that these activities entailed, the economics involved, and the power dynamics that played out in the relations between the GDR and Egypt, in particular, the article illuminates the way music diplomacy functioned between Cold War periphery states. Notably, cultural exchange between the GDR and the Arab nations was shaped as much by discourses of postcolonialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism as it was by any binary opposition of Marxist-Leninism and capitalist democracy.

Keywords: German Democratic Republic, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, music diplomacy, periphery state