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# Introduction: Popular Music

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## and Space in Post-War

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### German History

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#### **Forum: Alternative Musical Geographies: Popular Music and Space in Post-War German History**

TIMOTHY SCOTT BROWN, JEFF HAYTON  
AND JULIA SNEERINGER

Scholars are increasingly turning to rock'n'roll and its many genres as a means of exploring the recent past. What is electrifying about popular music in all its myriad forms is that it becomes a channel for rethinking social relations and affective communities (those held together by emotional ties) in the post-war period. These new identities and unconventional groupings exploded onto national societies, and their emancipatory programmes and inventive scenes drove democratisation. Societal responses to rock'n'roll indicate that popular music and the spaces where it manifested were highly contested, confrontations that enable scholars to reconsider historical narratives from alternative perspectives. Perhaps most importantly, as an expressive genre both driving and recording change, popular music is uniquely positioned to initiate and then document, through its material output, the efforts by individuals to alter everyday life and, as such, is an ideal vehicle for exploring the tremendous transformations that society has undergone in the post-war era.

Nowhere have these issues been clearer than in post-war East and West Germany, and the papers presented here elucidate these complicated themes. Focusing on Beat in the 1960s, Krautrock in the 1970s and Punk in the 1980s, each of the three papers included in this forum interrogates the imbrication of rock'n'roll and space in an attempt to chart alternative histories of post-war Germany. The sites inhabited by and re-imagined through rock'n'roll provided Germans with spaces, tools and strategies with which to challenge dominant political, economic, social and cultural hierarchies. This challenge in turn transformed state and society in profound ways. Both personal and communal, rock'n'roll enables a detailed investigation into those key political and cultural changes that shaped East and West Germany in the post-war era: rebuilding after the Second World War, the legacy of the 1960s and reunification following 1989. As a site of negotiation, rock'n'roll was deeply embedded in the

Department of History, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0045;  
[jeff.hayton@wichita.edu](mailto:jeff.hayton@wichita.edu)

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particular German contexts we seek to illuminate. Moreover, the fact that popular music spread beyond the Iron Curtain makes it possible to integrate two national trajectories not only into a common German history but also into a wider global phenomenon. Whether dancing at a bar on the Reeperbahn, being transported into outer space through musical soundscapes or crossing incognito at Friedrichstraße to smuggle records into the ‘other Germany’ – these ‘alternative musical geographies’ can help us rethink what post-war German history specifically, and modern European history more generally, should look like.

The articles included here were first presented in the panel ‘Alternative Musical Geographies: Rock’n’Roll and Place in Post-war German History’ at the German Studies Association Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado, on 3–6 October 2013. The authors would like to extend thanks to our panel moderator David Imhoof and commentator Neil Gregor, to the Music and Sounds Studies Network of the German Studies Association to which our panel belonged and to the audience for the great questions. The authors would also like to thank Detlef Siegfried for agreeing to write a commentary on our revised papers and *Contemporary European History* for publishing our forum on popular music and space in post-war German history.