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Rock ‘n’ Roll in Germany Through Udo’s Eyes

About the Author

Sasha Krnić is a graduating senior at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Majoring in both Global Studies and Sociology, this essay reflects Krnić’s ability to analyze individual phenomena on a historical and sociological level. With a long-nourished love for rock ‘n’ roll as well as a passion for literature, the subject of this essay falls in line with Krnić’s general interests and curiosity.

Abstract

This paper explores the journey that German rock star Udo Lindenberg’s 1977 journal article has taken since its publication. Through extensive research and analysis, this paper uncovers different citations and uses of the Lindenberg article, analyzing the ways in which it is utilized, what message it is used to convey or support, and how it has been able to remain relevant for various authors over the decades. The paper begins with an introduction to the author in question as well as the source itself, followed by a chronological annotated bibliography that takes the reader through the canon of literature comprised of sources that cite and/or reference Udo Lindenberg’s article.

Source: Udo Lindenberg, “Der Junge, den sie King nannten,” *Der Stern*, no. 36 (1977): 85-88. Reprinted in Götz Eisenberg and Hans-Jürgen Linke, eds., *Fuffziger Jahre [The Fifties]*. Giessen, 1980, p. 235f.

One of Germany’s most famous rock ’n’ roll musicians, Udo Gerhard Lindenberg (b. 1946), was born in Gronau, Germany. Growing up during the 50s, Lindenberg was exposed to a fresh wave of rock ‘n’ roll music, marked by great artists like Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. By the early 60s, Lindenberg was more enmeshed in the music scene, leading to the founding of his first band in 1968: Free Orbit. In 1972 he released his debut German album and continued his presence in the German music scene as well as the film scene, with appearances in numerous movies. As both a drummer and a singer, Lindenberg built a strong reputation for himself through his various bands, albums, and musical innovations. He is most notably known for normalizing German lyrics in rock music, proving it acceptable and showing its potential to be successful worldwide.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the 70s Lindenberg experimented with different mediums; he wrote his first book *Hinter All den Postern*, along with two more published in 1981 and 1989.

As the mid-80s approached, Lindenberg grew more involved in politics. Among other political involvement, he interviewed Willy Brandt, participated in Live Aid concerts, performed a tour in the USSR, and even began correspondence with Erich Honecker. Despite concerts in East Germany being hard to obtain (even canceled by cultural apparatchiks in some cases), Lindenberg managed to get Honecker to allow him to perform in 1983. This performance was seen as a step in the right direction for the two Germanies and was deemed important enough to be reported in world-renowned media outlets such as the New York Times. At this event, Lindenberg expressed his political views by making statements to the crowd such as “[we] have to break down all the borders and divisions between people!”[[2]](#footnote-2) Since the 1990s, Lindenberg has turned toward more mainstream music with a decreased political presence. He continues to tour today, with his last album having been released just 3 years ago in 2016.

In 1977 after the death of Elvis Presley, Lindenberg debuted as a guest author in *Der Stern* magazine – a general-interest magazine founded in 1948 – with a reflective memorial piece about the mark that Elvis left on him and countless other musicians.[[3]](#footnote-3) As an established rock ‘n’ roll musician with an impressive impact on the genre and its followers, Lindenberg’s tribute to Elvis came as no surprise. The piece: “Der Junge, den sie King nannten” is an obituary for Elvis through which Lindenberg thanked Elvis for his influence on him, and reminded the world that Elvis not only left an impact on rock ‘n’ roll music, but on society itself and the dynamic between parents and children during this time of generational transition and clash. From his initial exposure to rock ‘n’ roll music, Lindenberg was shaped by Elvis, paving the way for the integration of rock ‘n’ roll music into German life.

Since its original publication, the piece was republished in *Fuffziger Jahre (The Fifties)* in 1980, edited by Götz Eisenberg and Hans-Jürgen Linke, and has been cited in numerous books, magazines and journals. The GHDI source is extracted from this book, but the original source I was only able to track down after researching other texts that cited the piece. The only source that references the original publication in *Der Stern* is a book on musical analysis by Werner Faulstich: *Rock, Pop, Beat, Folk: Grundlagen der Textmusik-Analyse* (1978). Through the references in each source, I was able to find more texts that cited Lindenberg, and this is how I developed a comprehensive group of literature to engage with and explore. My research reflects the drastic impact Udo Lindenberg has had in shaping the German rock ‘n’ roll scene, highlighting how he is seen as a fundamental character in the development and establishment of the genre within Germany.

**Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order**

Spiegel Titel. “Heimweh nach den falschen Fünfzigern,” *Der Spiegel* 14 (1978): 90-108. <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40616862.html>

Printed in early 1978, this article discusses the ways in which the 50s made a comeback in popular culture because of people’s nostalgia and realization of the decade’s fashionable trends and styles. The article, found in one of West Germany’s most popular and long-running magazines *Der Spiegel*, covers a range of topics about the 50s – from artwork and literature, to films, festivals and music. Notably, the author chooses to discuss the generational gap that emerged during this time, and the manner in which children and teenagers began to defy their parents and behave in a more rebellious nature than ever before. In order to support this, the author draws on the part in Lindenberg’s 1977 article where he claims that Elvis gave kids something that was *theirs*; parents were seen as too old for rock ‘n’ roll, and the music genre gave kids an outlet that they saw as solely belonging to them. As opposed to the other sources, which focus on Lindenberg’s musical impact and use his source to track progress and change in musical taste over time, this article uses the source to support claims of generational differences, shifts in mentality over the decades, and the reason why the 50s stood out so prominently in people’s memories.

Faulstich, Werner. *Rock, Pop, Beat, Folk: Grundlagen der Textmusik-Analyse*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1978.

Serving as a “how-to” for musical text, lyrics, and analysis, Werner’s book explores many different aspects of music, providing a basic guide for curious musicians. This is the only source that directly cites the original Lindenberg text as found in *Der Stern* magazine. Lindenberg is referenced in the introduction of the book, where Werner refers to him in a negative, accusatory tone. He suggests that although there were many writings about Elvis after his death in August 1977 that highlighted his lasting impact on the music industry, Lindenberg’s piece was very subjective and his comparison of himself to Presley in terms of ability and career success underscored his death. Unlike the other sources, this book uses Lindenberg in a negative way, in order to emphasize the need to focus on the music itself and not get lost in media outlets.

Spieß, Ulrich. *Rockbands: Ein Modell der künstlerischen Kooperation in Kleingruppen*. Norderstedt: Ulrich Spieß Verlag, 2000.

As an analysis of the history and sociology of rock music, this book stresses the importance of cooperation and interaction in the rock ‘n’ roll genre. In order to supplement the content, a glimpse into the history of the dynamic origins of the rock and pop scene is provided, looking specifically at the impacts and influences that shaped the musical genre over time. Spieß’s use of Lindenberg’s ‘Obituary for Elvis’ serves to provide background information for the kind of impact that this music had on the origins of rock music in Germany. The book stresses the initial encounters that famous musicians such as Lindenberg had with the phenomenon of rock music and how that carried over into their interpretations of the genre through their own music. Spieß emphasizes that these kinds of reactions resonated with Lindenberg’s entire generation; this mirrors Depta’s (mentioned below) interpretation of the source in that it uses Lindenberg’s experience as a symbol for an entire generation, presenting his experience as one that is representative of all youth during this time period.

Mattig, Ruprecht. *Rock und Pop als Ritual: Über das Erwachsenwerden in der Mediengesellschaft*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009.

Through an incorporation of empiricism with theory, this book examines the mismatch between young music fans and older generations that do not seem to understand their fascination with particular types of music. Ruprecht’s goal is to highlight how important popular music is to the transition from child to adult, and how evident it is that musical fascination is a strong factor in helping to manage this complex transition period. Relying on Lindenberg’s text, the book uses his anecdote to reflect the importance Elvis had on Lindenberg’s life, and how much of a lasting impact he left. Much like Klaus Depta’s book (mentioned below) and the *Der Spiegel* article (mentioned above), Mattig’s book stresses Lindenberg’s reference to generational conflict and how rock ‘n’ roll played a pivotal role in helping shape identity and independence for many young people during the 50s.

Rumpf, Wolfgang. “Dramaturgien der Unsterblichkeit: Wie Medien und Unterhaltungsindustrie Elvis Presley inszenier(t)en.” *Arbeitskreis Studium Populärer Musik – Samples* (November 2009): 1-10. <http://aspm.ni.lo-net2.de/samples-archiv/Samples8/rumpf.pdf>.

Rumpf’s piece discusses how media and the entertainment industry portray Elvis Presley posthumously. The beginning of the piece reflects on the period immediately following Elvis’s death, in which tributes to him and rock ‘n’ roll/pop music were made across different mediums such as the radio and television, as well as by youth, especially in the United States. Along with these tributes were those of famous musicians, who paid homage to Elvis and his legacy; this is where Lindenberg’s piece is incorporated, in order to support Rumpf’s claim that there was an overwhelming Elvis-related presence in media after his death. Lindenberg’s ‘Obituary for Elvis’ emphasizes the King of Pop’s tremendous influence on people worldwide, and particularly the response his death sparked for many: some sort of public tribute leading to a media presence.

Thom, Nico. "Votan Wahnwitz Hinterm Horizont: Udo Lindenberg und das Musiktheater." *Lied und populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture* 58 (2013): 157-71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43784651.

As part of a periodical that focuses on song research and the development of popular music culture, Nico Thom discusses the development of Udo Lindenberg’s career through a musical-theatre lens in his journal article. He stresses the influences on Lindenberg while building his fame – both from German artists and American ones as well. Thom cites Lindenberg’s “Nachruf auf Elvis” in order to stress the difference in impact that American artists had in shaping his love for rock ‘n’ roll – namely Elvis Presley and his musical-theatre approach to performing. This impact is reflected in the way that Lindenberg describes Elvis’s hip movements and how this made him realize that there are many important things to consider about rock ‘n’ roll artists “aside from their music.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Thom interprets this source as personal insight into the motivation and inspiration of Udo Lindenberg, which sparked his long, successful, unique musical career.

Depta, Klaus. *Rock- und Popmusik als Chance: Impulse für die praktische Theologie*. Vechta: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2016.

Klaus Depta analyzes the connections between rock and pop music and the Catholic Church. His book serves to show the ways in which these two genres mitigate the discrepancy between the Catholic Church itself and Catholics of different lifestyles. Depta invokes Lindenberg’s “Nachruf auf Elvis” in order to highlight the increase in independence and power that youth had during the 50s, claiming that this helped spark the development of the rock ‘n’ roll boom. This book uses Lindenberg’s source in a similar manner to the 1978 *Der Spiegel* article in that they both use it as supporting evidence to help back up a claim about the 50s and the impact this genre of music had on the time. The focus is not so much on Lindenberg himself nor his musical contributions, but rather his experience of a certain time period in order to generalize it to youth of the 50s as a whole.

1. Frank Eisenhuth, “Artist Biography by Frank Eisenhuth” (AllMusic), <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/udo-lindenberg-mn0000502341/biography>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. James M. Markham, “West German Star Sings in the East,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Udo Lindenberg, “Der Junge, den sie King nannten,” *Der Stern*, no. 36 (1977): 85-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Udo Lindenberg. “Rock ‘n’ Roll and German Teenagers (Retrospective Account, 1980): An Obituary for Elvis”. Translated by Allison Brown. German History in Documents and Images. Accessed 20 April 2019. <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=833&language=english> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)