

MID-ATLANTIC GERMAN HISTORY SEMINAR
“THE GOLDEN HUNGER YEARS”:
MUSIC AND SUPERPOWER RIVALRY IN OCCUPIED BERLIN

On Saturday, April 20, 2002, members of the Mid-Atlantic German History Seminar met for a luncheon and discussion which centered on a paper submitted by Elizabeth Janik: “‘The Golden Hunger Years:’ Music and Superpower Rivalry in Occupied Berlin.” Janik, currently a post-doctoral Teaching Fellow at George Mason University, will be joining the history faculty at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, in the fall of 2002. She recently completed her Ph.D. under the supervision of Professor Roger Chickering, Georgetown University. Her paper was part of her larger study, now under revision for eventual publication.

In her paper, Janik described and analyzed American and Soviet arts policies, focusing on music, an area of culture often neglected in postwar and occupation historical accounts. She concentrated on Berlin and especially the role of American and Soviet military occupiers in fostering competing visions of culture. As Janik suggested: “In competition with each other and seeking the loyalties of their German charges, the Allies encouraged Berlin to become a lively—and heavily subsidized—city of the arts.” She concluded by noting that by the end of the occupation period, both east and west Berlin had symphony orchestras, radio stations, and universities, all of which would serve as institutional carriers of competing political, social, and cultural visions during the Cold War.

A lively discussion followed, which was made especially interesting and informative since a number of participants (including Robert Wolfe and Charles Herber) had been U.S. Army soldiers or OMGUS officers in Germany during these postwar years. Henry Friedlander also vividly described the post-World War II scene as he recalled it. These insightful observations about Berlin’s cultural climate were very illuminating.

In 1969, Vernon Lidtke (Johns Hopkins University) conceived of the idea of an informal historians’ group meeting occasionally to present work-in-progress. He along with William Fletcher (University of Delaware) and other Washington, DC-Baltimore area professors first met in the spring of 1971 at Johns Hopkins University. James Harris (University of Maryland) presented the first paper. Thus, the Mid-Atlantic German History Seminar was founded over thirty years ago to promote scholarship in German history. An informal association of academics, government employees with a background in German history, and museum officials, the group has been meeting regularly two times annually, in the

fall and in the spring. Participants offer to present a work-in-progress, such as a book chapter or article, and these are submitted in advance of the luncheon meeting. Over seventy individuals are on the Mid-Atlantic German History Seminar's mailing list. For many years, Professor Thomas Helde (Georgetown University) coordinated the effort, followed by James Harris (University of Maryland). Currently Marion Deshmukh (George Mason University) is the group's coordinator.

With the spring 2002 meeting, a new relationship begins with the German Historical Institute. Dr. Christof Mauch, the GHI's director, graciously offered to host the annual spring meeting of the Seminar. This will provide a central and convenient location. Normally, the various area universities of its participants host the Seminar meetings. In the past, the meetings were held at virtually all the Washington, DC universities (Catholic, George Washington, Georgetown, American, University of Maryland, George Mason University). But meetings have also been held at Prince Georges Community College, the Holocaust Museum, Towson University, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Delaware. Seminar participants come from universities as far as Hofstra, Rutgers, Virginia Commonwealth, and the University of Richmond. Thus the new relationship between the Mid-Atlantic Seminar and the German Historical Institute will be a welcome partnership. For more information about the Seminar, please contact Marion Deshmukh (Department of History & Art History, George Mason University) at (703) 993-2149 or via e-mail at mdeshmuk@gmu.edu.

Marion Deshmukh