

Czechoslovak Pop Music in Young People's Lifestyle Magazines in the "Anti-Decade", 1985–1995¹



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ABSTRACT:

This article analyses the coverage of pop music in two magazines for older children and young adults during the transition from late socialism to post-socialism in Czechoslovakia or what has been called the "anti-decade" of 1985–1995. By revisiting *Pionýr*, a magazine for adolescents aged 12 to 15 and *Mladý svět*, a magazine for young adults aged 15 to 30, I uncover the gradual transformation of Czechoslovak pop music from a genre for *Mladý svět*'s broad young audience to one aimed specifically at teenagers after 1989. These teens were the target readers of *Pionýr* and its post-socialist successors, *Filip* and *Filip pro-náctileté* (*Filip* for Teenagers). Pop music was connected with social capital and incorporated into the lifestyles of *Mladý svět*'s readers. However, it gradually disappeared from the pages of the magazine and became increasingly visible in *Pionýr* and its post-socialist counterparts. This study argues that this connection of pop music with teen lifestyles and values had profound social impacts between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s.

KEYWORDS

Czechoslovak pop music; late socialism; post-socialism; generation magazines; transformation; *Mladý svět* (Young World magazine); *Pionýr* (Pioneer magazine)

"Czechoslovak pop music is of marginal cultural interest, and thus, not very exciting for *Mladý svět*'s current readers. That doesn't mean that we plan to avoid pop music or ignore it altogether but we don't need to keep covering it in a way that's lost meaning. In the 20th century, 30 years is a very long time in which continents have changed and things more momentous than one reader poll in one little country have become insignificant."² In January 1992, *Mladý svět* editor Josef Chuchma used these words to farewell the magazine's Zlatý slavík (Golden Nightingale) poll, which was then in its 30th year. Since 1962, this poll had named the most successful female and male singers and bands in Czechoslovakia. Chuchma was clear that after the transformations of the Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovak pop music would be

1 This study draws on research funded by Czech Science Foundation as part of project GA ČR P410/20-24091S, Brave New World: Youth, Music and Class in the Czech Post-socialist Era.

2 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXIII, No. 4, 1992, p. 8.



disappearing from the media scene at least in the form it had been known to date. It was no longer the progressive force that had boosted the readership and exclusive content of *Mladý svět*, which organised the contest. For the editors, this pop music legacy had become a burden. This can be seen from Zlatý slavík's shrinking participant numbers. In the 28th poll in 1989, more than 90,643 readers voted.³ In contrast, in 1992, the year's ten most successful performers received fewer than 20,000 votes between them.⁴

The decline of public interest in Czechoslovak popular music in the first years after the revolution is hardly a new discovery. Several studies and documentaries about early post-socialist Czech (oslovak) pop music have reached similar conclusions.⁵ This makes it all the more striking that in 1996, the Zlatý slavík — now known as Český slavík (Czech Nightingale) — awards resumed with great success at *Mladý svět*, which was now only a co-organiser. Among the winners were artists similar to those who had been celebrated in the last years of Zlatý slavík. Although the competition only focused on the Czech scene, the very first year saw the record participation of 137,000 voters.⁶

The aim of this study is to map the changing interest in Czech pop music during what Pavel Vančát has called the “anti-decade” of 1985–1995. Vančát described this epoch in the context of changes to visual culture that were explored in an exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague from 2019 to 2020.⁷ The current work arises from my research with selected print periodicals that used texts and visual content to incorporate music into readers' lives. In particular, I have focused on *Pionýr* and *Mladý svět*, two of the best-selling magazines for older children and young adults in the Czech part of the former Czechoslovakia. Within these publications, I identify pop music-related articles, short commentaries and visual materials and then subject these to content analysis. I examined copies of *Pionýr* and its early post-socialist successors, *Filip* and *Filip pro -náctileté* in the library of the journals department at the Czech National Museum in Prague.⁸ *Mladý svět* is available online through the Czech National Digital Library.⁹

My primary criterion for selecting these magazines was that they were cultural products with a broad focus, which can be described as lifestyle or influencing their readers' lived experience. Pop music belonged to a set of interests that shaped read-

3 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXI, No. 4, 1990, p. 18.

4 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXIII, No. 4, 1992, p. 8.

5 C. M. ELAVSKY, “Musically mapped: Czech popular music as a second ‘world sound’”, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2011, pp. 3–24; *Pop Story* 4/4, 2016, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/11066934013-popstory/215542151320004/>, accessed 5.1.2021.

6 www.ceskyslavik.cz, accessed 15.1.2021.

7 For more details, see <https://www.upm.cz/obrazy-koncu-dejin-ceska-vizualni-kultura-1985-1995/>, accessed 1.3.2021.

8 For more information about the journals department of the National Museum library, see: <https://www.nm.cz/en/national-museum-library/library-service-department/national-museum-library-study-room-of-the-journal-department>, accessed 1.3.2021.

9 *Mladý svět* can be accessed virtually via <https://ndk.cz/periodical/uuid:9a032970-1c99-11e4-a8ab-001018b5eb5c>, accessed 1.3.2021.

ers' lifestyles. Given the popularity and broad coverage of social issues in these magazines, they may be seen as representations of the world of young people of the time. In the context of studies of everyday life, these were successful attempts to enrich the lives of part of a generationally defined group. While scholars like Alexej Yurchak have focused their research on the entire "last Soviet generation" of (mainly) young people who were Soviet citizens from the 1950s to the 1970s,¹⁰ my work addresses a more limited young cohort. These individuals lived in the Czech part of the former Czechoslovakia between 1985 and 1995 and read the most popular magazines aimed at their generation.

CZECHOSLOVAK POP MUSIC DURING THE "ANTI-DECADE"

As concerns my definition of popular music, this study does not consider or analyse individual genres. Rather, I am interested in what is generally called mainstream music, which describes a large number of currently popular music genres and songs and their performers. I have focused on both the presentation of this music and the extent of its magazine coverage. This discussion, thus, uses the established term "pop music", which can be defined as music (of any kind) that is submitted deliberately and as intensively as possible to mass distribution systems and mass media coverage.¹¹

In terms of its time frame, this research covers visible trends between 1985 and 1995. From a political standpoint, the year 1985 marked the beginning of the end of the government's hard-line normalisation measures. This may be attributed to the acceptance in socialist Czechoslovakia of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the USSR, which was seen as a path to reconstruction. This brewing change reached a clear boiling point in the 1989 revolution and continued until the mid-1990s. The "anti-decade" exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts characterised the post-revolutionary period in Czechoslovakia as not only a new beginning but an era in which networks and systems established in the 1980s were adapted and transformed. This methodology is more conducive to revealing the precursors, causes and consequences of what happened at the end of 1989.¹² The exhibition's starting place was the expansion and support of new media technologies and formats (video, video clips) by the Czechoslovak socialist state, and it ended with the debut of the first commercial TV station in the Czech Republic in 1994 and

10 A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 31.

11 For a simple definition of pop music, see, for example, B. Lamb, *What is Pop Music?*, 2018 — <https://www.liveabout.com/what-is-pop-music-3246980>, accessed 1.3.2021; for more detail, see: J. SHEPPERD — D. HORN — D. LAING — P. OLIVIER — P. WICKE, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 1. Media, Industry, Society*, Continuum, London — New York, 2003. For the Czech context including pop music during the normalisation period, see P. BÍLEK, 'K práci i oddechu: Znakový systém normalizační pop music', in: P. BÍLEK-K. Činát, *Tesilová kavalérie*, Praha 2011 p. 58, pp. 57–74.

12 P. VANČÁT (ed.), *Obrazy konců dějin 85–95*, Big Boss-Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, 2020, unpg.





the adapting of public spaces to Western visual design. In contrast, my research examines selected socialist magazines and their post-revolutionary successors, and I focus on mass-distributed pop music. The story of Czech teen magazines often ends with their demise and replacement by new titles, whether in the form of national versions of global publications or home-grown ones with strong financial backing. *Mladý svět's* fortunes also shifted and by 1995 it had lost both its popularity and social relevance.

LIFESTYLE MAGAZINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE ANTI-DECADE

Lifestyle is defined as behaviour derived from a set of attitudes, norms and shared values, and it is usually reflected in consumption patterns. Today it is, thus, profoundly influenced by various mass media, whose importance change over time.¹³ In Czechoslovakia in the 1980s, the medium that most dramatically shaped attitudes was television.¹⁴ However, this coverage was not only censored but also limited in variety due to the existence of only two TV stations. Print periodicals therefore played a key role. Under state socialism, these magazines reflected a wide range of hobbies and activities. And indeed by the end of the socialist period, the children's periodicals market included more diverse formats than it had at any point in history.¹⁵ While Czechoslovak state television broadcast only a few music programmes and these aired monthly in the 1980s, magazines offered more extensive coverage that included broader lifestyle issues. In principle, the Czechoslovak print media market was subject to state control. Supervision was conducted by the censorship department of the Federal Office for the Press and Information (FÚTI), which also examined and assessed the press. However, in the late 1980s, these press restrictions eased in Czechoslovakia. This was reflected in the growing demand for magazines compared to the situation in the early 1980s. Shopkeepers often reserved the most popular issues for favoured customers because of paper shortages.¹⁶

During the first phase of the post-1989 reforms, magazines broke free from state ownership. Up to the end of the anti-decade, foreign investors predominated and the neoliberal market affected media content. After 1990, publications were no longer legally required to promote citizens' socialist consciousness. Censorship was abolished and the FÚTI dissolved.¹⁷ In magazines of this era, existing editorial teams often had the main say in the early post-revolutionary years. However, these teams also lacked

13 For a classic definition, see B. D. ZABLOCKI — R. M. KANTER, "The Differentiation of Life-Styles", in: *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 2, 1976, pp. 269–298.

14 For an overview, see P. BREN, *The Greengrocer and His TV. The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* Cornell University Press, 2010.

15 Š. ŠVEC, *Dějiny českojazyčných časopisů pro děti v letech 1850–1989*, PhD. Thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, p. 180.

16 P. BEDNAŘÍK — J. JIRÁK — B. KÖPPLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých médií: od počátku do současnosti*, Grada publishing, Prague, 2010, p. 341.

17 P. BEDNAŘÍK — J. JIRÁK — B. KÖPPLOVÁ, *Dějiny českých médií: od počátku do současnosti. 2., upravené a doplněné vydání*, Grada publishing, Prague, 2019, pp. 396–408.

management experience and the funds required for essential upgrades to content management systems, print technology and distribution networks.¹⁸

Against this background, my research focuses on two of the period's most popular magazines that together reached a broad cross-section of younger people: this group began with pupils in approximately the second half of primary school and extended to young adults aged 30. The monthly *Pionýr* was aimed mainly at children in the higher grades of primary school. Under state socialism, it was produced by the Pioneer Organization of the Socialist Youth Union (SSM) and published by Mladá fronta publishing house; it was meant to provide a forum for young Pioneers, members of the state-sponsored organisation for children under the age of 15. In the 1980s, *Pionýr's* monthly print run reached 130,000 copies.¹⁹ In February 1990, not long after the post-socialist transition, *Pionýr* was renamed *Filip* based on an acronym for its main themes: film, literature, songs (in Czech: **f**ilm, **l**iteratura, **p**ísničky). After a split in the editorial department, the project continued after April 1991 with two competing magazines. The first, *Filip* was published by the original Mladá fronta publishing house; the second, *Filip -pro náctileté* (*Filip for Teenagers*) was produced by Prostor, a private publisher. Between 1991 and 1993, *Filip -pro náctileté* was one of the most widely read periodicals for young people. Its target audience was no longer Pioneers but, as its name implies, teenagers in general. The final issue appeared in mid-1994 when the magazine had already been ousted from the market by the local versions of multinational publications like *Bravo* and *Popcorn*, which benefited from their access to global expertise and international sources.

In what follows, I contrast the music-related content of *Pionýr* and its successors with that of *Mladý svět*. The latter weekly had been produced since 1959 by the official state-run organisation for Czechoslovak young people aged 15 to 30 (until 1968, this was the Czechoslovak Youth Union while from 1970, it was the Socialist Youth Union). In the early 1990s, the magazine was taken over by some of its editorial team through their company Print média. In 2003, it was bought by FTV Premiéra media group, and it was wound up in 2005. From the very beginning, music was a staple of *Mladý svět* but it also covered and contributed to lively debates on many current social issues. The magazine continued to appear in the final years of state socialism when it purportedly reached up to half a million readers.²⁰ Pop music's appeal was confirmed in the magazine and throughout Czechoslovak society by the success of *Zlatý slavík*, which was the most widely followed musical popularity contest until its cancellation in 1991. Under state socialism, *Mladý svět* focused mainly on the concerns of young people including family, school, work, relationships and social issues like drug addiction and crime. In addition, there was reports on tramping culture, military service and, last but not least, music, which was a special interest of several editors.²¹ At a glance, then, as I will argue, after the 1989 revolution, *Mladý svět* was well-placed

18 Idem, p. 407.

19 Š. ŠVEC, *Česky psané časopisy pro děti (1850–1989)*, Karolinum-Národní muzeum, Prague 2014, pp. 453–456.

20 A. KALOUSKOVÁ, *Postavení týdeníku Mladý svět v Československu v 70. a 80. letech*, MA thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague 2009, p. 70.

21 Idem.





to become the most popular weekly in the emerging Czech Republic. Around 1991 or 1992, it was, however, overtaken by new weeklies such as *Respekt* and *Reflex*, which would set the terms of public debates in the 1990s.²²

FROM PIONEER SONGS TO CELEBRITY CULTURE

In the mid-1980s, *Pionýr* magazine was a traditional venue for leading experts on children and authors of works for young readers.²³ The magazine's advisory board included writers, artists and teachers but no musicians, and this also influenced its content. The annual publication schedule followed the school year. The first issue appeared in September and the last one coincided with the summer holidays in August. Many of the magazine's sections focused on issues for Pioneer organisation members. This included club events but there were also references to party politics, the anniversary of the regime and the activities of peers in other Eastern bloc states. Readers communicated with the editors through polls that asked questions about children's lives as well as the "Confession" (*Zpovědnice*) section where a psychologist answered their letters; sex-related questions were noticeably absent. Even in these years, the magazine highlighted audio-visual material (TV shows and films) for children, and reports and scripts for local children's TV series and films were often divided across consecutive issues.²⁴

Music-related content made up just 5-to-10 percent of the magazine's content in the school years between 1984 and 1986. These estimates include not only pop music content but also more general music coverage.²⁵ Among the latter was a series from 1985 to 1986 about children and adults who played various instruments. At the same time, pop music performers featured regularly in the "Písničky s autogramem" (Autographed Songs) section. The focus was usually on a currently active artist and their recent work. The section always included several questions for the interviewee. Their autographed photo and a piece of music with lyrics appeared in the one-page feature. Between 1985 and 1990, about 40 singers were profiled in this way. Only a few of the most popular artists received repeat profiles. By 1989, attention was turning increasingly to emerging young performers and genres like disco and rock.²⁶

Another permanent section highlighted the new releases of the two official record labels in the Czech Socialist Republic: Supraphon and Panton.²⁷ The former's LPs were

22 <https://www.reflex.cz/clanek/causy/73836/mlady-svet.html>, visited 7.2.2021.

23 Until 1981, *Pionýr*'s editor-in-chief was the writer Vojtěch Steklač. From 1981 to 1991, it was Vladimír Klevis, a public commentator and prose writer. Both of them published short stories for teens.

24 In 1983 the series *Létající Čestmír* (Flying Čestmír) ran in the magazine. *Lucie postrach ulice* (Lucie, Menace of the Street) also featured in 1983. Other series included *Rumburak* (1984) and *Circus Humberto* (1988).

25 Each magazine issue had 40 pages.

26 Around this time, the section covered new bands like Precendens, Team and Panika, for example; see *Pionýr*, vol. XXXIV, No. 11, July 1988, pp. 17–18.

27 Between 1970 and 1989, there were three music labels in Czechoslovakia. In the Czech part of the country, Panton specialised in authorised music in more alternative genres.



listed under the headline “Supraphonská škola gramodesková” (Supraphon School of Records) while those of the latter appeared under “Haló, tady Panton” (Hello, this is Panton). This section was maintained in the magazine for the entire period of my survey. Both labels announced their new releases but the contributions of Supraphon, the larger company predominated. In 1988, for example, Supraphon’s column ran in half the issues and gave details about its latest Czech pop releases including music from both established and relatively new young artists. At the same time, it noted new recordings and reissues of classical music, children’s audiobooks²⁸ and well-known theatre performances.²⁹

Up to the end of the 1986 school year, the other music content in the magazine was minimal. If music was mentioned, this was generally confined to a few paragraphs in the “Pionýrská klubovna” (Pioneer Club) section about a new album or the results of the Zlatý slavík poll. In addition, a two-page section on official Czechoslovak music festivals highlighted events like Bratislavská Lyra,³⁰ Prague’s Intertalent, folk Porta and the Political Songs Festival in Sokolov.³¹ This section alluded occasionally to international performers. The first report on Anglophone music appeared in the May 1988 issue on the anniversary of the release of the first Beatles LP.³² In the “Listárna” (Correspondence) section of the next issue, the editors responded to a poll about the music performers that readers most wanted to read about: “while some confused original and unique artists with the latest fads, most of the requests referred to the Anglo-American and also French, German and Italian music scenes.” The next page contained a short report on the band Depeche Mode’s Prague concert.³³ In August 1988, a new section “Hvězdy na přání” (Stars by Request) appeared and offered introductions to the international musicians named most often in readers’ request letters.³⁴

By the time of the 1988/89 issues, reports on international stars had become a regular feature of the magazine. At first, these references were somewhat tentative and based on the artists’ connection with other topics. This was the case, for example, with the English singer Sting, who participated in the Budapest Festival on the 40th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. His songs, it was reported, “were not about Hawaiian holidays but revolution and not about which girl to take to the disco but about Chilean widows who longed to dance on their husbands’ murderers’

Supraphon led the market in classical music recordings, spoken word performances and Czech pop releases. The Opus label operated in Slovakia.

- 28 These children’s titles included František Nepil’s *Tělověda pro dorostence*, Markéta Zinnerová’s *Indiáni z Větrova* and Rudolf Kučera’s *Pestrý život jedné kočky*; see *PIONÝR*, vol. XXXIV, No. 7, p. 47.
- 29 One such theatrical recording was the double LP *To bylo Osvobozené divadlo*; see *PIONÝR*, vol. XXXVI, p. 47.
- 30 *Pionýr*, vol. XXXII, No. 12, p. 31.
- 31 *Idem*, vol. XXXIII, No. 2, pp. 30–31. No. 5, pp. 34–35, No. 9, pp. 40–41.
- 32 *Pionýr*, vol. XXXV, No. 8, p. 31.
- 33 *Idem*, vol. XXXV, No. 10, June 1988, pp. 28–31.
- 34 The debut instalment featured short reports about Whitney Houston, the Pet Shop Boys, Madonna, George Michael and Sandra along with colour photos; see *Pionýr*, vol. XXXV, No. 12, August 1988, pp. 22–23.



graves; he sang about the war in Vietnam, about war in general.”³⁵ These descriptions gradually disappeared, however, and were replaced with more superficial reports on performers’ lives. A piece about the Irish singer Enya, for example, highlighted her convent school education while later articles covered the love affairs of Kylie Minogue and claims that the singer Falco’s mother had expected him to be born a girl.

Along with “Hvězdy na přání”, the magazine launched “Populární hudba” (Popular Music), a more educational and polished series in the year before the revolution. This section covered developments in world pop music and was written by renowned critic Petr Dorůžka.³⁶ The series culminated with a piece in the end-of-year August 1989 issue that described the new punk wave and included local punk bands whose releases had not been state-approved.³⁷ In the 1989/90 issues, the section changed its name to “Pop rock folk pro pokročilé” (Advanced Pop Rock Folk), and Dorůžka gave readers definitions of different genres and scenes. Meanwhile pop music became more prominent elsewhere in the magazine with reports on the Prague concerts of international stars like Stevie Wonder and reviews of the performances of Ray Charles and Sandra at the Intertalent festival in October 1989.³⁸

In 1989, larger and more colourful photographs began to appear in the magazine. The interest in music also grew with the appointment of a new advisory board member, Bára Basiková, a popular young singer from the rock band Precedens. The “Hvězda s autogramem” section covered her band, while the new 1989/90 school year issue included a two-page poster of Basiková with a calendar of the musical “ABCs”. Each subsequent issue of the magazine would include at least one full-page colour poster of a popular star. By the end of the year, music accounted for 15 percent of the magazine’s content. In the last few issues before the revolution, a new format was established in the most important Czech teen magazine: it emphasised visual over written content and made clear that the image was the main message. Colour posters and sought-after celebrity images were at least as significant as any text. More changes followed with the 1990 issues of the publication that was now no longer known as *Pionýr* but *Filip*. The switch to an attention-grabbing cover came shortly after the revolution; the one for the June 1990 issue flagged the magazine’s content: “Michael Jackson, Bros, Jason Donovan, Milli Vanilli, Madonna, in the flesh!”³⁹ Some two months later, the cover of *Filip* featured its first ever photo of an international celebrity, the movie star Tom Cruise. It was accompanied by the headline “*Filip se ptá*” (*Filip asks*): “Who are you thinking about?”⁴⁰

35 *Pionýr*, vol. XXXVI, No. 3, November 1988, p. 34.

36 Dorůžka’s father was also the author of the first episode of the series *Lubomír Dorůžka*. Both father and son were prominent music critics in Czechoslovakia; see https://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictionary&task=record.record_detail&id=8742

37 “Co doporučit k poslechu z domácí tvorby? V každém případě LP desky Výběru, koncerty skupiny Už jsme doma, Hrdinové nové fronty, Zóny A a řady dalších!” In: *PIONÝR*, vol. XXXVI, No. 11, July 1988, p. 33.

38 *Pionýr*, vol. XXXVI, No. 5, January 1990, pp. 23–26.

39 *Pionýr*, vol. XXXVII, June 1990, p. 1.

40 *Pionýr*, vol. XXXVII, August 1990, p. 1.



Filip gave more space to pop music and also film in its 1990/1991 issues. By that time, the magazine has made a complete shift to provocative covers with images of local and international stars. The editors were now also communicating with readers through a poll of the top 20 music and movie stars called “Starparáda Filipa” (Filip’s Star Charts). Generated from votes mailed in by readers, these charts of the most popular stars evolved from month to month. By the second half of 1990, the magazine had, thus, effectively established its own Zlatý slavík-type poll that also incorporated votes for international artists. These alternative charts by *Filip pro -náctileté* readers included ratings for the most popular actors. They may, thus, be seen as lifestyle records similar to the surveys of mass media consumers often used in western Europe.

In 1991, as the magazine prepared for its partial takeover by a private publisher, the inclusion of photos and at least two posters of artists, music or movie stars in each issue became *de rigueur*. Starting in April, when *Filip pro -náctileté* debuted, music content—including both texts and images — represented more than 25 percent of the entire magazine. Each issue usually contained around 50 pages and had photos of music or movie stars on the cover. The Star Charts followed along with reports on emerging music stars. Throughout the issue, there were also articles accompanied by photos of bands or solo artists who were sometimes Czechoslovak and sometimes of international origin. *Filip pro -náctileté*’s new musical direction was, however, best illustrated by a series of new features.

To begin with, the editors launched a new post-revolution music contest called “Zlatý Ambrož” (Golden Ambrož) that was dedicated to discovering new talent. The conditions of entry and an application form first appeared in the final issue of *Filip* in March 1991. The newly separate *Filip pro -náctileté* editorial team then took over the planning and arrangement of Zlatý Ambrož. The contest offered “a chance to anyone who dreams of singing or playing pop, rock, folk, metal or classical music!”⁴¹ The winner of the first annual contest had the chance to record an album at the Czechoslovak state TV studio and was welcomed on the local scene.⁴² The magazine continued to underwrite the contest for the next three years, providing winning bands with positive publicity and the opportunity to release their own LP.⁴³

At the same time, the editors tried to succeed in the new market by drawing on their music industry connections. A contest called “Formule firem Filipa” (FFF) (The *Filip* Formula) highlighted the magazine’s links to record labels, which submitted their albums for evaluation. Readers were asked to award them points, and every three months, the magazine staged a car race among the labels, whose LPs were their “drivers”. During the year, the FFF held four rounds, and as in a standard Formula 1 race, the individual winners went on to compete in the overall annual championship. The first round was announced in the magazine in October 1991, and six Czechoslovak music labels sent in their candidates.⁴⁴ The editors aimed to make the magazine an

41 *Filip pro -náctileté*, vol. I, No. 1, April 1991, p. 2.

42 The first winner of the Zlatý Ambrož (Golden Ambrož) was Rap Masters, a Czech dance music band.

43 Subsequent winners included the groups Burma Jones and Nastřížené vlasy. The former had been active on the Czech pop music scene for more than 25 years.

44 The participating labels were Monitor, Popron, Multisonic, Bonton, Tommü records and Globus International; see *Filip pro — náctileté*, vol. I, No. 7, October 1991, pp. 40–41.



important venue for emerging music labels and their releases. In the lead-up to the first round, they approached a number of labels, some of which expressed interest. By the time of the second round in January, nine companies were competing, and the same number joined the third round in April 1992. After two years of the contest, its final round was held at the end of 1993, with eight labels participating.⁴⁵

The inclusion of cassette cover liners was another clear attempt to influence pop music's reception. The liners occupied two pages of the magazine and consisted of six images of performers, their names and a smaller section to be folded into the cassette cover concerned. The lyrics of the musician's songs were printed on the reverse of their picture. The liners, thus, provided practical design help to those engaging in music piracy. As Yurchak has observed, the copying of Western music was a famous practice in the Soviet Union until the 1960s, and similar activities were seen in the Czechoslovak space between the 1960s and 1980s.⁴⁶ What Yurchak has called the "recorderfication" of Soviet young people was based on the accessibility of tape recorders and the mass reproduction of tapes of Western music starting in these years. These cover liners appeared for the last time in the magazine's March 1992 issue. In post-socialist Czechoslovakia, then, Western music piracy was endorsed by the free press, and the practice ended only with the official arrival of Western record labels in the country between 1991 and 1992.

Editorial problems at *Filip pro -náctileté* began to surface in 1993. In May, the editor-in-chief departed after two years in his position, leaving the publication with just two editors. By this time, the magazine was devoted almost entirely to music and film, and much of its content was consumed by advertising. Its coverage often focused on singers and relied on facts and photos sourced from record labels, and it faced strong competition from the Czechoslovak versions of the teen weekly *Bravo* and monthly *Popcorn*. Both those publications boasted a superior distribution network, graphic design and reporting quality. Meanwhile all of the music and film coverage at *Filip pro -náctileté* necessarily came from the two editors, who often improvised in their efforts to produce content on Czechoslovak and world pop, rock and in some cases also the metal scene. While outside journalists had initially contributed specialist content (especially on metal), these contributions became increasingly rare. The remaining members of the original editorial team left the magazine on January 1, 1994. The final issue appeared in September 1994.

MLADÝ SVĚT AND ITS WAR ON POP MUSIC

In 1985, *Mladý svět* already had some expertise in covering music. The magazine published the results of the 1984 Zlatý slavík poll in its second issue for 1985.⁴⁷ Music was also one of the many topics featured in its wide-ranging journalism. In 1985, each edi-

45 For more information, see *Filip pro -náctileté*, vol. I, No. 7, vol. II, No. 1, No. 4, No. 8, vol. III No. 1, No. 4, No. 7.

46 A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 185–190.

47 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXVII, 1985, No. 2, p. 11.



tion included a half-page column called “Echo” in which DJ and critic Jaromír Tůma shared highlights from the local and world pop music scenes. In this section, readers could find summaries of new releases, festivals and other events in the lives of individual musicians and bands. In early 1985, Tůma reported, for example, on the poor performance of Slovak singer Julie Hečková at an East German festival, and he commented on the modern anthem “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” for Ethiopian drought victims, which was dominating the UK charts. He also posted the results of a survey of the most popular performers in Prague clubs in 1984. In “Ze světa” (Around the Globe), another section of the magazine that rounded up short news items, Tůma profiled the singer Prince’s career and style.⁴⁸

For many years, *Mladý svět* had also published the “Diskotéka Mladého světa” (*Mladý svět* Disco) feature, which it produced with the Supraphon record label. This section gave readers the chance to buy a set of six LPs chosen by Supraphon each year exclusively for the magazine’s readership. If this selection was any guide, the ideal *Mladý svět* reader listened to classical music, old school blues, folk, variety show songs and rock’n’roll. In 1985, music content made up 6-to-7 percent of the overall magazine. Outside the Echo column, it was represented in other sections including those linked to Zlatý slavík and *Mladý svět* Disco. Each month, the magazine also published interviews with musicians and reports from official state festivals. Occasionally, a band featured on *Mladý svět*’s black-and-white cover.⁴⁹ Pop music, thus, had more than a negligible presence in the magazine and its importance grew during the anti-decade.

As early as 1986, Echo expanded into a full-page column and more pop music reports began to appear elsewhere in the magazine. The entries in the “Z domova” (At Home) and “Ze světa” (Around the Globe) sections stood out: readers of these columns could, for example, find a two-paragraph report on the East German bands Kombi and Sily and their Czechoslovak tours or information about the Eurovision song contest results and Slovak singer Petr Nagy’s new album.⁵⁰ Although some of these stories were of a more tabloid nature, they could easily have found a home in the Echo section had they been written by Tůma. In fact, most of the magazine’s interviews and music festival reports were the work of different editors. *Mladý svět*, thus, had a diverse set of music reporters.⁵¹

The magazine’s music coverage was also more extensive than that in *Pionýr*. In the period under review, *Mladý svět* did not shy away from the international scene though Czechoslovak news dominated its pages. In the lead-up to the 1989 revolution, its music-related articles became both longer and more critical. Later, as the post-revolutionary rebuilding process gained momentum, the magazine gave more space to music and explored more genres. Where in 1986, it had reported on the high school graduation of singer Pavel Horňák of the children’s group Kroky Františka Janečka,⁵²

48 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXVII, 1985, No. 3, pp. 25–30.

49 A Slovak band appeared, for example, on the cover of issue No. 3, vol. XXVIII in 1986.

50 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXVIII, 1986, No. 25, p. 22–23.

51 The magazine’s music columns were written by its culture editors, in particular Luboš Beniak, Josef Chuchma and Roman Lipčík.

52 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXVIII, 1986, No. 21, p. 11.



in the 1988/89 issues, the focus shifted to unauthorised alternative artists such as the band Pražský výběr.⁵³ In 1987, *Mladý svět* also began to cover international stars' concerts. These reviews were usually written by editor Michal Horáček. After reporting from Las Vegas, Horáček reviewed the Hungarian concerts of Genesis and Peter Gabriel. In this way, the usual accounts of the Czechoslovak festivals Bratislavská Lyra, the Sokolov Political Song Festival and folk Porta were met with foreign comparisons. Meanwhile other *Mladý svět* reporters captured pop music highlights in Czechoslovakia in 1988 including a music video shot by the Australian band INXS in Prague and a Depeche Mode concert that would become legendary.⁵⁴

Local attitudes to global events were also reflected in a 1988 article about John Lennon's legacy and his commemoration at a symbolic monument, the Lennon Wall in Kampa Park in Prague. Against the backdrop of ongoing USSR–USA strategic talks on arms limitation, the article ended with an account of how participants had “sung a song that is being sung by people all over the world right now [...] Give peace a chance.”⁵⁵ A similarly hopeful tone could be heard in reports about Rockfest, an upcoming state-sponsored festival at Prague's Palace of Culture. This was not, the magazine said, “an attempt to escape social anxieties with our heads in the clouds but rather a clear and loud message of engagement: we're here, and this is what we think.”⁵⁶ Another report on a London concert for Nelson Mandela took a similar political stance though it also criticised the lack of quality music in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁷

Mladý svět's issues from 1989 are particularly striking because of the tensions they reveal in the magazine's music coverage. Duran Duran's Prague concert received two different reviews from editors with diverging assessments.⁵⁸ Similarly, there were two accounts of Sandra's performance in the Intertalent contest.⁵⁹ The opinions expressed about the Zlatý slavík poll also exposed editorial concerns about the future approach to music. The status of the poll was the subject of a debate between *Mladý svět's* chief culture editor and Ladislav Štaidl, the bandleader of popular singer Karel Gott. Despite their differences, both sides criticised the current system and speculated on its future.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, pop music continued to feature in the magazine if only in more tabloid-style reports. In 1989, a new section “Tržiště senzací” (News Sensations Market) reinforced this approach with a photo spread that collated many news stories; for each story, a small photo appeared of the star concerned along with two sentences

53 An interview with the lead singer of Pražský výběr, Michael Kocáb appeared in the magazine; see *Mladý svět*, vol. XXX, No. 17, p. 1.

54 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXX, 1988, No. 5, p. 15.

55 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXX, 1988, No. 4, 1988, p. 19.

56 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXX, 1988, No. 18, 1988, p. 21.

57 *MS*, vol. XXX, 1988, No. 45, 1988, pp. 19–21.

58 *MS*, vol. XXXI, 1989, No. 1, pp. 20–21; compare *MS*, vol. XXXI, 1989, No. 2, No. 31.

59 *MS*, vol. XXXI, 1989, No. 48, p. 3, resp. No. 50, p. 31.

60 This well-known bandleader called for the cancellation of Zlatý slavík due to the rigging of the competition. [Štaidl talks about rigging the competition, not about involving himself to rigging. Ah,ok. Please let me know if this wording doesn't work.] In contrast, *Mladý svět's* editor argued that it should continue and expressed his hopes for a fairer future contest with better results; see: *MS*, vol. XXXI, 1989, No. 32, 1989, p. 19.



of sought-after news and sometimes additional distorted photos. In one issue, the photo and description of Miss GDR were, thus, laid out beside the boat used by a record-breaking British trio to circumnavigate the world and the New York rock awards where Tina Turner and Keith Richards had performed. Another edition announced that Madonna was getting divorced after a three-year marriage while, in contrast, the Rolling Stones were reuniting after the same time apart. Readers were no doubt also curious to learn that LaToya Jackson had been photographed at the Kremlin on Red Square and her brother Michael would be advertising L.A. Gear shoes.⁶¹

The tensions around music continued even after the revolution. The first signs of conflict outside the magazine surfaced during the TV broadcast of a live concert to celebrate the 1989 Zlatý slavík awards. The concert audience booed popular singer Dalibor Janda; meanwhile, in pre-recorded interviews mixed into broadcast, former dissident singers Jaroslav Hutka and Karel Kryl questioned the value of the entire poll.⁶² A similar tension played out in *Mladý svět's* Echo column, which continued to highlight both local and world pop stars and more alternative artists. In the post-socialist issues, this alternative content included the “Pro všechny slušný lidi” (For All Decent People) concert organised by former blacklisted artists⁶³ and the life of London-based avant-garde singer and émigré Jana Kratochvílová.⁶⁴ A key turning point came in late 1990 when *Mladý svět* published its editor Roman Lipčák's article “Soumrak popu” (Twilight of Pop)⁶⁵ on the growing indifference of local audiences to Czechoslovak pop music. There was, Lipčák wrote, little interest in these performances, and he was struck by the poor quality of local artists and their management: “[S]uddenly the tiny world we lived in is –like a cheese that had been kept sealed under a glass lid — exposed. It turns out that even our greats are pretty average by world standards. The comforting lie that our Favorit is as good as the Golf suddenly just doesn't hold up.”⁶⁶ Lipčák also pondered what was next in store for local music given the global competition. The editor put aside the question of genre, observing that it was not just mainstream artists but also previously blacklisted singers who had lost their appeal “except perhaps among young people aged 15 to 20 for whom music is an expression of their youth.”⁶⁷ The results of the 1990 Zlatý slavík poll prompted similar reflections as the editors noted the predominance of voters aged 15 to 20 and plummeting reader interest. A total of 12,186 readers took part, a turnout so low that it raised the question of whether to announce the results of the poll at all.⁶⁸

61 MS, vol. XXXI, 1989, No. 12, p. 28, No. 31, pp. 28–29, No. 31, p. 28, No. 38, p. 28, No. 45/89.

62 Zlatý slavík 1989: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VZ3fBfZDWE> [10. 1. 2021]. The response to Dalibor Janda can be viewed at 32:19; for the contest itself, see the segment beginning at 43:25.

63 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXII, 1990, No. 1, pp. 16–17.

64 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXII, 1990, No. 16, pp. 20–21.

65 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXII, 1990, No. 41, pp. 9–11.

66 Idem. The Škoda Favorit was a famous Czechoslovak car in this period; “Golf” here refers to another vehicle, the Volkswagen Golf.

67 Idem.

68 *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXIII, 1991, No. 2, p. 8.



The Echo column continued to appear in the magazine until mid-1991. Through its author, Jaromír Tůma, readers received news of the UK charts and the Czech metal band Masters Hammer along with a photo spread of young female pop singers. The Czech country legend Pavel Bobek and the American rapper Vanilla Ice were juxtaposed in the same way. In April 1991, *Mladý svět* began to run advertisements for *Popcorn*, a newly founded magazine that would “feature world pop music, ten posters and exciting competitions.”⁶⁹ The following month, an advertisement for the specialist music magazine *Melodie* (Melody) appeared in the middle of the Echo section. In late July 1991, Tůma, *Melodie*’s future editor, invited readers to follow the publication. At the same time, he bid farewell to *Mladý svět*’s readers, adding the information that since 1986 he had conducted “284 interviews with local artists and introduced 280 foreign bands and solo artists through Echo.”⁷⁰ From August 1991, his column was replaced by the “Kultura” (Culture) section in which the editors took turns focusing on film, theatre and music but did not cover each theme in every issue. Between August and the end of 1991, only one music article appeared and this was about the final year of the Vokalíza festival in Prague; pop music had all but disappeared. By the time *Mladý svět* cancelled Zlatý slavík in early 1992, the magazine had practically eliminated pop music. In 1992, only five articles in *Mladý svět* dealt with music topics, and there was no sign of pop music in the Kultura section.

CZECHOSLOVAK POP MUSIC AS A SYMBOL OF SOCIAL IMMATURITY

By focusing on periodicals for young people between the ages of roughly 12 and 30, my research has shown how these magazines, which were popular in the late socialist years in Czechoslovakia and competed for readers during the early post-socialist transition, changed their content considerably during the anti-decade. The case of pop music serves as a good example. While the teen magazine *Pionýr* approached pop music very cautiously in the mid-1980s in part because of censorship pressures, by the time state socialism collapsed, news and photos of pop stars were among the biggest attractions for its readers. On the other hand, pop music had featured in the pages of *Mladý svět* since as early as the mid-1980s. The publication also increased its music content gradually in the anti-decade although former drawcards like its Zlatý slavík poll for Czechoslovakia’s top music artists and reports on regime-backed mainstream stars now met with criticism from some editors. More challenging or hard-to-access music became more prominent in the magazine. Nevertheless, its pop music content continued to grow in the lead-up to the Velvet Revolution.

In contrast, in the post-revolution years, pop music fell out of favour with *Mladý svět*’s editors and also certainly with some of its readers. This shift can be seen both from the magazine’s critical commentaries and the loss of interest in Zlatý slavík. At the same time, *Pionýr* transformed into *Filip* and subsequently *Filip pro -náctileté* and its popularity grew thanks to its music content and record label partnerships. The magazine managed to pursue initiatives that developed the local pop music scene

⁶⁹ *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXIII, 1991, No. 17, p. 25.

⁷⁰ *Mladý svět*, vol. XXXIII, 1991, No. 31, p. 29.



before the arrival of foreign investors. In particular, its charts of popular performers, local talent contests and cooperation with the growing music industry brought it short-term success. Ultimately, however, *Filip pro -náctileté* could not compete with its global rivals and it vanished from the scene completely. While *Mladý svět* proved more enduring, it also relinquished its position as a catalyst for musical change and assumed a more marginal. By the time it sought to rejoin the pop music scene as a mere co-sponsor of the revived Zlatý slavík awards in 1996, it was too late to save the magazine.

These research findings are noteworthy partly because of the historical shifts that they reflect in the market for these two popular magazines in Czechoslovakia. However, what may be more intriguing is the generational change that they suggest concerning mainstream music consumption and its social prestige. While in the mid-1980s, reading about and ranking mainstream pop stars was a fairly widespread practice in Czechoslovakia, by the end of the decade, adult readers had incorporated preference for of more challenging music into their lifestyles. Pop music, on the other hand, was made accessible to older children starting in the higher grades of primary school. In her study of children's games and folklore, Dana Bittnerová notes that in the second half of primary school, children undergo major changes in their perceptions and forms of entertainment. Although they remain immature, they have begun to lose touch with authentic children's folklore and games and are moving closer to adult perceptions. Such a shift could be mediated through the artificial world of pop music.⁷¹ In the Czechoslovak context, adults enabled the new pop music culture during the post-revolutionary transition and teenagers accepted it as their own. At least in the magazine space, adults maintained a dignified distance. At the same time, attitudes to music began to acquire new social meanings. The question "What do you listen to?" became an index of class as was also the case in France, and the acquisition of taste offered an imaginary pass to a higher social status, as Pierre Bourdieu has documented in his work on the adoption of music and creation of capital.⁷² *Mladý svět's* editors believed that in order to meet the post-socialist challenge of maintaining their status and an active influence on contemporary lifestyles, they would have to abandon pop music and do away with one of its best-known symbols. They likely realised fairly quickly that this was not the right strategy. However, it was too late for the magazine to restore its position, and in the ruthless capitalist economy, the cards had already been dealt.

71 D. BITTNEROVÁ, "Kultura dětí a dětský folklor", in: P. JANEČEK (ed.), *Folklor atomového věku. Kolektivně sdílené prvky expresivní kultury v soudobé české společnosti*, National Museum-Faculty of Humanities, Prague, pp. 13–38, p.13.

72 P. BOURDIEU, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984, pp. 261–264.