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Extract of Bachelor degree thesis

**Radio Luxembourg and its importance for auditors
in the socialist Czechoslovakia (oral history)**

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6. Radio Luxembourg

Radio Luxembourg was undoubtedly a phenomenon that deserves attention for several reasons. For young people in socialist Czechoslovakia, it was one of the sources of “Western” music – so much more attractive than the offer of Czechoslovak radio stations and record companies. Radio Luxembourg was significant not only for ordinary listeners, helping them survive the socialist state reality, but also for both professional and amateur musicians, serving them as a guide in their musical development. There was a direct influence of Radio Luxembourg not only in increasing young people’s interest in music, but also in learning English. The ‘forbidden fruit’ aspect also contributed to its popularity.

I will try to illustrate these reasons in the following chapters, particularly with the use of my own oral history material. Before doing so, however, I would like to sketch out the history of Radio Luxembourg as a radio station and devote two chapters to the views of current professional literature on Radio Luxembourg and to mentions of the station in one of the written sources of the time – *Melodie* magazine.

By way of introduction, let me quote Jiří Černý and his description of Radio Luxembourg in the mid-1960s as seen by a part of the general public: “...*inconspicuously, yet with an increasing intensity, (...) rock’n’roll is developing. Supported by no one, with the mark of Cain of decadent music on its forehead, it sneaks to the ears of young people on the notorious 208 metres medium wave, carrying the broadcasts of Radio Luxembourg, your station of the stars! The first radio station in the world to play popular music around-the-clock, from morning to night, interrupted only by brief spoken intermezzos: Flemish in the morning, German in the afternoon and English in the evening. And it plays what its title promises – Your Station of the Stars!*”¹³¹

6.1. The History of Radio Luxembourg

The early beginnings of Radio Luxembourg date back to the 1920s. At the time, a group of amateur radio enthusiasts was active in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, striving for the support of a new scientific discipline – radio broadcasting. In 1924, François Anen, one of the members of the group, obtained a broadcasting licence. In 1928, he exchanged the original 100-watt transmitter for a 3-kilowatt one, which he had received from the French station Radio Toulouse. The French were interested in the Luxembourg transmitter, eventually bought it in 1929 and founded the Société d’Etudes Radiophoniques. In 1931, the Société

¹³¹ Černý, Jiří: *Zpěváci bez konzervatoře*. Praha 1966, p. 115.

d'Etudes was converted into a larger organisation, Compagnie Luxembourgeoise de Radiodiffusion (CLR). Thanks to more substantial financial funds, the company could afford to buy a plot near Junglinster, located some 17 kilometres east from the capital of Luxembourg. The station's foundation stone was laid there by Prince Felix of Luxembourg on 7 October 1931, and three transmitters were set up, step by step, of 180 metres in height and with a cumulative power of 200 kW, making them the most powerful transmitters in Europe. The studios were located in the capital's central park, in the remains of an ancient fortress built in 1671 by Jean Charles de Landas, Count of Louvigny – wherefrom the name of the studio building, Villa Louvigny. The programme was transmitted from the studios by an underground cable to the Junglinster transmitter. As time went by, the studios gradually expanded.¹³²

After experimental broadcasts in January 1933, regular commercial broadcasting started within a few months: in French, German and English. The popularity of Radio Luxembourg and its entertainment programmes was increasing among the listeners until September 1939, that is until the beginning of the Second World War.¹³³ On 21 September 1939, Radio Luxembourg went silent, after broadcasting the song entitled 'For Liberty', performed live by an orchestra. The radio station raised its voice again once the war was over in Europe, even though the transmitter had been used for other purposes in the meantime.¹³⁴ After the occupation of the country by the German army, the transmitter became a part of the Reich Broadcasting Corporation in the summer of 1940, broadcasting German propaganda in the English language.¹³⁵ On 10 September 1944, Luxembourg was liberated by the Americans. The Germans had intended to demolish the radio facility, but fortunately did not succeed, with the exception of a few cases of minor damage. Besides, they left behind a great deal of valuable equipment they had installed, such as a tape recorder, probably the only post-War specimen in Europe (outside of Germany).¹³⁶ The Americans readily used the broadcasts to undermine the German soldiers' morale by reporting on German failures and fictitious uprisings, since they continued to broadcast in German and passed themselves off as a radio

¹³² Nichols, Richard: *Radio Luxembourg, the Station of the Stars*. An Affectionate History of 50 Years of Broadcasting. London 1984, pp. 9-26.

¹³³ CD *The History Of Radio Luxembourg*. Recording of the programme *Ozvěny Luxembourg* on Rádio Zlatá Praha station from 20 April 1994. Buki records, 2002. Author's archives.

¹³⁴ Nichols, op. cit., p. 50.

¹³⁵ Vaněk, Miroslav: *Byl to jenom rock'n'roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956-1989*. Praha 2010, p. 155.

¹³⁶ CD *The History of Radio...*, op. cit., author's archives.

intended for German listeners.¹³⁷ In this way, Radio Luxembourg had played its role in the eventual defeat of the Germans.

In November 1945, the radio returned into the hands of its former owners, and in July 1946, it went on the air again. The staff of Radio Luxembourg, though small in number, performed real miracles with records that were successfully hidden from the Germans during the war.¹³⁸ Teddy Johnson was the first of the disc jockey breed as we understand them today – that is, with a regular daily programme.¹³⁹

In the late 1940s, Radio Luxembourg began a new type of programme based on popular music – nowadays known as ‘charts’ or ‘hit parade’. The records were ranked according to their sales – a principle picked up from the American charts. Geoffrey Everitt was the man who initiated the introduction of this type of programme into Radio Luxembourg’s broadcasting, while general opinion was that such a programme would never catch on: the listeners wouldn’t want to hear a weekly programme which would be almost the same as the previous week’s, featuring all the music they listened to throughout the week. But, as anyone who has ever listened to the radio since 1950 will know, Everitt had hit on an absolutely winning formula with his programme.¹⁴⁰ It was the famous *Top Twenty*, broadcast on Sunday evenings. It opened with the number one, since the sponsor wished so, and to fit in all the twenty songs, adverts and the announcer’s input, only the first two minutes of each song were played.¹⁴¹

A change came in the early 1950s, namely on Monday 2 July 1961, when Radio Luxembourg’s English programmes started broadcasting on 208 metres medium wave (1439 kHz, later 1440). This was the frequency that made Radio Luxembourg famous all around Europe under the slogan “208 – It’s great!” The 1950s were the heyday for Radio Luxembourg. The war was over and already fading in people’s minds, and an atmosphere of excitement became prevalent, leading to the feeling that “we have never had it so good”, which was especially true of the popular music industry. Entertainment programmes on Radio Luxembourg were becoming increasingly popular. The listeners were attracted to Radio Luxembourg partly by the friendly atmosphere which the station had created for itself right from the very beginning, but mainly by the preponderance of big names which appeared regularly on the air – more regularly than they did on other stations. And we are not speaking

¹³⁷ Vaněk, op. cit., p. 155.

¹³⁸ CD *The History of Radio...*, op. cit., author’s archives.

¹³⁹ Nichols, op. cit., p. 65-66.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁴¹ Vaněk, op. cit., p. 156.

only about the disc jockeys – it was the era when DJ personality cult was just beginning – but also about the long list of celebrity actors and singers invited as guests to various programmes. It can be said that in 1955, Radio Luxembourg was more important in Britain than the BBC. What demonstrates its power is the fact that several records, while banned on the BBC, became best sellers simply because they were played on Radio Luxembourg – they were not heard anywhere else. Radio Luxembourg has contributed to another watershed in the history of pop music: in 1957, for the first time ever, a record reached number one in Britain before it did so in the USA. It was Paul Anka's 'Diana', and one of the reasons was that Radio Luxembourg's presenters were in the habit of playing records which they liked rather than records which had already been hits overseas.¹⁴²

In 1957, the transmitter power was increased to an unbelievable 300 kilowatts.¹⁴³ On 15 July of the same year, the German broadcasting on Radio Luxembourg was launched, which was also listened to in Czechoslovakia, along with the broadcasts in English.¹⁴⁴

After reaching its peak in 1955, the number of listeners started to gradually decrease. The steady rise of the television that started broadcasting in the second half of the 1950s contributed to the decline. The early 1960s were a period of stagnation in music. Then in 1963, the Beatles changed everything; above all, it was the end of the American dominance in popular music – its epicentre moved to Britain. However, for Radio Luxembourg this presented a danger – as a result, the BBC was closer to the source of new records than its Luxembourg competitor. Until then, Radio Luxembourg had always been the first or only station to have the latest records from the United States. Fortunately, the BBC did not use its edge to the full. The face of broadcasting in Britain was nonetheless to change again soon: the impulse for the change came from the North Sea where pirate radio stations entered the airwaves. Ploughing through the waters of the North Sea on boats with transmitters, they bombed the nation with non-stop music. The first pirate radio was Radio Caroline, followed by Radio London, and then came Radio 270, Caroline North, Scotland, 370 and many others. Their era was over in 1967 when Britain adopted the Marine Offences Act, prohibiting broadcasts from coastal waters. The pirate stations also contributed to the drop in Radio Luxembourg's audience. After their broadcasts were banned, the BBC came up with the

¹⁴² Nichols, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-92.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁴ Vaněk, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

project of BBC Radio One, aimed at providing an alternative to the pirates, which also had an impact on Radio Luxembourg's audience figures.¹⁴⁵

Detailed sources on the further development of Radio Luxembourg in the 1970s and 1980s are not available. The station launched stereo broadcasting as late as 1989, and provided 24 hours a day of broadcasts. Rather surprisingly, the station closed down on 30 December 1990.¹⁴⁶

6.2. Radio Luxembourg in selected current professional literature

In this chapter, I will attempt to establish how experts see Radio Luxembourg in professional literature.

Let us start by the texts with the most frequent mentions of the Radio. Miroslav Vaněk devoted a sub-chapter to “Laxík” ([ˈlaxi:k], *Czech term of endearment for the Radio and its style, the equivalent of “Luxy”, translator’s note*) and pirate radios in his pioneering study on alternative music in Communist Czechoslovakia in 1956-1989, published in 2010 in Prague and called *Byl to jenom rock’n’roll? (Was It Just Rock’n’roll?, translator’s note)* In the chapter on the import of rock into socialist Czechoslovakia and its further propagation, he writes that “for avid admirers of Western popular music, Radio Luxembourg represented literally the entrance to another dimension that could not have been experienced behind the Iron Curtain (...), almost the only direct source providing them with a regular influx of rock and beat music, together with information on new trends and especially their protagonists.”¹⁴⁷

An entry was devoted to Radio Luxembourg in the latest encyclopaedia *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948-1967 (A Guide Through the Cultural Affairs and Life Style in the Czech Lands 1948-1967, translator’s note)*. The author of the entry, Martin Franc, states, apart from other things: “Both in the 1950s and the 1960s, the station gained great popularity especially among young Czechoslovak listeners as one of the rare sources of foreign modern popular music, otherwise inaccessible, particularly in the 1950s.”¹⁴⁸

In his paper on music in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, Juraj Lexmann mentions Radio Luxembourg in the section on modern popular music and jazz, which he sees as one of the

¹⁴⁵ Nichols, op. cit., pp. 93-137.

¹⁴⁶ Vaněk, op. cit., p. 156.

¹⁴⁷ Vaněk, Miroslav: *Byl to jenom rock’n’roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956-1989*. Praha 2010, p. 154.

¹⁴⁸ Knapík, Jiří – Franc, Martin et al.: *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948-1967*. Volume I, II. Praha 2011, p. 767.

activities of music life shaping the music awareness of society at the time: “Despite the bans and obstacles, it was impossible to prevent young people from being interested in Western style modern popular music and jazz. Listening to music on the Luxembourg radio station was a fashion with a taste of forbidden fruit.”¹⁴⁹

In her book on “velvet philosophers”, English author Barbara Day, well acquainted with the Czech scene, also evokes the earlier era in the chapter on the Jazz Section of the 1970s: “From 1948 onwards the Communists promoted folk music as a medium with the potential to gather the flock of nations into one fold. It was not until the late 1950s that young people, listening to the distorted voices of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin on Radio Luxembourg, began again to improvise for themselves, on home-made instruments.”¹⁵⁰

From the above quotes, it can be concluded that the importance of Radio Luxembourg in the Czech context has been noted and reflected especially from the point of view of its music contribution. Let us compare these contemporary reflections with those from the past through an analysis of references to Radio Luxembourg in *Melodie* magazine.

6.3. Radio Luxembourg in *Melodie* magazine

I will try to illustrate the views on Radio Luxembourg in socialist Czechoslovakia also using the analysis of seven volumes of *Melodie* magazine (full name *Melodie – měsíčník pro hudbu a společnost; Melody – the monthly for music and society, translator’s note*) from the 1960s (it was published from 1963 onwards). In addition to single mentions either in specialised articles on various topics or in letters from the listeners, a separate article was dedicated to Radio Luxembourg, the reference to it even appearing on the cover page. The frequency of mentions of Radio Luxembourg has started to decrease from the 5th volume on (year 1967), while in the last volume from the period covered, that is the 7th volume (year 1969), I have not found a single mention, which could be linked to the changes after 1968 but also to an overall drop of interest in this radio station since the late 1960s. It could be interesting to go through the later volumes of the magazine until the late 1980s and see whether an increased number of mentions of Radio Luxembourg could be observed in a certain period and compare it to another magazine (such as the weeklies *Hudební rozhledy* or *Mladý svět*), possibly to establish what changes in society could be relevant in this respect.

¹⁴⁹ Lexmann, Juraj: *Hudba šťastného zajtrajška*, p. 271. In: Paštéková, Jelena et al.: *Poetika a politika. Umenie a päťdesiate roky*. Bratislava 2004, pp. 258-271.

¹⁵⁰ Dayová, Barbara: *Sametoví filozofové*. Brno 1999, p. 179.
Day, Barbara: *The Velvet Philosophers*. London, 1999, p. 201.

Let us now look at the specific references to Radio Luxembourg in *Melodie* magazine in the 1960s, starting by the article fully devoted to this radio station.

The article proves that already at the time, both the general public and experts realised the indisputable role of Radio Luxembourg in the area of music: *“The results of several surveys recently conducted both in our country and abroad unequivocally confirmed the great popularity and broad listener base of the Radio Luxembourg station; its entertainment programmes – with an emphasis on the work ‘entertainment’ – are the most popular radio programmes overall and namely among young people.”*¹⁵¹ However, the description of Radio Luxembourg’s broadcasting is followed by warnings against excessive listening, and its name is often mentioned in discussions on music and aesthetic education: *“What matters is especially its aesthetic and moral influence on youth – the prevalent target audience of the station in our country.”*¹⁵² According to the author, there are two extreme attitudes towards this radio station: uncritical and unreserved admiration as opposed to disdain accompanied by comments on kitsch, bad taste and demoralisation. He continues by saying that one-sidedness in either direction is detrimental and does not lead anywhere, since popular music has a place also in Czechoslovak society, even though its mission is seen differently from the West: the monopoly of popular music should not devour the whole of the music culture. He further adds: *“Nothing remains but to pick up the gauntlet, stand up to the challenge and try one’s best. (...) So it may be about time to stop perceiving Radio Luxembourg as the only culprit guilty of the bad state of our youth’s music education, but also to stop seeing it as forbidden fruit and a symbol of all that is trendy and modern. I think that we will be able to face the Luxembourg wave only once the leading names of world popular music lose the stamp of rarity that can be only found on the Luxembourg station.”*¹⁵³

Although the article also contains criticism, it is beyond doubt that the author did realise the influence of the station on young people and on shaping the broadcasting in Czechoslovakia. Also the musical production of bands performing songs taken over from “Laxík” was seen critically: *“Listeners (...) are mostly attracted to melodies of guitar bands (...) with a simple harmony and a catchy tune in the rhythm & blues style, becoming the base of amateur instrumental bands’ repertoire, often in a deformed interpretation with a proud appellation ‘original laxík’.”*¹⁵⁴ The “original Laxík” style is viewed with contempt in several

¹⁵¹ Piskač, Zdeněk: *Radio Luxembourg*, p. 28. In: *Melodie* 1965, No. 2, pp. 28-29. See annexes for full text of the article.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

other articles: *"The hidden danger is the fact that the repertoire of these bands is mainly oriented at laxik production, especially at the pieces that are very primitive and easy to play."*¹⁵⁵ Another article writes about a similar band: *"They are guys who love rhythm and dance music more than anything, but consider the score to be a conservative anachronism, altogether dispensable. They listen to Luxembourg and play by ear and from memory. They differ from the original, sometimes more, sometimes less, often are at odds with good taste, but overflow with enthusiasm and gusto."*¹⁵⁶ Similarly: *"But how about the groups that have not found such acceptance yet? We think that it would be a pity to just leave them in the grasp of Radio Luxembourg and not help them in their uncertainty and in their search for true music values."*¹⁵⁷

Radio Luxembourg was being associated with negative phenomena in other contexts as well: *"There is no doubt that England still maintains its position of a bridge acquainting us with the developments in international pop music via radio waves and magazines. It is due to the geography and to Radio Luxembourg, as well as to the Beatles. In any case, this orientation brings with it an adverse, yet logical effect: a unilateral consumption and flow of information, together with a strong overestimation of the importance of British pop music – and an underestimation of the European and also American production. (...) To follow the American pop music and to rate it, you need more than Top-Twenty on Radio Luxembourg."*¹⁵⁸ Not all the mentions were negative though; one can also find positive ones, or neutral statements on its contribution. We shall examine these later.

Radio Luxembourg was often mentioned in connection with the *12 na houpačce* (*12 on a swing, translator's note*) or *Mikrofórum* programmes¹⁵⁹: *"Finally someone realised that a Hit-parade does not have to be exclusive to Radio Luxembourg and other Western stations but that we can put one together ourselves, with our own songs, without copying foreign templates."*¹⁶⁰ A quote from another letter from a reader: *"I used to be an avid Radio Luxembourg listener, like surely many other young people, and I wished for the reception to be better to be able to make recordings for my discotheque, especially from the popular Hit-parades. I secretly wished for something similar to appear in our country. Finally my wish came true."*¹⁶¹ However, they were also trying to set themselves apart from Radio

¹⁵⁵ Sündermann, Jan: *Do fronty na kytaru?* In: *Melodie*, 1963, No. 4, p. 54.

¹⁵⁶ Márová, Zdeňka: *Big Beat...ve škole.* In: *Melodie*, 1964, No. 2, p. 19.

¹⁵⁷ Atl, Jiří: *Jak dál?* In: *Melodie*, 1963, No. 8, p. 128.

¹⁵⁸ Tůma, Jaromír: *Americká scéna neanglickým pohledem.* In: *Melodie*, 1967, No. 7, pp. 156-158.

¹⁵⁹ For these programmes, see chapter on Czechoslovak Radio.

¹⁶⁰ Wolkerová, B.: *Napsali jste nám: Aranžéři, aranžéři...* In: *Melodie*, 1965, No. 6, p. 141.

¹⁶¹ Hamr, Pavel: *Napsali jste nám: Jak se houpá houpačka.* In: *Melodie*, 1965, No. 9, p. 213.

Luxembourg: *"We have got the impression from the letters that those listening to Houpačka and also to Luxembourg, and now also to Radio One would like the songs sung in English to be included about a week after their appearance in the bestselling twenty in England. (...) We would certainly like to listen to such a programme ourselves. (...) But it is unfeasible to organise such a regular weekly supply of records from the West."*¹⁶² Similarly, on the *Mikrofórum* programme: *"Despite the large number of contributors, Mikrofórum does not have the same stock of records like for instance Luxembourg, which both is and isn't a handicap, since this programme does not even wish to serve the same purposes, that is, setting up a big show, producing hits and usurping the objective to wholly influence the taste of a young person."*¹⁶³

Radio Luxembourg is further brought up in articles about rock music, as its source: *"In the 1950s, there was a steep decline in our country of the sometimes sentimental, sometimes comically silly swing era songs. Then came the rock'n'roll from the USA via Luxembourg and with it, revived, though slightly revamped in a rock style, American folk songs."*¹⁶⁴ In another article: *"Also Radio Luxembourg played an important role in the fast penetration of beat music. The best known programmes in 1957-58 were 30-minute R'n'r Party shows presented by the American disc jockey Alan Freed and in 1958-59 Gus Goodwin's R-a-b Party."*¹⁶⁵

In the section of the magazine called "Co se kde zpívá" (*What is sung where, translator's note*) Radio Luxembourg's hit parade is also included, starting with the 3rd issue of 1965.

To sum up, we could say that the importance of Radio Luxembourg, given its contribution as a source of popular music, has been observed as early as the 1960s, albeit with an occasional touch of criticism – with a note on the amateurish character of the bands inspired by the station in their music production, its "aesthetic and moral" impact or its one-sided orientation at the British music production. At the same time, there was an awareness of its influence on shaping some of Czechoslovak Radio's programmes.

I will try to point out other aspects of Radio Luxembourg's importance in the chapters that follow.

¹⁶² *Co se kde hraje a zpívá. Třináct na houpačce.* In: *Melodie*, 1967, No. 12, p. 269.

¹⁶³ Brabec, Jindřich: *Mikrofórum – hit Československého rozhlasu.* In: *Melodie*, 1966, No. 2, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶⁴ Krečmar, Eduard: *Big beat a písnička.* In: *Melodie*, 1964, No. 9, p. 134.

¹⁶⁵ Langer, Miroslav: *Dvanáct let beatové hudby.* In: *Melodie*, 1965, No. 9, pp. 202-205.

6.4. Radio Luxembourg atmosphere and its disc jockeys

To introduce this chapter, I would like to attempt to capture the atmosphere of Radio Luxembourg, so different from other radio stations, let alone those in socialist Czechoslovakia, which constituted a part of Radio Luxembourg's attraction for the listeners.

The relaxed and chatty style of the presenters was a significant plus for Radio Luxembourg, as Richard Nichols confirms when writing about Christopher Stone, one of the first announcers on Radio Luxembourg, still before the Second World War: *"His style of presentation was already markedly more relaxed than anyone else on BBC radio and Radio Luxembourg allowed him more freedom than he (or anyone else) had been used to. This was one of the keys to the success of Radio Luxembourg. Not only was their programming in a lighter vein, but they allowed their announcers to be far less formal and far more conversational than the BBC."*¹⁶⁶ Pete Murray, who was an announcer on Radio Luxembourg in the 1950s, commented that Radio Luxembourg allowed him to use his own personality with much more freedom than the English BBC.¹⁶⁷

Choosing from plentiful advice on how to achieve success, we quote one of Radio Luxembourg's most popular disc jockeys, Jimmy Savile: *"You have to love the music you're playing. If you can't think of anything apt to say, you have to have in store a broad and friendly expression on your face. Remember that you are the property of your fans 24 hours a day. If you don't like it, find another job!"*¹⁶⁸

Although the sponsors of the programmes invited established star names for obvious commercial reasons, Radio Luxembourg was the only radio station which gave untried and unknown people the chance to make themselves known and popular.¹⁶⁹

In comparison with the performance of presenters on our radio, Radio Luxembourg's broadcasts must have been quite a revelation for Czechoslovak listeners. As summed up in Jiří Černý's professional view: *"Luxembourg was unbelievably lively. It seemed to me that the presenters really liked their job, that they were enjoying themselves immensely; it was extremely dynamic and very much contrary to the manner music shows were announced here – on the radio, let alone on television, which had also spread (...) into the way of presenting, for instance, the Bratislavská lyra or Děčínská kotva festivals – it was indeed reminiscent of the old Austro-Hungarian times."*¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Nichols, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁶⁸ *Melodie* 1967, No. 2, p. 43.

¹⁶⁹ Nichols, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Jiří Černý.

Jan Šesták's words confirm that the listeners really did perceive it this way: "...and what was typical (for Radio Luxembourg – author's note) was a certain natural spontaneity (...), simply an informal attitude of the disc jockeys. It was out of the question that for example the Austrian Ö3 or here (...) it was always this Central European, this sort of... ahem, dignified setting, always, while Radio Luxembourg, not to mention those pirate radios, this Radio Caroline, so they were really easygoing, the machine-gun speed, real fun, informal, and that's what we liked, we felt like they were our friends or something."¹⁷¹

Richard Nichols also remarks on the disc jockeys' friendly approach to listeners: "On Luxembourg, however, the announcers would address their audience as individuals, frequently by name if someone had written to them."¹⁷² And letters came also from Czechoslovak listeners.¹⁷³

6.4.1. Tony Prince's visit to Czechoslovakia in 1970

A notable event in this context was the visit of one of Radio Luxembourg's most famous disc jockeys, Tony Prince¹⁷⁴ to Czechoslovakia in 1970. He played several of his gigs there, including one in Brno at the Šelepka Bav club where one of the narrators, Jan Šesták, occasionally helped his friend, the programme director František Jemelka, and therefore had an opportunity to meet Tony Prince in person. Mr. Šesták shared the atmosphere that Tony Prince brought to Czechoslovakia in his blog¹⁷⁵. He especially emphasised that Tony Prince "...gave us, at least for a couple of hours, the possibility to enjoy the wonderful atmosphere of the 1960s. (...) For many of the kids back then, it was not only the last but probably also the first authentic contact with the global atmosphere of the late 1960s when Tony Prince, with his natural spontaneity and showmanship, managed to enhance our enjoyment of the music and bring a feeling of absolute freedom – no matter how momentary. We drew on it for the next 19 years to come, with the support of Laxík where Tony (...) regularly sent music greetings to his Czechoslovak fans. (...) So there is no need to stress how much our meeting

¹⁷¹ Interview with Jan Šesták.

¹⁷² Nichols: op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁷³ As mentioned in an article on Radio Luxembourg in *Melodie* magazine: "...the announcers, charmingly inviting the audience to send postcards specifying their wishes. When fulfilling these requests, Czech names sometimes pop up." In: *Melodie* 1965, No. 2, p. 28.

¹⁷⁴ On his participation in Radio Luxembourg, see Nichols, op. cit., pp. 123-185.

¹⁷⁵ Šesták, Jan: *Karel Gott, lágr v Dachau a naše totalita*. Internet source; Šesták, Jan: *Tony Prince z Rádia Luxembourg se k nám vrátil po 39 letech*. Internet source; Šesták, Jan: *Rádio Luxembourg i slavný Tony Prince opět na scéně*. Internet source.

with him two years after the Russian invasion influenced us and encouraged us for the grey totalitarian years that followed."¹⁷⁶

Tony Prince was a copybook example of the qualities described in the previous chapter: he was informal, relaxed and friendly. Jan Šesták commented on his style by saying that Tony was able to create a special atmosphere that was contagious without exception, including for those who did not understand English.¹⁷⁷

Thanks to the friendship between Mr. Šesták and Tony Prince, we also have a testimony on his visit to Czechoslovakia as seen from the other side, by Tony Prince himself. His perceptions could even be linked to a certain messianic feeling, of bringing us a message, while admiring people from Czechoslovakia that he got to like very much. See for yourselves:

"My wife Christine and I have felt the passion of the Czech kids we met all those years ago, and our hearts bled for them for the following two decades. I may not have returned for a while but I called out to the Czech fans often on my programmes on Radio Luxembourg, letting them know we were always thinking and hoping for them. We rejoiced when you were finally freed so long after the Dubcek uprising. (...) I remember a kid coming to the edge of the stage and saying: *I give you all my Deutschmarks for Rolling Stone records*. I remember my car window being broken as the fans crowded us after a gig in Brno. (...) And I knew I was delivering a message to you all about freedom. And, because we came away knowing how bloody lucky we were in the West, we will always cherish that special week in your beautiful country. Thank you all! (...) Whilst I had such a great personal experience bringing you my music in 1970, you were the heroes, the ones who had to survive those dark days when young people should be enjoying their lives. Congratulations to all of you."¹⁷⁸

6.5. Radio Luxembourg reception problems

Radio Luxembourg broadcast on medium waves, notorious for patchy reception, often better at a distance than it is close to the transmitter. The broadcasting method is not always reliable – weather, cloud cover and the difference between daylight and darkness all have their effects – and are the reason for the frequent ‘fade’ of Radio Luxembourg.¹⁷⁹ Judging from the information that the medium wave signal is better further from the transmitter, there should not have been any problem with “Laxík” reception in Czechoslovakia. However,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Nichols, op. cit., pp. 95-97.

almost everyone who listened to the station will confirm the opposite: “...it wasn't very clear, but oh well, you could listen to it. I know that there were places where they couldn't get it at all, but on our little hill, we could.”¹⁸⁰ Radio Luxembourg had such a strong transmitter that its signal went as far as the easternmost parts of Czechoslovakia, but again, it was not very clear: “It was really terrible to listen to. When you started listening, (...) within a minute and a half, two minutes, the jammer slowly turned on, and probably that system worked like this, that very quietly, from below, something cut into the record, a sharp squeaky sound, and perhaps in three quarters of a minute it started to shriek, and you either had to shake it like this – which was possible for at least a minute – or you just switched it off. (...) You had to switch it off, because one couldn't stand it. So we turned it off, waited for half a minute, switched it on again, then it came again, and it went on like this in regular blocks.”¹⁸¹

However, the listeners were willing to put up with the bad technical quality of the broadcast music, since everything was better than the local production.¹⁸² Also the words of Jan Šesták confirm that for Czechoslovak listeners, the bad quality signal was counterbalanced by other qualities of Luxembourg's programme: “...that didn't play any role for us because (...) Radio Luxembourg had a much better signal than Radio Free Europe (...); we didn't take it hard since (...) in those days, you could not buy any Western records here, so we could not have listened to Western music otherwise, we only knew it from Radio Luxembourg, so practically, for us, it was all part of the game, so to say. (...) We simply somehow didn't mind, sometimes it got lost just for a few seconds – the song – but well, we took it for normal...”¹⁸³

The previous testimony mentioned a jammer. It is symptomatic of the times that almost all of the Radio Luxembourg listeners assumed that the broadcast was intentionally being jammed.¹⁸⁴ However, Radio Luxembourg was an official foreign station, such as the Voice of America or the BBC, which were not jammed, unlike the “subversive” and illegal Radio Free Europe. Radio Luxembourg was even not monitored like these stations, the likely reason being that the Communists did not see any danger in the contents of its programme – i.e.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Libuše Šťastná. Also Juraj Šebo mentions the issue: “Listening to Laxik was connected with hardships: it broadcast on medium waves, and the signal was very unstable and clogged.” In: Šebo, Juraj: *Budovatel'ské 50. roky*. Bratislava 2010, p. 311.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Ján Bachura. Terrible sound was also observed by a listener from Košice – see interview with Júlia Kolářová.

¹⁸² Vaněk, op. cit., p. 157.

¹⁸³ Interview with Jan Šesták.

¹⁸⁴ See for instance the interviews with Ján Bachura, Libuše Šťastná and Júlia Kolářová. Mentions of the interferences in Radio Luxembourg's broadcasts can also be found in the Czech Television documentary *Bigbit*, parts 1 and 3, author's archives.

popular music.¹⁸⁵ Why then was the quality of its signal so bad? Michal Bukovič suggests an answer to this question: *"As a friend who's an engineer has told me recently (...), the Communists never jammed Laxík, but there is something called the 'harmonic waves'. Luxembourg broadcast on the 1439 kilohertz wave, while Radio Free Europe broadcast on the 719 kilohertz wave. And the Radio Free Europe jammer harmonically infiltrated into Radio Luxembourg's frequency. When you divide it by two, it's clear. Also the denominations in metres match: Luxembourg – 208 metres, Radio Free Europe – 416 metres."*¹⁸⁶

6.6. Possible sanctions for listening to Radio Luxembourg

Is it even possible to impose sanctions on someone for listening to their favourite music? As an example from East Germany shows, it was. In 1959, five youths were sentenced to five years each in prison for listening to radio stations outside Germany, Radio Luxembourg being among them. 1959 was also the year when Walter Ulbricht said that Elvis Presley and Radio Luxembourg were diverting the attention of young people away from the youth movement which German youngsters did not find as attractive as the music from the West.¹⁸⁷

The fact that the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was capable of similar action can be demonstrated by a case that took place in 1957 at the Mánes wine bar in Prague where rock and roll music was played at a farewell party to army recruits. A police crackdown was carried out against "páseks" (*translator's note: eccentrically clad lads*) who dared dancing with "rolled-up trousers and tap-danced at that."¹⁸⁸ The police literally dragged 28 young people out of the wine bar. The sentences were exemplary, five participants went to prison.¹⁸⁹ Harsh sentences were supposed to deter and intimidate the young generation, so that they refrain from similar "Western-oriented" cravings.¹⁹⁰

However, this did not prevent them from listening to Radio Luxembourg (nor from being generally interested in "Western" music). Listening to Radio Luxembourg became a sort of a fashion with the taste of forbidden fruit among young people. But it was never

¹⁸⁵ See next chapter on possible sanctions for listening to Radio Luxembourg.

¹⁸⁶ CD *The History Of Radio Luxembourg*. Recording of the programme *Ozvěny Luxembourggu* on Rádio Zlatá Praha station from 20 April 1994. Buki records, 2002, author's archives.

¹⁸⁷ Nichols, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁸⁸ The sentence further mentioned that their conduct and subsequently their behaviour during the dancing caused public disturbance, that they committed an act of gross indecency, which is a sign of their clear lack of respect to society, whereby they committed the criminal offence of breach of the peace. In: Vaněk, op. cit., p. 405.

¹⁸⁹ They were sentenced for 20, 15, 12, 10 and 17 months. In: Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Vaněk, op. cit., p. 210, 405-406. See also part 1 of the Czech Television documentary *Bigbít*, author's archives.

officially prohibited. I was interested in the perception of Czechoslovak listeners: whether they still had the feeling that they could somehow be sanctioned for listening to the station.

They all replied in the negative – that nothing of the sort came to their minds¹⁹¹, that they did not consider the matter at all¹⁹², or that such an impression rather came up in the connection with stations such as the Voice of America, since “*there was the politics*”¹⁹³. They had this feeling despite their assumption that the station was intentionally jammed¹⁹⁴, or even prohibited – this is what Júlia Kolářová said about the matter: “*In Košice, it could have been less... it was milder, as it was not the capital, so probably they just didn’t address it at this level. (...) But then several things like this happened to me*¹⁹⁵ *that I... that I had no idea that there could be something wrong about it, or that it could be prohibited, a thing that I liked, and I remember being very shocked – why shouldn’t it be allowed? (...) I had no idea why, and no one was able to answer why it shouldn’t be allowed, and then it became absolutely commonplace... nowadays, there are at least five radios similar to Radio Luxembourg in every city...*”¹⁹⁶

Jiří Černý brings the view of a radio industry insider: “*...that someone should be, albeit formally, hauled before courts just for listening to Radio Luxembourg, that, I’ve never heard. For Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America – yes, but that was something different, the fact could be for instance recorded in your personal file, as a negative thing, yes, that could indeed happen, but these were times when your file contained the information about you wearing striped stockings and an ‘eman’ hairdo (‘pompadour’ haircut reminiscent of Presley’s style, typical for the ‘páseks’ subculture – translator’s note) or wearing high heels, oh well. But it wasn’t thought about much.*”¹⁹⁷ Some of the regular listeners share this feeling: “*...I wouldn’t say exactly sanctioned, but naturally, if someone had a big mouth or promoted Radio Luxembourg too much, for instance in front of someone who wasn’t exactly a friend, then it certainly would not have benefited him, it could appear in his personal file and (...) if push came to shove in the sense whether this or that person should be hired to a job or accepted into a school, and if the records said that he had promoted Western radio stations among his peers, then it certainly would not have benefited him. (...) But as I’m saying, I think*

¹⁹¹ Interview with Libuše Šťastná.

¹⁹² Interview with Júlia Kolářová.

¹⁹³ Interview with Ján Bachura.

¹⁹⁴ See previous chapter on problems with the reception of Radio Luxembourg.

¹⁹⁵ She mentioned another example, the situation when she wanted her husband to be present in the delivery room at the birth of their first child, which was not possible at the time, and her wish only came true during her second delivery. See interview with Júlia Kolářová.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Júlia Kolářová.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Jiří Černý.

that it was mainly the matter (...) of the 1950s experience or the beginning of the 1960s, and later on, with the start of the overall loosening of control, it wasn't that (...) dangerous or serious."¹⁹⁸ Also Ladislav Plch thinks that this was rather the matter of the 1950s and recalls an anecdote from the 1960s, when a relative brought him Elvis Presley's records from a business trip to Egypt, and since they didn't have a gramophone at home at the time, he had to go downtown to copy the gramophone discs.¹⁹⁹ With a friend, they also went to a gramophone store – "...and they played it for us into the whole mall, like into the open, they played it into the open! What a stunner! And the people there, when they heard what it was – such a stunner – Elvis Presley, it was Jailhouse Rock, you see, (...) and it was sometime in 1960. (...) In Rovnost someone later criticised it, like, that they play such trash to our working people and so on, but it only stayed at the verbal level, there were no sanctions or anything."²⁰⁰

Therefore, when listening to "Western" music and especially to Radio Luxembourg, there was a feeling of something forbidden in the air, and since "forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest", it was namely this feeling that made Radio Luxembourg so attractive, however, without the fear of a serious sanction. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the Communist leadership did not show a marked interest in Radio Luxembourg, it did not see any danger in it, and therefore did not jam its broadcasts. These are Jan Šesták's thoughts about the matter: "I'd especially say that the Communists of the time simply did not know what... what was happening on Radio Luxembourg, or simply very few of them spoke English; or the music: they did not see it as a danger. What they did mind though was Radio Free Europe or these, 'seditious transmitters', as they called them, and also official stations such as the Deutsche Welle, the BBC and other..."²⁰¹

Also Jiří Černý is of the opinion that Radio Luxembourg did not have any political significance: "And that it should have a political significance, that I do not believe. Also, it is symptomatic that (...) the Communist Party Central Committee had never attempted to come out against it. It wasn't until the 1960s when Radio Free Europe shrewdly started to broadcast music blocks in the afternoons that (...) Mikrofórum was founded²⁰². If this Luxembourg, if the Communists felt that it somehow influenced the young people, they would

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Jan Šesták.

¹⁹⁹ Ladislav Plch says: "...I have the impression that we even didn't have a gramophone at home at the time, (...) at Alfa, (...) there's a café there nowadays, Švanda, so there was this studio, where you could have a shellac disc engraved following the... then copy and..." (JŠ: "It was some sort of a metal sheet, (...) it cost some thirty crowns...") "I really don't know anymore, but it was a lot of money for us back then." In: Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²⁰¹ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²⁰² On Mikrofórum, see chapter on the Czechoslovak Radio.

have done something like that earlier, but it was really Radio Free Europe that forced them to take this step."²⁰³

6.7. Radio Luxembourg as an important source of music

The previous chapters also provided an outline of the situation in socialist Czechoslovakia in what concerns radio broadcasting and popular and rock music, especially of the "Western" type. In this context, the role of Radio Luxembourg was the most significant namely in the area of music, which has already been pointed out to some extent in other literature.²⁰⁴ This chapter will only confirm the fact using additional sources.

Jan Šesták's description of his first encounter with Radio Luxembourg clearly suggests that the atmosphere of the broadcast music played a major role. He used to spend the holidays with his parents in the Beskydy mountains where a friend of theirs played the music from the English radio station in the evenings, so that it was heard all across the valley: *"...rock'n'rolls from Radio Luxembourg echoed in that beautiful Beskydy nature; at the time I was naturally not aware of the specific details, but I liked the atmosphere, the way it sounded, and that was something that had stuck in my mind at the time (at the age of five or six – author's note), it was something... special because you could not get anything like that on our radio, and my parents didn't listen to this kind of music..."*²⁰⁵ And in later years, while in primary school, he recalls: *"The girls from my class used to write song lyrics into their memory books, but when I heard some of it on the radio, the magic was lost. They sounded dull, like for adults. I remembered Ivan Kulišťák playing the English radio station all across the valley in Prostřední Bečva where we used to spend our holidays. So I started playing with my radio set, and found it after a while. The wild rhythm of songs and the machine-gun speed of English words was unmistakable. No sleepy voices and good-night music. Radio Luxembourg on 208 metres wave!"*²⁰⁶

The most important role of Radio Luxembourg consisted no doubt in being a source of popular and rock music. Juraj Šebo even argues that *"this radio station managed to influence the course of history. At least as far as music is concerned."*²⁰⁷ The claim that Radio Luxembourg was mainly about music is documented by the narrators' testimonies: *"...my brother (...) was also well-informed about these music charts. We were really immersed in it,*

²⁰³ Interview with Jiří Černý.

²⁰⁴ See chapter on Radio Luxembourg in professional literature.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²⁰⁶ Kudrnáč, Joni: *Beetles. A šedesátá léta začala přicházet i do Československa*. Brno 2006, p. 71.

²⁰⁷ Šebo, Juraj: *Zlaté 60. roky*. Bratislava 2008, p. 26.

both of us, every month. (...) And my husband who had listened to it in Prague – but we only met each other later – told me (...) that he only listened to the music. (...) Above all, the music there was always up-to-date, the most recent tracks, and a lot of music and not many words. (...) There was English, there was music – what else do you need at secondary school? And no politics at all, or anything.”²⁰⁸

Libuše Šťastná, when asked whether she remembered any of the programmes that she had listened to on Radio Luxembourg, answers: *”Music. Music, music, music, (...) music that we liked and that normally couldn’t be heard here, it wasn’t here but it was there. (...) Well, so we could hear what couldn’t be... what wasn’t available on our radios... what wasn’t, didn’t exist, it was the music that actually wasn’t available here. Well, you couldn’t even buy it on a disc, it was the time of vinyl records, no CDs back then, every now and then someone brought something from abroad, well, and on this ‘Radio Luxembourg’ (imitates the English accent, laughing – author’s note), there was everything!*”²⁰⁹

Jan Šesták does not remember any specific programmes either: *”...I can’t recall any names of the programmes, I admit, because I was more conscious of the individual songs...*”²¹⁰ He further adds about Radio Luxembourg’s music in his blog: *”In the totalitarian era, Radio Luxembourg aka Laxik was for many of us one of the few possibilities of expanding our music horizons and spending pleasant moments by the radio without having to listen to revolutionary songs and Communist baloney. (...) Laxik’s popularity here lasted throughout the totalitarian era; it was only thanks to them that we could hear the Beatles, the Beach Boys or the Rolling Stones for the first time, without any delay...*”²¹¹ He further adds, as quoted from the book *Beatles*: *“There used to be a programme on Laxik, Presenting Elvis Presley. A real beauty, fifteen minutes of pure Elvis. But one evening, I heard: (...) ‘Six songs in a row just by the Beatles!’ Unbelievable! I even started pitying those kids who still discussed Večerníček and Hajaja (regular children’s programmes on television and radio featuring a good night story, translator’s note). Radio Luxembourg became my Večerníček, and I knew that it was to be forever.*”²¹²

In their testimonies, the narrators also compared the music production of Radio Luxembourg with the local, and in some cases also Soviet or Austrian ones: *”No Czechoslovak radio station (...) could give us the comfort of certainty that all of a sudden, we*

²⁰⁸ Interview with Júlia Kolářová.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Libuše Šťastná.

²¹⁰ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²¹¹ Šesták, Jan: *Tony Prince z Rádia Luxembourg se k nám vrátil po 39 letech*. Internet source;

Šesták, Jan: *Rádio Luxembourg i slavný Tony Prince opět na scéně*. Internet source.

²¹² Kudrnáč, op. cit., p. 73.

won't be hearing the Alexandrov Ensemble or some Russian traditional 'chastushkas'. (...) ...it was possible to receive the broadcasts of the Austrian radios, Ö3, (...) but that wasn't as attractive, since they often played German and Austrian songs and such, but sometimes they also included Anglo-American hits that we were interested in most of all. (...) Here, we had Mikroforum, every afternoon from three to five p.m., some sort of a 'spite programme' that was supposed to lure away Radio Free Europe's listeners. Even if they did play a Western song occasionally, it was fifty-fifty with the local songs that we weren't interested in that much back then...''²¹³ Similarly, Ján Bachura: "Well, you can hardly conceive of the music that was played back then. Gott, Duchoň, Kostolányová in Slovakia. (...) You know what, it was unlistenable... (...) And then there were those stations from the Soviet Union, and that was something awful, there was only folklore, the Alexander Ensemble at the most, or some of the other Soviet ensembles."''²¹⁴ Ladislav Plch is even more expressive: "...it was frankly irritating to the utmost (speaking of the Czechoslovak Radio – author's note). They played... it was this Rudolf Cortés or Richard Adam and such all the time, or, from Slovakia, this Siloš Pohanka, and Melánia Olláryová..."''²¹⁵

Radio Luxembourg was one of the few sources of "Western" popular music in socialist Czechoslovakia: "...for one thing, Western records were not available at all, so we actually could not even hear or know Western music from elsewhere than Radio Luxembourg."''²¹⁶ As Ján Bachura says, otherwise, such music got here only occasionally: "...since back then, occasional English or international music practically got into Czechoslovakia only once a year, during the Bratislavská lýra festival, when there was a guest from another country; the rest was practically unlistenable from today's perspective."''²¹⁷

The importance of Radio Luxembourg as a source of foreign music is also documented by Jiří Černý's approach who stopped listening to the station only once other opportunities of getting access to this type of music emerged: "I listened to it the most, I'd say, until the first half of the 1980s because then I already had the opportunity to get records from abroad, borrow them and be informed about it in other ways than just from the radio."''²¹⁸ Ladislav Plch's story is similar, even though this transition happened earlier for him, but for the same reasons: "Later on (from the mid-1960s – author's note) I didn't listen to it because... because

²¹³ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²¹⁴ Interview with Ján Bachura.

²¹⁵ Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²¹⁶ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²¹⁷ Interview with Ján Bachura.

²¹⁸ Interview with Jiří Černý.

all of a sudden, there was a real avalanche, suddenly they started to broadcast it here and (...) above all, travelling became easier, and people brought in LPs... ”²¹⁹

The prime time on Radio Luxembourg for Czechoslovak listeners was Sunday evening²²⁰, the time of the *Top Twenty*²²¹ chart show. Apart from that, they were also used to listening to the programmes during the week, and there were even such who listened to it almost every day during a certain period.²²² Often, they were limited by the fact that there was only one big family radio available in the kitchen²²³, those who were more lucky had a transistor radio²²⁴, allowing them to listen to their favourite radio for instance at work or even during their compulsory military service²²⁵: *”Then I finally got myself a transistor radio, so when I worked as a pointsman and shunter at the railway station, I spent my shift with a transistor radio; I preferred night shifts because then I could listen to Radio Luxembourg. When I was conscripted into military service, I was already leaving with my transistor radio, (...) so I had immeasurable possibilities, among other things, I could listen to Radio Luxembourg all the time.”²²⁶*

Jiří Černý has the following opinion on the importance of Radio Luxembourg in this context: *”I think that the most direct influence of Luxembourg was on music taste, and musical horizons in general. And that was mainly due to the fact that it was a cut and dried musical radio, more so than any other – from Western radios that could be received in our country.”²²⁷* Not to overestimate Radio Luxembourg’s impact in this respect, let us hear the rest of his opinion: *”It certainly influenced the awareness and the taste of young people a lot,*

²¹⁹ Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²²⁰ See e.g. interview with Ján Bachura.

²²¹ See e.g. interview with Júlia Kolářová or Jiří Černý.

²²² For example Ladislav Plch or Jan Šesták: *”Me... almost every day... every day. It was... it was sometime... I remember, in 1950... 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 – at that time, I already knew the charts by heart really.”* In: Interview with Ladislav Plch. *”It can be said that I listened to it every day...”* In: Interview with Jan Šesták.

²²³ *”...I was just sorry that I didn’t have a transistor radio; we only had one radio set in the kitchen, so I was limited by that – when the family gathered there or in late night hours it wasn’t possible to listen to it without disturbing the others (...) and at the time, it was my dream to get a transistor radio, so that I could listen to it all the time, for example in bed.”* In: Interview with Jan Šesták.

²²⁴ *”We had an ordinary big radio, but I listened to this more on my transistor radio, because my parents hated the noise it made... (...) such a tiny little transistor radio; once I stayed alone in the room, I tried tuning it in...”* In: Interview with Ján Bachura.

²²⁵ Miroslav Vaněk wrote about the role of radio stations such as Radio Luxembourg for the soldiers serving their compulsory military service: *“...military radio components allowed skilful handymen to tune in to the desired broadcasts. The boring humdrum life and the stereotype of duties certainly also played their part. (...) Music exuding freedom, music visually wedded to long hair, that is, to something that no one in the military units definitely had at the time, and above all, the sound of the electric guitar, so different from the sound of the bugle announcing another lost day every morning; all of this was helping the young men to live through the unpopular compulsory military service.”* In: Vaněk, op. cit., p. 160.

²²⁶ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²²⁷ Interview with Jiří Černý.

but as for how many these young people were, I wouldn't say that many."²²⁸ Since the number of Luxembourg's listeners in the individual decades of the second half of 20th century certainly varied, we would hardly be able to establish the precise figure, but let us at least mention the results of a study carried out in 1963 – the year when Radio Luxembourg was an indisputable number one in the ratings among foreign stations.²²⁹

The above quotes only confirmed the conclusions about the importance of Radio Luxembourg, as already reflected in professional literature²³⁰ – i.e. that the radio represented above all the source of “Western” popular music for young people, to which they had no other access, since it was not broadcast on Czechoslovak Radio.

6.8. The influence of Radio Luxembourg on musicians in Czechoslovakia

As pointed out in the chapter on the development of popular music in Czechoslovakia, from the mid-1950s, Radio Luxembourg had an influence not only on regular listeners, but also on shaping some of the musicians. Miroslav Vaněk wrote that Radio Luxembourg became one of the key impulses and sources of inspiration for the development of the Czechoslovak beat music, and musicians, both amateur and professional, still recall it, e.g.: *“When I first heard the Beatles and other bands, it was on Radio Luxembourg in 1962. I had never seen them, we were behind the Iron Curtain. We used to play their songs just by ear, having listened to them on the radio,”*²³¹ said a member of music band Brutus. Petr Janda from Olympic recalls being influenced by Radio Luxembourg as well: *“When we were about fourteen, the rock'n'roll rush came, especially thanks to Radio Luxembourg. We were so desperate that we noted down the details about what was played when and who sang it. We also wrote down the lyrics from the radio, which was quite fun.”*²³² Singer Karel Zich had a similar experience: *“While at secondary school, (...) we sang and played rock'n'roll, but also instrumental pieces by the Shadows that we took in from Radio Luxembourg.”*²³³

Pavel Bobek is probably the most famous among Radio Luxembourg's fans. His notebooks containing records of his listening to Radio Luxembourg's evening programmes are notorious: they consist of the names of the songs, their performers and other notes.²³⁴

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Karbusický, Vladimír – Kasan, Jaroslav: *Výzkum současné hudebnosti, hudebního vkusu a zájmů v roce 1963 a jeho výsledky*. Praha 1964, p. 58.

²³⁰ See chapter on Radio Luxembourg in current professional literature.

²³¹ Vaněk, op. cit., p. 157.

²³² Ibid., pp. 157-158.

²³³ Ibid., p. 158.

²³⁴ They are described by Jiří Černý: *Zpěváci bez konzervatoře*. Praha 1966, p. 144. They are also mentioned in part 1 of the Czech Television documentary *Bigbít*, author's archives. Also, they were displayed in the section on

Radio Luxembourg was also a source of inspiration for him when he was looking for a name for his rock and roll shows with his classmate Jiří Laurent at the Paravan theatre – they called it ‘Paralax’ (linking the first two syllables of ‘Paravan’ and ‘Luxembourg’ or ‘Laxík’).²³⁵

Michal Bukovič, an excellent Czech lyric writer, also remembers Radio Luxembourg²³⁶: “I grew up in the Fifties, so the only music that I had known was Milan Chladil and Rudolf Kortés and their kind, and I even had no idea that you could sing in a different language than Czech.”²³⁷ His sister who emigrated to Sweden sent him Paul Anka’s record as a birthday present, and that was the first time when he heard someone sing in English – and it dazzled him. “Then I started listening to Radio Luxembourg, where these kinds of songs were all the rage...”²³⁸

In his first book, *Zpěváci bez konzervatoře (Singers Without a Music Degree, translator’s note)*, in the chapter called *The big beat alias rock’n’roll has arrived*, Jiří Černý sketches brief profiles of Czechoslovak “rock stars”, almost all of them mentioning Radio Luxembourg in one context or another. For instance Pavel Sedláček found his way to music in the same way as dozens of others: he got a guitar as a present, sat next to the radio set and jotted down the lyrics from Luxembourg. Pete Kaplan, while studying at the Faculty of Radio Engineering in Poděbrady, took his grandma’s two valve radio, which brought the melodies from Radio Luxembourg to the students’ hall of residence. The notebooks he has kept from these times are a testimony of his studies: on one side, mathematics and dialectical materialism, on the other, a song from “Laxík”. Also Yvonne Přenosilová had learned from her classmates that it was possible to listen to a station like Radio Luxembourg, and soon knew who Haley, Presley and Cliff Richard were.²³⁹

Bass guitarist of the Matadors band, Otto J. Bezloja, claims: “Luxembourg had a much greater influence than all those phonograph records, (...) Elvis, Little Richard... when I first heard him... it was from the discs, but the real beginning, the evolution, that was Radio Luxembourg.”²⁴⁰ And the personal impression of Vladimír Mišík, still an important guitar

how the Beatles’s music got to Czechoslovakia of the “Beatlemánie” exhibition at the Moravské zemské muzeum (Moravian Museum) in Brno that took place from 25 May 2011 to 20 January 2012.

²³⁵ Konrád – Lindaur, op. cit., p. 19.

²³⁶ The lyricist teamed up with singer Karel Zich, for whom he wrote a number of big hits such as ‘Paráda’, but also the lyrics for the song ‘Luxembourg nám hrál’ (‘Let Luxembourg Go On’ – translator’s note). He also wrote lyrics for Karel Gott and many others.

²³⁷ Video from the Czech Television programme *Kam zmizel ten starý song (Where did that old song disappear, translator’s note)* with Michal Bukovič as a guest. Internet source.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Černý, Jiří: *Zpěváci bez konzervatoře*. Praha 1966, pp. 121, 128, 135.

²⁴⁰ *Bigbít*, Czech Television documentary, part 1, author’s archives.

player: *"At that time, Radio Luxembourg made the most intense impression from all this new stuff that what was happening; they really played rock'n'roll and big beat..."*²⁴¹

Also other musicians, appearing in *Bigbít*, a Czech Television documentary, remembered having listened to Radio Luxembourg: Jiří Šimák, Tatiana and Naďa Němcová (part 2), Pavel Sedláček (part 3), Radim Hladík and Vladimír Mišík (part 8), Ivo Plicka (part 10), Pavol Hammel (part 12), Michal Prokop (part 13).²⁴²

Again, not to overrate Radio Luxembourg's role in this respect, we should mention that radio presenter Jiří Černý states that he was more influenced by printed English texts, that is, English magazines, than by Radio Luxembourg.²⁴³

6.9. The role of Radio Luxembourg among groups of young people

In a group of young people, music is generally one of the themes welding people together – you can dance to it or simply listen to it together and talk about it. Since Radio Luxembourg offered heaps of popular music in comparison to other radio stations, it also played a role in this respect. It was a significant phenomenon among young people from socialist Czechoslovakia, as proved by the answers to the question whether friends or acquaintances of the narrators also listened to the radio station: *"Exactly, because... because you listened to it together with your friends, it was sort of together. (...) The joy of being together and as I said, we also danced... (laughter)."*²⁴⁴ Ladislav Plch said: *"With this Ivoš Bláha or Tonda Bělař, we would discuss it on our way from school or from the swimming pool, from the training: 'Did you hear this and that on Laxík yesterday...?' And Tonda was also good at imitating it... (laughter)."*²⁴⁵ And Jan Šesták: *"Our classmate Klára Babrajová once came into the classroom, (...) saying that she very much liked Elvis Presley (...), and so I realised that it was not just me, that there were more young people who were interested in it, and that it wasn't true that they would all be limited to what was available on our radio..."*²⁴⁶

It was often through friends that one started listening to Radio Luxembourg: *"I had a friend who was a big music lover, and he knew that on that hill of ours, I could catch all sorts*

²⁴¹ Ibid., part 8, author's archives.

²⁴² Ibid., listed parts, author's archives.

²⁴³ Interview with Jiří Černý.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Libuše Šťastná.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Jan Šesták.

of things on our radio set that he himself couldn't. So for the first time, I listened to it with him, then we took in another friend, and then I listened to it alone as well."²⁴⁷

Jan Šesták also wrote about the forming of groups of children at school who listened to Radio Luxembourg, and commented on the advantages: *"...at secondary school, in the early 1960s, there were always two groups of kids that formed before the first bell. The first mainly discussed the TV programme of the previous evening, while the other, consisting of us, those without a TV set, discussed all the rest, including what we heard in the evening on Radio Luxembourg. We were seemingly at a disadvantage, 'losers', as we could be called today, but the irony of fate played its part. We listened to Laxik every evening until midnight, and even though doing other things at the same time, for instance for school, such an intense contact must have had an impact on our English.*"²⁴⁸

Radio Luxembourg also produced idols that young people could admire: *"...we talked about it also with those (...) friends of ours, because that (hit parade – author's note) was then presented by an idol of ours of the time, his name was (...) disc jockey Joe, I think. We'd never seen him in our lives, but then came times when people brought those plastic bags from Hungary with emblems of Abba, Brotherhood of Man, Sweet, Slade – and we were completely thrilled, and some of these had his face on it – and he looked like – like an old Indian, he had such long hair, well, for a 14-year old brat, he was the idol of the idols... (laughter).*"²⁴⁹

Listening to Radio Luxembourg was also a means of fitting in: *"...it can be said that it became a necessity at the time that if you wanted to succeed in that group of six or eight boys, you had to know what was on Radio Luxembourg on the day or evening before.*"²⁵⁰ Also Jiří Černý mentioned this: *"...because then those hits they played were discussed, their titles mentioned, so one wanted to be "in", as they say, one tried to know what the others knew. (...) It can be said that at least a half of the boys in class (...) was always interested in this modern dance music in one way or another.*"²⁵¹

The fact that music and Radio Luxembourg connected people does not exclude it also being a means of setting oneself apart from the others, which is usually also important for

²⁴⁷ Interview with Libuše Šťastná. See also other interviews: *"...the most likely source is that the information simply got around at the grammar school..."* In: Interview with Júlia Kolářová. *"...through friends, for example those who played some musical instrument..."* In: Interview with Jiří Černý. *"...I got a tip from friends, classmates, that sometimes you can also hear some other music, rock, big beat, that's what they called it at the time."* In: Interview with Ján Bachura. *"...I suspect that a tip from a friend of mine, Tonda Bélař, was behind all this (...), he was a year older than me, and at twelve or thirteen, this meant being very much ahead, I mean in terms of keeping track of things..."* In: Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²⁴⁸ Šesták, Jan: *Dělají z neznačkových školáků socky rodiče?* Internet source.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Ján Bachura.

²⁵⁰ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²⁵¹ Interview with Jiří Černý.

young people in their journey to maturity. We have already mentioned the group of children listening to Radio Luxembourg setting itself apart from those who already had a TV set at home. This is how Ladislav Plch remembers it: *"...we were real outsiders, you know, (...) there was only this one friend and this Tonda Bělař, otherwise the whole of my class and all the friends I know, they were wild about Matuška and Pilarová and such stuff, (...) of course Gott, and so on from 1962 on. And I know that with them, you really couldn't discuss this."*²⁵²

In simple terms, as Jiří Černý claims, Radio Luxembourg *"was a part of adolescence – in the same way as sports, ball games and ballroom dancing courses."*²⁵³

6.10. Radio Luxembourg as a source of English

Apart from music, which had the key role on Radio Luxembourg, there were also the presenters' commentaries²⁵⁴. Since the language of the broadcasts was English, it begs the question to what degree Czechoslovak listeners were able to understand what the Radio Luxembourg disc jockeys were saying. The answers vary, depending on whether the listeners had the possibility to study English at school or take private lessons.

For instance Ján Bachura was one of those who weren't lucky in having English at school: *"Well I was completely lost. I couldn't – I didn't know any English, (...) but I could speak Russian, but then they didn't broadcast in Russian..."*²⁵⁵

Once a young person got access to English, this often led him directly to Luxembourg, as Jan Šesták comments: *"...even though I can't generalise, usually those who were already learning English, who were lucky to have English at school, then we can say they all listened to it, (...) it was a completely logical outcome, this Radio Luxembourg, it was a completely natural way of getting access to living English, to live music..."*²⁵⁶ Also Libuše Šťastná confirms this: *"Well, I studied (English – author's note), so this was actually also the reason why it was on..."*²⁵⁷, as well as rock'n'roll singer Pavel Sedláček: *"Since I had been learning English from the age of eight, I listened to Luxembourg..."*²⁵⁸

²⁵² Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²⁵³ Interview with Jiří Černý.

²⁵⁴ See also chapter on the atmosphere in Radio Luxembourg and its DJs.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Ján Bachura. The lacking knowledge of English was also a source of various funny anecdotes: *"I knew that there was a band called the "Beatles" (pronounced as it would be read out in Czech [ˈbe ʌt, les] – author's and translator's note), I had read about them. But I hadn't heard any of their songs. From time to time, they played some songs by a band called the [Bi:tlz], but then, no one ever wrote about them."* In: Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Libuše Šťastná.

²⁵⁸ *Bigbít*, Czech Television documentary, part 2, author's archives.

When asked about English on Radio Luxembourg, Júlia Kolářová answered: *"I used to go to (...) a primary school with an extended English language programme, so at secondary school, I already had quite a passable knowledge of English. (...) I was really immersed in English and it (meaning Radio Luxembourg – author's note) felt so groovy... (laughter)."*²⁵⁹ The entertainment element is mentioned by Jiří Černý: *"And I have to say that we enjoyed, I mean us boys, learning the basic phrases, like – 'Radio Luxembourg, your station of the stars', and so on, and we kept repeating it until we tired of it..."*²⁶⁰

From 1957 on, Radio Luxembourg also broadcast a programme in German, which was listened to in Czechoslovakia as well. Some listeners had the impression that for them, German was easier to understand than English: *"I also used to listen to Vienna, and I'd say that I better understood the German from Vienna than the English from Luxembourg."*²⁶¹ One of the few to listen to Luxembourg in German was Ladislav Plch: *"At the time, I listened to the German Radio Luxembourg in parallel with the English one."* (JŠ: *"But then you were one of the few to catch it..."*) *"Was I? But it was also thanks to my listening to Vienna: even though I didn't speak German either, I was able to better dig out the names out of the German than out of English. (...) German, for me, those sounds, it seemed very familiar, very close, I managed to make some sense out of it..."*²⁶²

However, the English broadcast had greater audiences, undoubtedly also thanks to strong personalities among the disc jockeys and a better airtime (from 7:30 p.m. as opposed to early afternoons for the German broadcasts). *"And above all, we weren't that much interested in the German broadcasts; we were simply waiting for the English..."*²⁶³ explains Jan Šesták.

Miroslav Vaněk wrote about AFN Munich listeners voluntarily learning English to understand the broadcasts.²⁶⁴ Was the situation the same with Radio Luxembourg? Judging from the testimonies, we can conclude that there is no doubt about it.

For example Michal Bukovič, who later became a famous author of song lyrics, admitted that at school, he used to have Ds from English but *"...out of interest in Luxembourg, in what the people there were saying and signing, I learned English as an autodidact."*²⁶⁵ In Jan Šesták's blog, we can read that *"we used to write our homework while listening to Laxik, without realising that our school English was getting better above all*

²⁵⁹ Interview with Júlia Kolářová.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Jiří Černý.

²⁶¹ Interview with Libuše Šťastná.

²⁶² Interview with Ladislav Plch.

²⁶³ Interview with Jan Šesták.

²⁶⁴ Vaněk, op. cit., p. 159.

²⁶⁵ Video from the Czech Television programme *Kam zmizel ten starý song* with Michal Bukovič as guest. Internet source.

thanks to the fact that we listened to English radio up to several hours a day."²⁶⁶ He also compared Luxembourg broadcasts to available English textbooks: *"So we didn't learn English just from the textbooks. Also, they weren't very entertaining; the topics of the lessons were more about our industry and agriculture, and if there was an occasional lesson devoted to England, it was only to describe the success of the Russian ballet, which had come to London."*²⁶⁷ In the interview, he mentioned again that Radio Luxembourg was important for him in establishing contact with English: *"Well, I think that it certainly influenced me in the sense that it enabled me to learn English, and I never had problems understanding someone or another station. (...) We didn't want to be good at English for the sake of being good at English; we wanted to be good at English so that we could understand what they said on Radio Luxembourg and what the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and so on were singing..."*²⁶⁸

We should not overestimate the importance of Radio Luxembourg in this respect; there were definitely also other stimuli and means to hone one's linguistic skills, not only in English. Luxembourg, however, provided not just English but also heaps of music, so the listeners could mix "business with pleasure" and must have absorbed at least some English as a result of everyday listening.

²⁶⁶ Šesták, Jan: *Rádio Luxembourg i slavný Tony Prince opět na scéně*. Internet source.

²⁶⁷ Šesták, Jan: *Dělají z neznačkových školáků socky rodiče?* Internet source.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Jan Šesták.