

Samizdat, Houses of Culture and Entertainment

It's stuck in the middle of almost every housing estate. It's the maximum one-story-high, grey house of culture. Sometimes it has an attached pub. In it are a couple of people who endure its dehumanized space. In the assembly hall is a course on sewing, English, or yoga. At the strike of 8 o'clock in the evening the building empties. On the occasion when a concert is to be held a ticket-taker stands before the entrance and waits for those who come. That is when someone comes at all. . . .

For the most part, residents of the housing estates ignore their assembly halls. Perhaps, to be sure, this is understandable for those courses on aerobics. But an evening at a concert? Why miss that? Residents usually sit in front of the television, and when they desire to go somewhere, the town's center isn't that far away. There was that time two years ago when the weekly jazz show took place in Litochlebech (Prague 4) and a total of 8 people showed up. Often not even stars have it easy at housing estates. Mišík has to be happy in such a Prague venue when 12 people show up. Michal Prokop can sell out *Lucerna*, but for his housing-estate concert only a handful of people attend. And groups like *Nahlas* or *Krausberry*? They haven't yet been on television, so who would go see them! . . .

The program director of a house of culture out in the suburbs doesn't have it easy. He has to show a profit. But how, when other than the Saturday showing of children's films (daddies lead their offspring here, then hurry to the adjacent pub), not even a leg turns up?

Live music is dying at the housing estates. We do find a couple of exceptions. In Prague, for example, there is the Junior Club at *Na Chmelnici* or the generally reasonable folklore club *Petynka* in Břevnov. But those are specially oriented affairs with long-standing continuity, the reputations of which are high among musicians and the public. Furthermore, they are more like suburbs than housing estates. The houses of culture in Prague 4 or the newly developing South Town [*Jižní město*] have nothing in common with this cultural prowess.

We find two types of consequences. A vicious circle -- no spectator, no money, nothing invites us, no spectator, etc. Not only is the dead social life of the housing estate damaged. At the same time opportunities for less known, but often very interesting artists are destroyed. In many cases professional groups quickly break up, because without records or television no one would come to a housing estate to hear them. . . .

It's peculiar that, despite it all, a lot of young people can be found who go to work in these facilities with the image that they will waken the heights of the housing estates. Generally they last a year before another idealist replaces them, who then soon is also cured of the illusion that something of quality will attract at least a couple of visitors to the dear concrete churches of our age.

Source: Michal Sedloň, "Concrete Culture [Betonová kultura]," trans. Cathleen M. Giustino, *Lidové noviny*, June 1988, n. 6, p. 19.