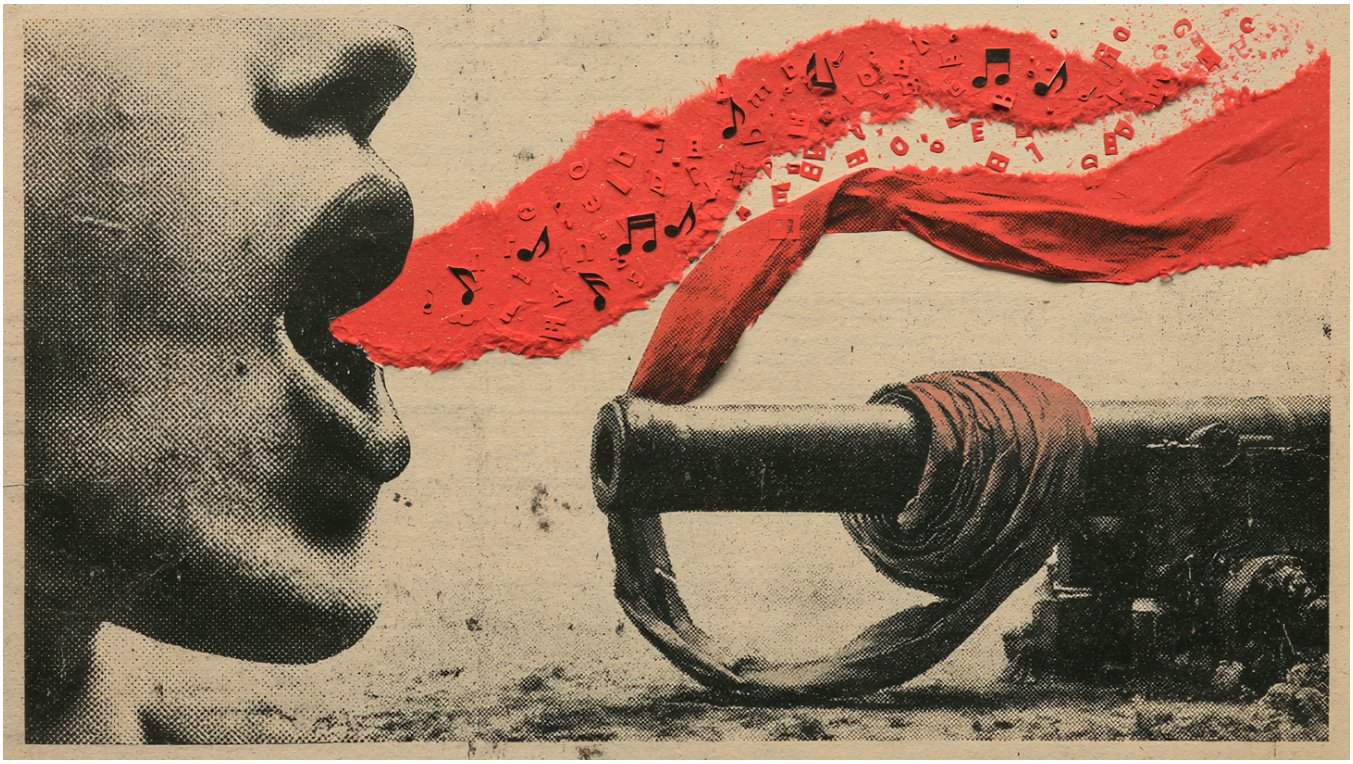

FRIEDENSNOTE NR. 54

The Greatest Power

Words can be a punch of the fist or a caressing hand, they can lure us into war or bring about peace – Udo Jürgens wrote a hymn to the word.

The singer of „Merci, Cherie“ and „Aber bitte mit Sahne“, often underestimated as a mere „schmaltz peddler“, turned to serious subjects early in his career. A chansonnier who, through his generally accessible choice of words and his stirring melodies, knew how to carry along a great many „ordinary“ people, so that his political messages reached far and wide. Udo Jürgens was known and loved in the former GDR as well. For the author he became a lifelong companion and teacher.

„Wort“ is an eight-minute symphonic chanson that Jürgens performed in 1980 together with the Berlin Philharmonic. It calls to mind film music and has a heart-opening effect. The lyrics, too, are anything but banal. For the word can be weapon or caress; it has already „led peoples astray“, yet it is also capable of making peace. If only East and West had understood the singer's message!

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AUTHOR	Christian Günther
SONG	Wort
PERFORMER	Udo Jürgens
ALBUM	Udo ’80, 1980

Notes of peace.

Peace.

Notes.

Can songs, can music decide over war and peace?

Can a word?

Or several words become sentence and sentences?

Can language steer our doing and acting so far that we sooner understand or even love, or else hate and ultimately kill?

Yes. I believe, yes.

All the more so when word and notes unite, when out of a few words and a few tones a song is born that penetrates the soul and resonates within us, echoes, lays feelings bare and kindles thoughts.

The great Udo Jürgens released, at the end of 1979, his altogether very important album „Udo ‘80“, on which, as the final track, the symphonic work „Wort“ – recorded with the Berlin Philharmonic under the supervision of Herbert von Karajan and forming the basis of this article – was first published. After long conversations and the thematic impulse from Udo Jürgens, who, as with almost all of his songs, also composed it, Oliver Spiecker wrote the lyrics according to his ideas.

At the time of its release I was fourteen months old. Only when I was fourteen years old did this magnificent work reach me, in what I still find to this day the even more beautiful – because still more intense, still more penetrating – live version on the album „Open Air Symphony“, which had just appeared.

My God, I was fourteen and listening to such music! I was fourteen and searching for substance, for a foundation that might give me and my life solid ground, in this world so plainly rather muddled and often truly – at least by us humans – not thought through to the end.

Udo was a good teacher of life; he is one to this day, perhaps the best. But that might one day be a subject for a book of its own …

There you are, fourteen years old, and that amid historic events, born in the GDR, which had just collapsed under its own ideological foolishness in a peaceful furor probably almost unique in history; you want to go through puberty, but you also want, with the seriousness it deserves, first to understand the world and second to improve it, and then you are offered these lines as a thought exercise to distract you from your unfounded permanent erection along with your megalomaniac revolutionary fantasies:

ORIGINAL

„Wort, du bist Gedankenelement

Kannst Illusion sein, die verbrennt

Bist unbegreiflich, wenn man dich begriffen nennt

Wort, du trägst so vielerlei Symbol

Bist in Ideen Weltenpol

Kannst überladen sein und auch bisweilen hohl

Wort, du bist so leise und so sacht

Dabei hast du die größte Macht

Die diesen Erdenball umschließt und ihn regiert

Wort, du wirst geflüstert und zitiert

Du bist der Leitstrahl, der uns führt

Hast Krieg und Frieden schon diktiert

Wort, du hast so vielerlei Gestalt

Und bist so unerreichbar alt

Kannst glühend heiß sein und so kalt

Wort, du wirst missbraucht und kommandiert

Hast Diktatoren dirigiert

Und ganze Völker schon verführt

Wort, bist du auch manchmal rigoros

Und triffst uns wie ein Degenstoß

Denn deine Wirkung ist nicht nur im Guten groß

Wort, du bist so zärtlich und so warm

Dein Klang nimmt uns in seinen Arm

Du bist die Brücke, die die Menschen näherbringt

Wort, du wirst melodisch, wenn man singt

Bist ein Signal, das in uns dringt

Du bist die Sinfonie, die nie verklingt.“

ÜBERSETZUNG

> *„Word, you are an element of thought*
>
> *Can be illusion that burns away*
>
> *Are beyond grasp once one calls you grasped*
>
> *Word, you carry so many a symbol*
>
> *Are in ideas the pole of worlds*
>
> *Can be overladen and at times hollow too*
>
> *Word, you are so quiet and so soft*
>
> *And yet you hold the greatest power*
>
> *That encircles this earthly globe and rules it*
>
> *Word, you are whispered and are quoted*
>
> *You are the guiding beam that leads us*
>
> *Have dictated war and peace before*
>
> *Word, you have so many a form*
>
> *And are so unreachably old*
>
> *Can be glowing hot and just as cold*
>
> *Word, you are misused and commanded*
>
> *Have conducted dictators*
>
> *And led whole peoples astray before*
>
> *Word, at times you too are ruthless*
>
> *And strike us like the thrust of a blade*
>
> *For your effect is not only great in good*
>
> *Word, you are so tender and so warm*
>
> *Your sound takes us into its arms*
>
> *You are the bridge that draws people closer*
>
> *Word, you turn melodic when one sings*
>
> *Are a signal that pierces into us*
>
> *You are the symphony that never fades away.“*

Doubt as an answer. Well, wonderful!

Doubt as an answer. Yes, wonderful!

Perhaps this is the most important lesson my teacher of life was able to pass on to me: Trust when the word truly feels sincere, lived, and felt from the deepest of hearts. Even when it is flawed and not free of human blemishes.

But distrust, for heaven's sake distrust (!!!), when you sense tactics, calculation, or morally charged promises of salvation! Trust the one who doubts. Distrust the one who threatens you with wisdoms as though from a court of last resort and without alternative. All the more so when he threatens you with contempt and reprisals should you not obey them.

The word can caress and console, reconcile, extend a hand, dig for truth and sincerity and conjure peace. But the word can also sow discord, nourish contempt, spew hatred and ignite war. Perhaps we do not always manage to grasp the truth, but it is enough to recognise the lie, to unmask it, in order to serve peace.

„In the beginning was the Word", that first sentence from the Gospel of John echoes through ever emptier naves. And whoever among us has not yet lost his own wholly personal relation to God, entirely independent of man-made denominations, can feel it almost physically, this fabled force of a firm word.

To believe that a powerfully booming „Let there be light!" sufficed for light to come to be a short while later, everyone must decide for himself; but that a hundred-thousandfold, persistently voiced „We are the people!", called out peacefully yet resolutely, can bring an ideologically hyperventilating system of power crashing down and make a protecting power armed to the teeth withdraw instead of shooting everything to pieces, we have lived through. We have also learned that a wildly bawled „Yes!" from ten thousand whipped-up throats, in answer to the diabolical question „Do you want total war?", led into ruin.

> *Call me naive when, after the third glass of wine, I like to try to picture how it might have been if, in that moment in February 1943 in the Berlin Sportpalast, Göbbels had been met with a ten-thousandfold „NO!" in answer to his question.*

Would he have had all ten thousand shot on the spot? Hardly. Most of them, however, will in the following two years of that insane war probably have lost their lives anyway; at the very least their

livelihoods.

> *Wort, du wirst missbraucht und kommandiert*
>
> *Hast Diktatoren dirigiertUnd ganze Völker schon verführt,*

but just as much and just as true:

> *Wort, du bist so zärtlich und so warm*
>
> *Dein Klang nimmt uns in seinen Arm*
>
> *Du bist die Brücke, die die Menschen näherbringt.*

When someone today says with fiery zeal and tolerating no doubt that he wants to deliver outlawed cluster munitions into a war in order to achieve peace –

When someone today offers his care for our health even at the price of my existential annihilation –

When someone, threatening contempt in case of non-compliance, wants to forbid certain phrasings because, ideologically filtered, they might perhaps be understood as contemptuous of humanity –

When a democrat calls the 50 percent who do not agree with him anti-democrats –

When someone wants my trust but demands blind, uncritical obedience –

> *Wort, du trägst so vielerlei Symbol*
>
> *Bist in Ideen Weltenpol*
>
> *Kannst überladen sein und auch bisweilen hohl.*

No, I sadly do not always recognise the truth, but I do recognise the lie!

Thank you, Udo!

LISTEN & WATCH

FIRST PUBLISHED ON MANOVA

www.manova.news/artikel/die-grosste-macht-2

THE SONG IN ITS ORIGINAL · YOUTUBE

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD5d0Q1yOw0

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Christian Günther, Jahrgang 1978, wurde in Eberswalde, damals DDR, geboren. Hauptberuflich ist er Lebenskünstler und kritischer Geist, nebenberuflich Gastronom, Konzertveranstalter und freiberuflicher Autor von Songtexten, Essays und Artikeln.

Er hält Zuversicht für die erste Bürgerpflicht und die Möglichkeit zum Ausleben von Satire für den besten Gradmesser für den Zustand einer Gesellschaft.

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