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Lost in Music

The Cornel Chiriac-Story

by Patrick Banush

(SWR/WDR/BR)

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Sound: Someone trying to find a station on a short wave radio. Finally the right one gets tuned in. We hear the young and flirtatious voice of a sixtyish female announcer with a Romanian accent:

Trudi

“LOST IN MUSIC. The Cornel Chiriac Story. A feature by Patrick Banush.”

The short wave sound becomes a warm, full, analogue '70s signal. A break in the theme music is followed by the innocently flirtatious voice that announced the title of the feature. But now--it's 30 years ago. She announces in Romanian: "Metronom saptezecisicinci ...La microfon: Cornel Chiriac." The dynamic theme song ends and we hear Cornel's voice.

Cornel

Aveti salutul lui cornel chiriac...si invitatia de a va delecta... *(continues in the background)*

Trudi

March 4, 1975: You don't understand what he's saying? The broadcast is in Romanian. Only it's not coming from Romania, but from a former military hospital in the Englischer Garten in Munich. The name of the programme: "Metronom". Its creator: Cornel Chiriac, age 33. The topic this afternoon, at 4:15 pm, is the last album of British blues rockers The Groundhogs.

For a moment we hear Cornel again at full volume.

Trudi

And who am I?

Sound: back to the theme song

Trudi (in the past): "metronom saptezecisicinci"

Trudi

Metronom 1975: I'm Trudi, the voice from the opening. Anyone who wanted to listen to Cornel – and there were many who did – had to listen to me first. And that's why I'm here bringing you the story of Cornel Chiriac, the most famous yet loneliest radio DJ in the world. And the story doesn't begin on this cold winter day in Munich, but more than 20 years earlier...

Music: Romanian folk music.

Trudi

...in the Romanian town of Pitești, an hour north of Bucharest...during the Stalinist 1950s.

Sound: Someone trying to find a radio station.

Trudi

Cornel is only twelve years old. And although his parents are party members, one day their son manages to stumble across a banned radio station.

Original recording: The signature music of Voice Of America.

Willis Conover:

Willis Conover in Washington DC with "The Voice of America" Jazz Hour.

Starting here: old jazz recordings with a lot of short wave static...

Trudi

Willis Conover's jazz programme for the Voice of America is broadcast worldwide...on short wave radio. The transmitted signal is shot into outer space and bounces off the ionosphere (the electrically charged area of the stratosphere). It transcends borders, distance and iron curtains, and finds its way (*whispers close to the microphone*) directly into Cornel's ear.

Trudi

Despite the bad reception, Cornel is wild about the programme. And dreams of being part of the jazz world--western, bourgeois and banned in Romania.

Linda Schuster

As a kid he was basically glued to the radio. He was a total loner and all he did was listen to music.

Trudi

That was Linda Schuster, age 58. More about her in a moment. But first: a then 47-year-old former actor and novice politician.

1958 commercial:

My name is Ronald Reagan. Last year the contribution of 60 million Americans to the "crusade for freedom" made possible this 135,000 watt Radio Free Europe transmitter...
(*Continues in the background*)

Trudi

In 1956 the USA launches another station: Radio Free Europe is broadcast out of Munich to the Eastern bloc. Not far from the Iron Curtain, exiles create programming in their native languages. And Reagan does the fundraising for a powerful new transmitter that will show those Communists!

Reagan

...the crusade of freedom is your chance and mine to fight communism.

Music: More traditional Romanian music.

Trudi

Like the ones in Romania. The Schuster family are among several hundred thousand Transylvanian Saxons residing in Braşov—or, as it's called in German, Kronstadt. Their little girl's name is Linda.

Linda Schuster

The regime was tough, of course. You never knew what the next day had in store and all we wanted was to live in freedom. That's why my parents started applying – as early as when I was ten years old – for permission to emigrate to Germany.

Trudi

And until that happens, they dream of the West.

Sound: Someone trying to find a radio station.

Linda Schuster

We listened to RIAS Berlin quite a bit...and in the afternoon to Radio Free Europe. That was not allowed. It was kind of amazing--under regimes like that children always know what you can't talk about.

Music: a martial propaganda march.

Trudi

A regime, under which a former shoemaker's apprentice from the village of Scornicești can make it to the top. 1954: Membership in the Central Committee. From '55: In charge of the Politburo's organisation and cadre. His name: Nicolae Ceaușescu...in his mid-thirties and the protégé of party leader Gheorghiu-Dej.

Music: Big band tune by Johnny Raducanu.

Trudi

The Sixties: The decline of Stalinism. The jazz ban is lifted. Cornel, now 19, publishes his own little handwritten magazine. His subscribers: three musicians in Bucharest. Johnny Raducanu – whose big band we're listening to right now – pays him a visit and is enthusiastic about the young man who gets starry-eyed when he talks about jazz. Someone like that belongs in Bucharest.

Theme song: "intilnire cu jazzul"

Female voice:

Intilnire cu jazzul, presinta cornel chiriac.

Trudi

Starting in 1963, Cornel presents the first jazz broadcasts on post-war Romanian radio.

Cornel: (as presenter)

dragi ascultatori dupa cum am anuntat, luni 18. mai a avut loc in sala de concerte a clubului de jazz de pe langa palatul culturi

Trudi

He writes a book about Louis Armstrong...is a co-founder of the first Eastern European jazz association...and in the evenings he lectures in packed student clubs—using a record player.

Linda Schuster

It was a very intense time, but - because of the sword of Communism hanging over his head – a dangerous one as well.

Trudi

The entire state-run radio is full of apparatchiks. Long-haired Cornel doesn't get paid because he doesn't punch the clock every morning at 8. No one cares that he works whole nights without a break. His standard greeting to the skulking watchdogs of the Communist Party: "So, what are you guarding today? Mediocrity?" That can land you in prison.

End of Johnny Raducanu's big band tune.

Music: Rock song by Mondial.

Ceaușescu:

Ne aducem o contribuție precioasă la dezvoltarea marxismului-leninismului...

Trudi

Communist Party leader Gheorghiu-Dej dies in 1965. The new secretary-general's name is Ceaușescu. Will he be an innovator? A reformer? One thing's certain: He's a stutterer who barely has command of his native language.

Influenced by beat music and the American hippie movement, something completely new blossoms in Bucharest: Rock. Front and centre once again: Cornel Chiriac. Here's the band Mondial with "Primavara." Could this be the start of a thaw?

Linda Schuster

It was a time when people were no longer willing to put up with everything. But we didn't sense that – back then there was no hope – that something would change.

Music: "Canarul", a dark, melancholy song that starts with the sad chirping of a bird.

Trudi

Even Phoenix, an up-and-coming band from Timisoara, have no such illusions. In their gloomy "Canarul", a canary dreams that its cage is open...and it crashes against the bars of the locked door.

Background sound: production office.

Trudi

Nevertheless: Cornel - now 26 - and his co-producer Geo seize the opportunity...and manage to secure a time slot for the first pop/rock broadcast in the history of Romania. But they can't come up with a name for the show!

Sound: rhythmical ticking

Trudi

Geo has been training as a target shooter. In the office he's always making the sound of the beat to which the targets are revealed and covered--using a...metronome...and...

"Delicado", Metronom's 1967 theme song (by James Last) is heard.

Female voice

Metronom. Presinta Cornel Chiriac

Trudi

....and that's precisely what they call their programme. The theme music is a little off base, but extremely catchy.

Music: "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (Bob Dylan)

Trudi

Starting on July 10, 1967, Cornel gets to play his favourite musician Bob Dylan, as well as Janis Joplin, The Doors, The Beatles, the Stones, and blues and soul—every week at 5:15 pm on the Romanian communist radio station...even if Cornel often has to get his records illegally from the American embassy. He translates the lyrics, is in constant trouble with the censors and is soon proclaiming a new star on the music horizon:

Cornel: (OFF)

astazi in cadrul rubricile rezervate rythm n bluesului, soulului si in general stilurilor si scholilor muzicale negre aflate la limita dintre folclor si muzica pop i-mi vreau sa dedic emisiunea unui mare artist al caruia nume va spune desigur foarte multe: (ON) Jimi Hendrix!

Music: "Hey Joe" (Jimi Hendrix)

Trudi

Cornel loves Hendrix and Dylan. And all the young Romanians love Cornel and his programme Metronom.

Background sound: restaurant.

Trudi

Emil Hidos. Today he's 58, back then a 17-year-old waiter in Bistrița. He likes to party and gets hassled by the police because his hair is too long.

Emil Hidos

I was a fan of Elvis, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, I mean, from the very beginning. And you didn't hear...you never heard anything like that on Radio Romania.

Trudi

Now you do.

Music: "Get Off of My Cloud" (Rolling Stones)

Emil Hidos

All the kids in my neighbourhood were home between 5 and 6 pm listening to Metronom. I can say with 100% certainty that it opened our eyes. We viewed our lives much, much differently, as well as the difference between communism und freedom.

End of Stones track. Cue: "Think" (Aretha Franklin), with a lot of reverb, as if coming down a long corridor.

Trudi

Linda Schuster is now 18 and living in Iași, in northeastern Romania. In the overcrowded dormitory of the German department, there is only one topic of discussion.

Linda Schuster

It was precisely the musicians' lyrics that were considered dissident, right? In other words: the music itself. Not Cornel Chiriac's on-air presence. Naturally, he had to move within a certain framework in order to avoid arrest. But he was always able to express his thoughts in a way that let his listeners know what he was actually talking about.

Music: Aretha Franklin singing "Freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom!"

Trudi:

Namely, freedom!

Background sound: Small town atmosphere

Trudi
Early 1968 in Iași.

Linda Schuster
One afternoon a young man crossed my path and I knew right away that I had never seen him before in this college town. Not with a moustache like that...and he had longer hair than most people. You weren't allowed to wear your hair long back then. And he was very slim and interesting-looking.

Music: "Totusi Sint Ca Voi" (rock band Phoenix live)

Trudi
That evening Linda sees the man again. The voice that thrilled an entire generation of young people is standing on the stage as the jury president of the national student music competition. And the winners are: Phoenix. With their open and courageous lyrics.

Background sound: beach (sea, children yelling). Phoenix' "Ca voi sunt" is heard on portable radios.

Trudi
That summer, due to its huge success, Metronom is broadcast daily. Live from the Black Sea, in a holiday hotel in Mamaia.

Evening beach sounds.

Trudi
Emil Hidos from Bistrița, age 18, works here as a waiter during the holidays and hangs out in the evenings with Cornel and his entourage.

Emil Hidos
After we were done with work, he with his broadcast and I with my shift, we would meet down at the Hotel Flora and drink, talk and what have you until 5 or 6 in the morning. I was very proud to be standing a few feet away from Cornel Chiriac.

Trudi
Typically, the hotel manager is an informant for the Securitate.

Emil Hidos
He was always in our vicinity in the evenings. He wanted to hear what we were saying.

Trudi
Cornel goes to the manager...and...drops his pants...

Emil Hidos
...and he said, "If you want to hear something, listen to my ass." He was a real character and had real guts. If he had an opinion about something, he said it. He didn't give a damn about the consequences.

Ominous soundtrack music is heard.

Trudi

The Czechs want freedom of opinion too. Dubcek's reforms are pointing the country toward social democracy. But on August 21 1968, the Prague Spring is quashed by the Soviets. Surprisingly, only one head of state stays out of it.

Ceaușescu

Cetateni ai tari romanesti. patrunderea trupelor celor cinc tari socialiste in chechoslovacia...

Trudi

Nicolae Ceaușescu. He even publicly condemns the invasion. It's not that he's in favour of democracy. He's afraid of being the next one on the Russians' list. As a result he turns up the pressure domestically: Liberalisation in culture and society - a possible provocation to the Soviets - must cease.

Two things are waiting for Cornel back in Bucharest in his office at the radio station: An invitation to the conference of the Eastern European Jazz Association. Location: Bratislava, CSR...

Background sound: typewriters clicking.

Trudi

He applies for permission to attend. Without it you can't leave the country.

And one more bit of news. Effective immediately: fewer songs with critical lyrics. Less American music. Every song must be approved by the censors prior to broadcast. And that makes Cornel want to be really provocative. In early 1969 he pulls out all the stops...with millions of Metronom fans listening.

Background sound: production office (typewriters, telephones ringing etc.)

Trudi (softly)

He secretly switches the tape that the censors have approved, and the following song gets played:

Music: Ominous soundtrack music culminates in a timpani crescendo.

Music: Beatles singing "Back in the USSR"....

...followed by the sound of the needle being ripped from the Beatles record.

Trudi

"Back in the USSR. You don't know how lucky you are." And that after the suppression of the Prague Spring--on the radio station of a nation trying to embrace Stalinism once again. Metronom is immediately taken off the air.

A short burst of white noise followed by "relaxing," apolitical Muzak from the Mantovani Orchestra.

Trudi

And the explanation?

Emil Hidos

Not a word. He was dead, for all intents and purposes. Radio Romania started broadcasting another programme in Metronom's time slot without any explanation at all. No "he's on vacation," nothing at all....nothing...

Background sound: live audience at a festival.

Trudi

Phoenix is scheduled to perform a week later at a music festival in Kronstadt . But culture ministry officials detain the band in a hotel in Bucharest. Cornel goes to Kronstadt and angrily insists that the festival organizers show their colours. But they cave in to the authorities. And cancel the performance of the critical musicians.

The sound of the live audience is interrupted.

The sound of liquid being poured from a bottle into a glass.

Trudi

Cornel gets drunk...

The sounds of a fire.

Trudi

...sets the curtain in his hotel room on fire...

The sound of screeching tires.

Trudi

...and returns to Bucharest.

Music: a loop of four pulsing measures of a Doors song, like a train getting up to steam...

Trudi

He no longer has Metronom, his own show, but he's still a jazz producer. A letter arrives at his office: permission to attend the jazz conference in Czechoslovakia. The destination, entered on the standard form in ballpoint pen: "Bratislava, CSR." Now he can go to the passport office.

The loop of the Doors track is interrupted.

Music: John Coltrane's "Giant Steps".

Background sound: party atmosphere (wine glasses)

Trudi

But instead he heads over to see some friends that night--at the studio of the well-known graphic artist Zica Baroi, who copies the handwriting on the form...and changes the "Bratislava, CSR" ...

The sound of ballpoint pen writing.

Trudi

...into "Bratislava, CSR, and Austria."

That would be enough to land them both in prison.

The Doors loop resumes...

Background sound: government office.

Music: The pulsing Doors loop, now quiet and filtered.

Trudi (softly)

A few days later, Cornel is sitting in the passport office with the document.

Sound: microphone feedback.

Voice of a male clerk:

Numeru unu unu trei trei !

Trudi (softly)

He approaches one of the clerks...who examines the form, looks at Cornel...and then...

Sound: a muffled explosion.

Trudi

...stamps his passport with an exit permit for the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic... and Austria.

Music: the pulsing Doors loop resumes, now loud; fragments of Strauß' "Wiener Blut" waltz.

Background sound: street scene.

Trudi

Cornel is getting ready to escape. But right at his doorstep he gets caught up in a student protest.

Background sound: street scene with chanting protesters.

Linda Schuster

They suddenly caught sight of Cornel, screamed at him and tried to shove him to the front of the protesters. He knew all too well that if he took on the role of spokesman he would land in prison just as sure as...

Trudi

He hides in the entryway of his building. And then he makes a run for it, travels to Bratislava, attends the conference and boards the train...not the one back to Bucharest, but the one going to Vienna.

Train sounds.

Trudi

Austria is only a few kilometres away...but the Iron Curtain lies across them.

Trudi

(Long silence...only the sound of Trudi's breathing.)

Trudi

Cornel presents his passport...

Trudi

...and gets through without the slightest problem.

Music: the loop continues, picks up speed like an accelerating locomotive.

*The Doors loop breaks out of the constant repetition...Jim Morrison sings:
"Try to run...try to hide.....break on through to the other side...break on through to the other side....break on through to the other side..."*

Trudi (*like a train conductor's announcement*)
Next stop Kittsee! But first: The train will be crossing the East-West border.

The screeching sound of a train whistle.

Fade Out /Fade In

Background sound: a park, with birds chirping.

Trudi
March 1969: The Englischer Garten in Munich. The American radio station Radio Free Europe. A long white hulk of a building. A former military hospital. In the eyes of left-wing Germans: Agents provocateur on the CIA's payroll. In the eyes of communist regimes: Fascists. In the eyes of listeners behind the Iron Curtain: Heroes.

The sound of footsteps along a long corridor.

Trudi
The transmitter, the goal of Ronald Reagan's fundraising, is operating at full capacity and broadcasting in 21 languages, including Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech...

*Sound: the various languages rise to a cacophony like a Tower of Babel. Abrupt stop.
Then: a station-identification signal.*

Male voice
"Aici e radio europa libera"

Trudi
...and Romanian.

Music: intro to a scratchy recording of an old song.

Trudi
Journalist Max Banush – age 81 in the present – has been working here for two years. At age 43 he's the youngest staff member and to him the music programming isn't quite...well...right...

Music: Rina Ketty singing the schmaltzy old hit parade song "J'attendrais".

Max Banush
I said, "Look, the music of the moment is the Beatles, the music of the British Invasion." People answered: "That's ridiculous. You can't listen to that music on short wave radio." As a matter of fact, short wave radio wasn't the best medium for that music, but the problem wasn't the medium. The problem was the music! This new music.

The sound of knocking on a door.

Trudi
That's his boss.

Max Banush
He said, "Max, I got a letter, a crazy letter." I read that letter. A young man – I didn't know him - wrote that our radio station didn't have any programming for young people. No music for young people. That we were musically illiterate. The words he used (*laughs*) were not very kind...and he wrote that he would be amenable to coming in and creating a real programme for young people.

*Music: "J'attendrais" ends.
The sound of an automobile.*

Trudi
Banush drives to a reception camp for Eastern bloc refugees in Austria, where he meets the author of the letter.

Max Banush
He looked like Jesus Christ. His hair, his physique. I thought he was a young man with a whole heap of talent. And I could hear that this young man had a great voice for radio. He told me about his programme called Metronom. It had been very famous and he wanted to produce this Metronom for our station.

Trudi
Banush wants to get Cornel to Munich right away, but as an asylum seeker Cornel Chiriac is not allowed to leave Austria--officially.

Background sounds: "Autobahn" traffic.

Max Banush
He told me: "I'll ride in the trunk." I said, "No! There's a checkpoint at the border. German border guards aren't naive."

Trudi
Cornel will go through the woods on foot. And Max Banush will wait for him in the car on the German side.

Max Banush
Deal. Agreed. But then it starts raining.

The sound of a torrential rain.

Max Banush
It was already dark. I drove past the border and I think I made a mistake: I went too far. And then I realized that if I didn't drive back, I wouldn't be able to find Cornel. So I drove like this: one meter at a time. But driving on the autobahn in reverse is a crazy idea...

The sounds of rain; a car driving in reverse; the angry honking of cars speeding past.

Max Banush

After a couple of hours, I saw Cornel. He was totally exhausted. Soaked to the skin, completely...

We hear Metronom's 1969 theme song by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. Now Trudi is the announcer.

Trudi

Anyway...

On June 2, 1969 – two months after its cancellation – Metronom is re-launched—this time from exile, on a station that you aren't allowed to listen to in Romania. And starting now, the voice heard during the theme song is mine.

Music: "Purple Haze" (Jimi Hendrix)

Trudi

Cornel Chiriac - long-haired, bearded and wearing a striped jumper - sits in front of the microphone in Munich. And six times a week, he rails on the air against the lies and brutishness of the Romanian dictatorship. With his favourite assistants: Hendrix...

Cornel (translated by Trudi)

Only one thing can really manipulate people: Music.

Music: "Like A Rolling Stone" (Bob Dylan)

Trudi

...Bob Dylan...

Cornel (translated by Trudi)

The younger generation wants nothing to do with the world today.

Trudi

...and The Beatles.

Cornel (translated by Trudi)

Once and for all we need love, truth and justice. Revolution! Revolution!!!

Music: "Revolution" (Beatles)

Linda Schuster

The news spread like a wildfire across the country. I heard that Cornel Chiriac had defected and was continuing to present his programme on Radio Free Europe.

Emil Hidos

The reception was wretched, but we were totally thrilled anyway, because Cornel could now speak freely.

"Revolution" (Beatles) ends.

The sound of birds chirping from the beginning of Phoenix' "Canarul".

Trudi

He can speak freely. But his listeners and fans are prisoners of the Romanian dictatorship--like the canaries in the Phoenix song. Liberalisation and freedom were a naive dream. The truth: prison bars.

Sound: Cornel's voice in the background, as it sounded in his radio studio.

Max Banush

The way he spoke, everyone understood that he was a friend, that he loved his listeners, that he BELIEVED in his listeners and that he wouldn't exist without them.

Linda Schuster

It was like he was in a trance at the microphone. He reminded me a little of a priest, actually.

Max Banush

From the moment the "ON-AIR" light went on, Cornel's voice was different. In that moment he entered a different world. It was...cosmic. Nevertheless his broadcasts were political and had a friendly aggressiveness...

Trudi

But does his critique reach people in Romania, 1200 kilometres away, where Radio Free Europe is banned? It does indeed. People like Emil Hidos.

Emil Hidos

I had a battery-powered radio, which I carried on my shoulder, playing Radio Free Europe full volume. On the street! And I immediately noticed that two cars stopped next to me with three people in them. And one of them said to me: "This is your first warning. If I catch you playing that radio so loud one more time, you're going to prison."

Trudi

But Emil keeps listening.

Emil Hidos

This is how I saw things at the time: He is fighting for us. And if he's fighting for us, then we have to fight too.

Background sound: park atmosphere, birds

Background sound: production office (typewriters, fragments of broadcasts etc.)

Trudi

And Cornel demands that his fans write to him.

Max Banush

It was like this: I would receive eight letters in ten weeks—and I was fantastic! A champion! He got 800 letters.

Max Banush

We saw the impact that Cornel Chiriac was having on the younger generation in Romania.

Music: "Satisfaction" (Rolling Stones)

Trudi

But what are the listeners writing?

Max Banush

They talked about music, but not just music. Every letter was, let's say, 30% politics. About what was happening in the prisons and the schools, about what was going on with teachers.

Trudi

Emil hears Cornel on Metronom, reading a letter that criticises the regime.

Emil Hidos

And I said to myself: Okay, when that young man has the guts to write something like that and say it publicly, then I can do it too. So I wrote. I talked about our lives in Bistrița: how we were beaten by the police, how we couldn't have long hair or meet.

Trudi

Six letters, one written together with his friend Paul.

Emil Hidos

Yes, I was very naive back then and the only thing I knew for sure was that I couldn't sign my real name. So I signed the first letters "Brian Jones" (he was my favourite Rolling Stone) with no return address or I left them unsigned. Then I put them in the post box and waited.

Music: "Satisfaction" ends. Then: "My Generation" (The Who)

Opening lyrics: "People try to put me down, talking `bout my generation..."

Max Banush

Every letter was a story. One might be a story about Brașov [Kronstadt]. And when he read the Brașov story, people in Northern Romania and young people in Bucharest would listen and fairly soon he'd receive other letters: "The Communist Party is doing such-and-such in our town..." And that's how the whole country would find out what was going on.

Trudi

Always using pseudonyms and sent to anonymous post office boxes.

The best way: Posting the letters while on vacation in Bulgaria or giving them to tourists from West--because of the threat of a prison sentence.

Linda Schuster

He also knew that his listeners were putting themselves in great danger by writing to him.

Cornel (translated by Trudi)

The lives of our youth are a tragedy. That's what you're writing to me.

Max Banush

Cornel Chiriac considered every dictator and every Romanian leader a criminal. He never spoke like a hooligan, he always expressed himself very clearly and very personally...about those criminals.

Trudi

Emil has sent one letter via a friend from Moosburg. But the five in the post box fall right into

the hands of the Romanian secret police.

Emil Hidos

The Securitate were looking for a "Brian Jones": an unemployed hooligan or someone like that. But I was the exact opposite. I was the best waiter in Bistrița and a very normal young man.

Music: "My Generation" ends.

Background sound: marching, trumpets sounding a call-to-arms

Trudi

Lucky boy, that "Brian Jones" from Bistrița. Instead of getting caught, he gets drafted. Cornell actually reads the letter that he gave to his friend from Moosburg on Metronom. But Emil misses the broadcast. Wasn't there a radio in the barracks?

Emil Hidos

Well, we had in-house radio. You know, with the military station.

Trudi

Personal radios were allowed?

Emil Hidos

Yes, but I was scared. I heard what happened to one of us who had tuned in to Radio Free Europe and listened to it everywhere in the barracks...

Cornel (over loudspeaker / translated by Trudi)

Young people are supposed to participate in the so-called "building of socialism." And what do they get offered in return: NOTHING.

Trudi

The consequences: His fellow soldier is beaten up and lands in the psych ward.

The sound of an ambulance siren.

Emil Hidos

I had guts, but not like that.

Trudi

Homesick for your favourite programme?

Emil Hidos

Yes. To me it was – how do I put it?– like a school, where I got to hone my personality. I knew I had a lot to learn.

Music: "The Star Spangled Banner" (US national anthem - Jimi Hendrix live at Woodstock)

Trudi

Cornel is living and learning too. During his first business trip, his naive love for America cools off a bit.

Linda Schuster

He was also at Woodstock in 1969. A person coming from the Eastern bloc would naturally

find it incomprehensible that people could get so wasted on drugs.

Trudi

Young people in the West feel just as betrayed as those in Romania. And now Cornel starts dishing it out in ALL directions.

Cornel (*translated by Trudi*)

You'll be the ones to scrap the arsenal of evil. It doesn't matter if it's capitalist or communist.

Trudi

And an entire country listens to him.

Theme song: Metronom 1970

Max Banush

His ratings were better than those of our political broadcasts. He was the only one who brought a new generation of Romanians to Radio Free Europe (which was probably a frequent source of chagrin to the Romanian dictator).

Trudi

After a ten-year wait, Linda, now 22, is finally allowed to emigrate.

Linda Schuster

So there I was in Munich—I didn't know what my next step at university would be, nor what I wanted to do in the future. I took the liberty of writing a letter to Cornel Chiriac...and he called me two days later. After that I could go everywhere and see everything.

Background sound: production office.

Trudi

Lucky girl: He happens to need an assistant for the Sunday request programme.

Linda Schuster

(laughs) We went into the Radio Free Europe archives with a shopping cart and picked out vinyl records. Like kilos of them. And in the process we got to know one another better. Well, when you're doing grunt work like that, of course you chat a bit, and there's an exchange of views. And at that point in time I was a pretty little thing with long blonde hair and rosy cheeks. He must have taken quite a fancy to me, because he would not give up. He would get upset with me if I let two or three days pass without phoning him! Nine months later, I moved in with him...

Trudi

The two of them are in love.

The same can't be said for Cornel and the Romanian regime.

The sound of many typewriters being simultaneously pounded—ominously, furiously—and of pages being ripped from the carriages.

Max Banush

He received hundreds of letter from the Securitate, and the message was crystal clear: If you keep it up, you will be liquidated.

Trudi

And that puts Linda in danger too.

Background sound: street scene.

Linda Schuster

We lived on the ground floor and I was always afraid that one day he would be shot through an open window. But he wasn't afraid himself.

Trudi

But he is isolated.

Linda Schuster

On the one hand he was the most well-known Romanian at that time. Everyone from age 18 to 81 knew who he was. On the other hand, he was a foreigner with long dark hair and a beard—just another nobody on the street in Munich. And at that time foreigners weren't exactly a welcome sight.

Trudi

And his co-workers at Radio Free Europe?

Background sound: production office.

Max Banush

Eighty percent of the production staff was dinosaurs: diplomats, people with no connection to the younger generation, no connection to contemporary music. So he was an unwelcome guest.

Linda Schuster

They saw him as a little rabble rouser. He was a young man who came to the station and became more famous than anyone else, even though they'd been working there for years, even decades.

Music: "Alabama Song" (The Doors)

Background sound: bar room

Linda Schuster

Sure, he was angry a lot and he didn't know how to channel that anger.

Max Banush

He hung out in all the pubs in downtown Munich, looking for young people and other Romanians. He wanted to talk to these people, to help them.

Trudi

In "Klein Bukarest"....or the pub in Altschwabing belonging to a Romanian circus performer.

Linda Schuster

Sure, going out to pubs was always a way to escape, and...

Max Banush

He had a deep longing for Romania and, as everyone knows, when you're homesick, you might start drinking a little bit. Because when you drink, you can dream.

Linda Schuster

Cornel smoked and drank a lot, but no more than his young friends. People in the music scene just drink a lot.

Max Banush

His homesickness followed him to the studio and to his flat. His life and his heart were in Romania.

Linda Schuster

Because he spoke almost exclusively Romanian in his professional life, it was very difficult for him to learn German. And he wasn't happy in Germany.

Background sound: BRD student protesters chanting "Ho Chi Minh!"

Trudi

He's 29 years old. But he's completely different from the young West Germans around him.

Cornel

It's too bad. They may be leftists, but they have no clue about the reality of life in Eastern Europe.

The sound of marching.

Trudi

Right then Emil, for instance, is sitting in his barracks and must transcribe a notebook by hand for his commander.

The sound of ballpoint pen writing; outside, in the distance, the sound of marching.

Emil Hidos

Suddenly a soldier came from the gate and said, "Hey, Emil, someone from Bistrița is looking for you...go to the gate." I saw this man who was – how shall I put it? – not exactly a friend of mine. I was a waiter and he often ate in the restaurant where I worked. So I went over to him: "Hello there! Nice to see you!" He said, "Sorry, but I'm here on official business." I was totally flabbergasted, I felt like a fish on dry land. I was ordered to the commander's office and told: "Look at these letters you wrote to Cornel Chiriac." "Not me!" They had made photocopies of five letters.

Trudi

Beside them, the transcription of the notebook. A trap.

Emil Hidos

"See, that's your handwriting!"

"Yes." What was there left to say? All right, yes. "You are under arrest."

Trudi

He is taken away, along with Paul Carol, the co-author of one of the five letters.

The sound of water dripping in a damp basement dungeon.

Emil Hidos

We were both held in custody in Bistrița by the Securitate. They threw me in the basement and for three weeks I was beaten morning, noon and night. I wasn't allowed to sleep. All I wanted was to sleep. Not to eat or anything else, just to sleep.

Theme song: Metronom 1970

Cornel (*translated by Trudi*)

He was exhausted and took sleeping pills. Nine of them. And they ended his life.

Music: "Electric Ladyland" (Jimi Hendrix)

Linda Schuster

The death of Jimi Hendrix was a great blow to him – to most of his listeners as well, of course. And he wept.

Max Banush

He was like a father who has lost his son. He said that every student should come to school wearing a black armband. Thousands and thousands of students showed up wearing black armbands.

Background sound: a schoolyard, the recess bell, loud yelling.

Linda Schuster

And when Janis Joplin died, he was also quite moved. That was a very intense time. No one had thought about the possibility of fatal drug overdoses.

The sound of a judge's gavel bringing order to a courtroom; murmuring of spectators.

Music: a Jimi Hendrix guitar solo. The volume is quickly turned down – as if by hand.

Trudi (*softly*)

Emil Hidos gets a surprise at his trial: A defence attorney actually shows up.

Emil Hidos

(*laughs*) The only words the lawyer said were – everyone in the courtroom laughed – “Sorry, but I’m in the middle of another trial in another courtroom. May I be excused?” That was it. And he was gone. That was it.

Trudi

Now it gets Kafkaesque. Notes about parties he threw with his friends have been found in Emil's home.

Emil Hidos

Since I had a tape recorder, I was in charge of music. Those who had more money were

responsible for booze. Everybody took care of something. And I had written it all down. The Securitate said, "Hello! This is an 'organisation'."

Trudi

And that means... *(a gavel banging)* ... 24 years in prison for disseminating fascist propaganda.

The sound of a cell door closing.

Emil Hidos

And I was sent to my cell, thinking I'd be sentenced to 24 years in prison. But the next day my charge was reduced from "fascist propaganda" to simply "anti-communist propaganda". And for that I was sentenced to six years...

Trudi

Six years for five letters to his favourite DJ.

Emil Hidos

...and I was glad, because somewhere in my mind I was still imagining a sentence of 24 years! I was only 18 and thought I would be an old man when I got out.

Theme song: Metronom 1971

Trudi

An audibly shaken Cornel on July 3, 1971. A few days earlier, The Doors' Jim Morrison has died in Paris, the victim of a heart attack:

Cornel

light my fire, primul success care a raspindit numele grupului the doors in intreaga lume, jim morrison , regretatul jim morrison era solist vocal, ray mansarek la orga , pian si gitara bass, robbie kriegler la gitara si john densmoore la tobe... *(Chirping can be heard in the background.)*

Trudi

What's that sound in the background?

Linda Schuster

The sound came from outside. He worked with the windows open. So when he was on the air, you could hear the birds in the Englischer Garten.

The sound of birds in a park.

Trudi

Some are free...

The sound of isolated, sad canaries from the beginning of the Phoenix song.

Trudi

...others locked up in cages.

Max Banush

"What do you think would happen," he asked, "If I visited Romania?"

“You would go directly to prison. You would go directly from the railway station to prison. Yes, Cornel. You are an enemy of the Romanian dictatorship. You know better than I that you are the enemy. Enemy with a capital E.”

Music: intro to a propaganda song in a march cadence.

Trudi

Mr and Mrs Ceaușescu can travel without any restrictions. Nicolae and Elena have just returned from a trip to China and North Korea. And they've brought a little souvenir from Asia: an almost religious cult of personality.

Propaganda song: "Stima noastră și mandria, Ceaușescu România!"

Trudi (*translating*)

Our glory and our honour...Ceaușescu and Romania!

Trudi

Homage is paid not only to the dictator, but also to Madam Dictator...

Original recording: a poem to Elena Ceaușescu from a TV broadcast.

Child:

... e tovarasa elena Ceaușescu, militant și om de stinta, ce în lupta comunistă, și-a pus viața cu credința, devenind prin fapta ei eroină legendară.

Trudi

She only went to school until she was 13. But children glorify her in poetry as a great scientist and a legendary heroine.

Music: gloomy folk tune, "Stars Up There" (Melanie)

Trudi

In exile poetry sounds somehow...more melancholy.

Linda Schuster

His spoken English was fairly good and he could translate English wonderfully. Very poetically.

Trudi

Like this song by folk singer Melanie.

Cornel

The sad and touching song about an abandoned girl: "Stars Up There".

Cornel (*untranslated*)

trebuie să fie stele acolo sus / iar tu trebuie să stai lipit de mine / așa cum era odată

Music: Melanie's sad song continues.

Trudi

Cornel knows how loneliness feels... Linda starts work as a teacher.

Linda Schuster

In 1973 I reported to my workplace in Spessart for the first time and was suddenly 350 kilometres away from Munich.

Max Banush

During this period Cornel's life was miserable. Just miserable. But even when he had drunk a little too much, when it was time for his broadcast, Cornel was strong and clear-headed...until the end of the programme. *(laughs)* Afterwards there were...problems.

Background sound: prison lockdown.

Music: more of Melanie's sad folk song.

Trudi

Cornel is alone. And his strangest fan club is doing time in a faraway prison.

Emil Hidos

There were six or seven of us, all of whom had written letters to Cornel Chiriac. One from Braşov, one from Târgovişte. There was a bespectacled man with very thick lenses, Codreanu, and Paul Carol and I came from Bistriţa. Another was from Baia Mare, and another from Moldavia, from Iaşi. They had taken someone from every second or third province in Romania to scare the others into not writing.

Background sound: a prison yard (footsteps on gravel, crows cawing)

Trudi

During yard exercise they recite old broadcasts to each other. And soon their idol, Cornel Chiriac, is no longer alone.

Rock theme song: Metronom 1974

Trudi

Linda returns. The couple stroll through Schwabing making plans.

Cornel:

La microfon Cornel Chiriac pentru a va prezenta inca o emisiune din ciclul....

Linda Schuster

We saw a pair of beautiful platinum rings, which Cornel got for us. Then we were engaged...yes. It was fun.

Music (starting here): the melancholy jazz rock tune "Carol Anne" (Soft Machine, 1974).

Cornel:

La microfon Cornel Chiriac pentru a va prezenta inca o emisiarschune din ciclul....

Trudi

1974: The Ceauşescu regime is permanently enshrined. The Conducător is presented with a golden sceptre. He is now the first "President" in the history of Romania.

Linda Schuster

He never lost courage. He never tried to overthrow the regime, but rather to change

people's consciousness and offer them comfort. Because he knew all too well that they were just prisoners.

Max Banush

But he was sure that a day would come when it would all collapse and he could return to Romania.

Trudi

And he says this to his in-studio guests from the band Soft Machine, whose "Carol Anne" we're listening to right now.

Cornel [original in English]

I see. Well let's hope that there will be one day the chance for you to play there. There is an audience as good as here in the west and... *(laughs)* and very open to the music. Well you will see it if you will get that chance.

I thank you very much, Carl Jenkins and Alan Holdsworth, for coming in our studio and speaking to the people in Romania.

Background sound: rural life in wintertime.

Linda Schuster

By now he had learned German and basically adjusted to Munich and Germany.

Trudi

In autumn Linda, 24, and Cornel, 32, move to Moosinning, just outside of Munich.

Linda Schuster

That was a fresh start for both of us. It was a bungalow surrounded by a lovely garden. And we were thrilled and immediately bought some shrubbery and started digging around in the garden. But then came winter, you know.

Excerpt from the theme song: Metronom 1975

Trudi

March 4, 1975: At 4:15 pm Munich time Cornel goes on the air live. You've already heard the beginning.

Cornel

Aveti salutul lui Cornel Chiriac si invitatia... sa va delectati....

Trudi

And at 5 pm the broadcast is over.

Max Banush

He signed off. And everything that happened after that I heard from other people.

Linda Schuster

We had had a telephone conversation, Cornel and I, between 9 and 9:30. He said, I'm going

to stay a little longer." He had stopped by two pubs, where he met some old acquaintances. The one on Occamstraße was owned by a Romanian who was a former circus performer. Among the people who spoke to him was a young man...

Max Banush

...who said that he was hungry. Cornel was very generous and whenever anyone, any young person was hungry, he said, "Come eat with me," and that person got to eat. Afterwards, as I heard it, the young man asked him in which direction he was driving.

Linda Schuster

He wanted a lift. And when the doorbell rang, I thought that Cornel had forgotten his key, and so I opened the door.

Max Banush

I came to the station at about 8:30. Had there been an explosion? What had happened? Three or four of my colleagues were standing there and the look in their eyes was...so...unbelievable...

Linda Schuster

The Erdingen police came to my door at 2:30 am and informed me of what had happened.

Max Banush

Gurian, our head of production, came over to me and I said, "What's the matter, Gurian? What is this?" He said, "Cornel is dead."

Several seconds of silence.

Trudi

At 2 am a co-ed discovers his body in Luitpoldpark lying next to his car. He has been stabbed in the chest twelve times. The 17-year-old who had spoken to Cornel in the pub confesses to the crime. His version: It was a simple case of robbery homicide.

Max Banush

It was clear to me that this man was a puppet, because he didn't know anything. Some gangster approached him and paid him 10,000 DM to knock off this man. And that was it. But in the beginning! According to information I received, Mrs Ceaușescu had paid a million dollars to snuff out the life of Cornel Chiriac.

Background sound: a cemetery (birds, the ringing of a funeral bell)

Trudi

His ashes are interred at Reînvierea Cemetery in Bucharest. On a white headstone are engraved a pair of headphones and the inscription "Generation Make Love not War." There's a photograph of Cornel in front of a microphone with his beard and his striped jumper. At night the secret police remove little crucifixes, chains and flowers placed there by fans.

Linda Schuster

Subconsciously you keep waiting for him to come. And at some point you realize that it's really the truth. He's not coming back.

Trudi

What was the name of the last song that Cornel played?

Cornel:

Inchei prezentarea albumului solid al grupului ground hogs cu „Joker`s Grave.“

Trudi

“Joker`s Grave.” The word “joker” can mean “prankster.” Or “the highest card in a deck of cards.” Or “a tiny flaw in a system that will at some point cause the entire construction to collapse.” In 1975, after Cornel’s murder, his fan Emil Hidos is released from prison. He is now 25 years old.

Background sound: prison gates being opened, then street scene.

Emil Hidos

My real prison sentence began after my release. On the first day, I was out on the street and none of my old friends would speak to me, not even to say a simple hello.

Trudi

His favourite programme no longer exists. His role model is dead. But he still has some old recordings. And starts working as a waiter again.

Background sound: restaurant.

Emil Hidos

The restaurant had a huge terrace, where a band played in the evening; in the morning, no one was there, nothing was going on. One time I turned on the sound system and connected my tape recorder to the equipment.

The sound of audio equipment crackling and feedback.

Trudi

One last act of courage in deference to his hero.

Emil Hidos

I played a Metronom broadcast quite loud. The whole beer garden could hear it...and I let it play for about an hour and a half. Afterwards the Securitate came and beat me up.

Trudi

They try to enlist the young waiter as an informant. He refuses and ends up working for the sanitation department. Even there he is constantly harassed by the secret police.

Emil Hidos

It couldn’t get any lower than that and I had to get out of Romania at the first opportunity. I no longer had a life there.

Music: gloomy ‘80s synth music – “Dr. Destructo” (Tangerine Dream)

Trudi

The supply situation is getting worse and worse. Heating pipes freeze in the winter. It’s twelve degrees inside the flats. Ceaușescu has Bucharest’s historic centre demolished in order to build himself a monstrous palace. Emil is finally allowed to emigrate in 1986 and goes on a pilgrimage to Munich.

Emil Hidos

There was a restaurant and an Aral service station there. The manager of the restaurant showed me a little spot behind the service station and told me that it was the place where Cornel Chiriac's body was found. And I just wept.

Moment of silence, followed by:

Background sound: demonstration (protest slogans, gunshots)..

Trudi

Winter 1989: Romania is the last grotesque Stalinist dictatorship in Europe.
On December 18, the army opens fire on young demonstrators in Timișoara.

Original TV recording: Ceaușescu's final public speech (Trudi whispers her translation)

Trudi

Four days later the 71-year-old Conducător has a hundred thousand loyalists brought to Bucharest. From a balcony above Palace* Square he wants to demonstrate that he's master of the situation--on live television.

Ceaușescu

Furthermore I would like to thank the organisers of this great mass demonstration...

The sound of audio equipment crackling and feedback.

The natives become restless; yells from the crowd.

Ceaușescu (*uneasy*)

...who...who...

Cornel's voice (*over a public address system/translated by Trudi*)

Once and for all we need love, truth and justice.

The Beatles' "Revolution" plays over the public address system at Palace Square. [*trans. note: "Palace" Square was not renamed (coincidentally) "Revolution" Square until after the Romanian Revolution of 1989.]*

Ceaușescu (*confused and angry*)

Ce? Nu !! Allo! Allo! ...Tovaras! ...

Now the nation is in revolt.

Trudi

Ok, so no one really played one of Cornel's Metronom broadcasts that day the way Emil did on the restaurant terrace. But the revolution comes anyway.

The sound of a helicopter.

Trudi

The dictator and his wife flee. After several days and several thousand deaths, it's all over. The Ceaușescus are convicted by a military tribunal...

The sound of machine gun fire.

Trudi

...and executed by a firing squad on December 25.

Short fragments of a children's chorus interrupts The Beatles: "We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

Trudi

The last dictatorship in Eastern Europe has come to an end. A "joker," a tiny flaw in the system named Cornel Chiriac, has thrown a spanner in the works--14 years after his murder.

Music: The Beatles' "Revolution" ends.

The sound of a needle reaching the end of a record; the tonearm rises and the record player shuts off automatically.

Trudi (*whispering*)

To this day there are no monuments, no squares and no streets named in honour of Cornel Chiriac, the most famous yet loneliest radio DJ in the world. Not in Romania. And not in Germany.

In bad short wave radio sound quality, as if we were slowly losing the transmission signal:

Trudi

That was "Lost in Music - The Cornel Chiriac Story". With Cornel Chiriac, Linda Schuster, Emil Hidos, me--Trudi Dumitrescu--, Jimi Hendrix, the Ceaușescus and many more. In memory of Max Banush. Engineer: Daniel Seiler. Director: Patrick Banush. Production: Wolfram Wessels. A 2008 co-production of Südwestrundfunk, Westdeutscher Rundfunk and Bayerischer Rundfunk.

THE END