

The Temple of Music

Project Narrative

This project originated from the initial intention to design an opera house in Berlin. However, since the city is currently somewhat oversaturated with opera houses, it is better to define its true needs of and to design a building that would offer something extra to the city's public. In order to respond to Berlin's specific needs, some historical perspective is a first requirement.

Berlin has a rich musical history. This started to take shape in the 18th century. In this period Frederick II 'the Great' was King of Prussia, comprising much of what we call Germany today. Berlin was its capital and the chief administrative and cultural center of Northern Germany. Frederick II founded two important musical establishments in the city of Berlin: Opera houses. Therefore, the reign of this king and his commitment to music created a lasting and unmistakable impact, solidifying Berlin's status as one of Europe's main musical capitals (Exner 2010). Berlin has retained that status to this day, with the opera houses built during the reign of Frederick the Great still standing.

How to define opera? It can be described as an amalgamation of theater and orchestral music, in which the orchestral music plays a fundamental role, while the theater performed in opera plays is considered as a higher form of theater. [BRON] Born in Italy around 1600, opera is renowned for its complexity, demanding significant effort from both performers and audiences (Greenwald 2014; Kildea 2014). Opera has traditionally been elitist for the simple reason that only the nobility and the rich could afford to attend (Forsyth, 1985; Abbate and Parker 2012).

Towards the end of the 19th century, a lighter, more popular alternative to opera became available, attracting more middle and even lower class audiences: operetta. Pioneered in Paris during the 1850s by German-born composer Jacques Offenbach, operetta soon arrived in the German-speaking regions. The works of the Austrian composer Johann Strauss II were staged in Berlin for an enthusiastic public. Berlin eventually had an operetta composer of its own: Paul Lincke, whose first operetta, *Frau Luna*, premiered in 1899. Since operetta specialized in catchy tunes with sometimes explicit and ambiguous lyrics, these songs tended to become widely popular, hummed or sung by all. Such tunes were known as *Gassenhauer* or *Schlager* ("hits").

Opera gained increasing popularity, growing in the 20th century thanks to technological advancements, such as vinyl records, radio, and VCR tapes, allowing it to transcend the confines of traditional opera houses to the living room of an average person. (Abbate and Parker 2012). But because of this technological advancement, other genres and music styles from the other side of the world experiences a spread as well. Genres like jazz and tango came to Berlin and were well received, very much so until the end of the second world war.

After in 1949 Berlin had become divided into East-Berlin ruled by the Soviet Union, and West-Berlin ruled by the US, the music scene became divided as well. This was exacerbated in 1961 by the construction of a wall between the two parts of the city. The ideological divide led to distinct musical experiences in East and West Berlin, with the East requiring individual ownership and production of music, and the West maintaining freedom from political manipulation (Thacker 2017).

This resulted in a counter movement. Punk rock gained traction in East Berlin during the 1970s and fueled an anarchistic ideology for the youth in the GDR with a drive to be free from state control.

On the other side of the wall, two British musicians stirred up the pot with hit record after hit record about unity and freedom. These musicians, David Bowie and Iggy Pop, together with the Anarchist Punk Rock movement in the East helped tear down the Berlin wall. (Welsh 2019; Mohr 2019, <https://www.wearethemighty.com/music/david-bowie-berlin-wall/>)

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 started a period of euphoria and transformation (Resident Advisor and Tracey 2023). Abandoned structures in East Berlin, easily accessible to the public, became breeding grounds for cultural phenomena, authorities didn't even care if people would squat them (Künzel and Praller 2012). One such instance is Dimitri Hegemann's conversion of an old department store's bank vault into the club *Tresor*; considered the birthplace of Techno music in Europe (Groove Magazin Berlin, n.d.).

More about techno music

Beyond Techno, Punk Rock and Opera, Berlin has been a fertile ground for various music genres, it is safe to say that music has been a crucial force in Berlin's historical evolution, and it remains integral to the city's identity. Present-day Berlin is renowned for its vibrant nightlife, encompassing genres like Jazz, Techno, Punk, House, and Electronic music in general. The Berlin government even started an extensive funding organization to push the musical boundaries ("About - Initiative Neue Musik Berlin e. V.," n.d.). Is it then the logical choice to design an opera house in Berlin?

Despite this cultural richness, Berlin's iconic nightclubs are gradually closing, risking the erosion of the very scene that revitalized the city's post-reunification cultural scene (Scaturro 2020). Preserving club culture becomes imperative to sustain Berlin's unique musical identity.

Thus the question isn't merely about the need for another opera house in Berlin but about understanding the city's genuine needs. However, opera, used to be the coolest thing to go to on a Friday night [BRON]. Just like nightclubs of Berlin today. Maybe we can learn something from the golden age of opera houses, because they still exist. Contemporary perceptions often label opera as outdated, appealing mainly to an older segment of the public due to its long standing history dating back to the late 17th century (Exner 2010). Efforts to attract younger audiences, such as students at discount rates or renaming opera houses as performing arts centers, have not proven entirely successful. [BRON] Maybe Opera houses can learn something from nightclubs because they are still very popular

There are some undeniable similarities between traditional opera houses and current nightclubs. This leads us to the research question:

"Do modern nightclubs have structural and social similarities with old-fashioned opera houses?"

With this research question we can learn about Operas in their prime and use these aspects in the current day and age to enhance the experience of the building that is yet to come in Berlin. To answer the question, it is important to look at the history both of opera houses and the music scene in Berlin, because it will provide a broader context for the project.

In conclusion, Berlin does not necessarily need another opera house. Instead, it requires a structure that safeguards club culture, a building that has the grandeur of an opera house, the versatility of a concert hall, the relevance and rawness of a nightclub, the unpredictability and mystery of a record store, the experimental freedom of a recording studio, and an homage to the current and historical music scene of Berlin. *Tempel der Musik*, the first musical arts centre, aims to do all these things.

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Notes