



## ***Open letter from Barrie Kosky***

Dear Herr Bürgermeister Wegner, dear Finanzsenator Herr Evers and dear Kultursenator Herr Chialo,

This open letter is being written to you not by the ex-intendant and ex-chef regisseur of the Komische Oper but by, up until now, a proud citizen of the city of Berlin.

As the three of you seem to be totally unaware of the catastrophic artistic and financial implications of your planned Baustopp of the Komische Oper renovations, I thought it was time to inform you about the Komische Oper and its place in Berlin's cultural history and to warn you of what you are about to do.

You are about to commit an act of self-inflicted cultural vandalism on a building that is one of the most important opera houses and music theatre institutions in the world. A theatre that has stood and witnessed all of Berlin's history over the last 130 years. A theatre that has survived all the horrors of 20th century German history. A theatre that has contributed untold glory to the international reputation of this, your city and that has revolutionised the art form of music theatre across the world.

I am not referring to the untold artists who have performed on the stage of this theatre nor am I referring to the genius of artists like Walter Felsenstein who changed the way we look at opera forever. I am referring to the building itself.

This building in Behrenstraße is a theatre that I love more than any other theatre in the world. Anyone who has worked on the stage of this theatre or sat in the audience of this theatre knows that this theatre belongs to that very small collection of theatrical spaces that are magical. It is a magical space.

It is a building where Berlin history, Berlin stories and Berlin dreams float, dance and sing through time and space. You may not understand this as I believe all three of you were not regular attendants of the Komische Oper in Behrenstraße. In fact, you may have never been to a performance in this theatre.

But millions of other people have.

Millions of people have been enchanted, challenged, entertained and delighted sitting in this theatre. Thousands of people sat in this theatre when it opened in 1892 marvelling at the Fellner and Helmer architecture. Thousands of people sat in this theatre after the first world war, escaping the financial hardships, the poverty and the misery of everyday life and marvelled at the illusion and fantasy dancing across the stage.

Thousands of people sat in this theatre during the explosive years of the Weimar Republic and marvelled at the new, open, cosmopolitan world unfurling on this stage. Thousands of people sat in this theatre as Berlin Jews were rounded up and sent to concentration camps and the entire cultural landscape of this city changed forever. Thousands of people sat in this theatre celebrating the liberation of the city from Hitler's nightmare. Thousands of people sat in this theatre in a divided city and marvelled at the birth of modern music theatre under the guidance of Walter Felsenstein and thousands of people sat in this theatre when the wall was torn down, and Berlin was no longer a divided city.

This theatre has seen it all. This theatre has witnessed it all. All the joy. All the heartbreak. All the death and destruction. All of the magic. This theatre IS Berlin.

And yet you want to destroy all of that.

Let me be perfectly clear. No-one believes that a Baustopp for the next two or three years will result in the completion of the Komische Oper renovations. The costs will explode, the budget will become untenable, and the entire renovation will be stopped. The Komische Oper will be forced to remain in the Schillertheater, an interim theatre that is not an opera house, that has no storage space, that has 250 seats less than Behrenstraße and has absolutely nothing to do with the history of the Komische Oper. The Komische Oper will be disconnected from its homeland. Disconnected from its ghosts. Disconnected from its history. Disconnected from its soul.

And it will die.

A company like the Komische Oper cannot survive being uprooted from its home. The company is inseparable from its home. The theatre is the company, and the company is the theatre. You remove a plant from its rich, fertile soil and it withers, rots and dies.

As you may or may not know, I am virulently opposed to the appallingly ill-conceived Bundestag Resolution against antisemitism. I find it a very dangerous and problematic document. One of the major themes in the Resolution is the necessity of Germany to remember and celebrate how Jewish life has contributed to the cultural landscape of Germany. What has this got to do with the Komische Oper you might ask?

Are you aware of the Jewish history of this theatre? Are you aware that the theatre was saved by the Jewish theatre producers Alfred and Fritz Rotter who transformed this theatre during the Weimar Republic into the most important operetta and revue theatre in Germany? Are you aware they were both hounded out of Berlin in 1933 and died penniless in exile? Are you aware that the greatest Jewish operetta composers of the 20th century all worked in this theatre? Leo Fall, Paul Abraham, Oscar Straus, Emerich Kalman and their almost exclusively Jewish librettists all worked in this theatre. Are you aware

that the greatest stars of the German speaking operetta world were mostly Jewish, and all sang, danced and acted on the stage of this theatre? Richard Tauber, Fritzi Massary, Gitta Alpar and Rosy Barsony and many other artists were the world champions of their fach.

The theatre on Behrenstraße achieved its worldwide success due to predominantly Jewish artists. It was the unofficial Jewish showbiz venue of Berlin. It was an important space of Jewish cultural life. A rare symbol for what could be possible in Germany. A space where the Jewish and German souls could find some common cause, some togetherness, some way forward. All of this ended in 1933.

You can understand my outraged disbelief that on the very month that a resolution appears calling for the protection of Jewish life in Germany and the fundamental importance of remembering Jewish history and culture in Germany, the city of Berlin announces that a theatre where this oh-so-important Jewish history actually happened is under consideration to be shut down and closed. The Nazis tried to erase the Jewish identity of this theatre, and it survived. Until now.

Are the words of this Bundestag Resolution only empty and hollow rhetoric or do you not understand that a theatre like the Komische Oper is a living and breathing example of this Jewish history that you all want to so proudly protect and remember? Or is the Komische Oper only a sequence of numbers at the bottom of a budget sheet – expendable and only discussed for financial considerations.

The co-intendants of the Komische Oper have outlined very clearly the financial repercussions of a Baustopp and these repercussions are not my subject in this letter. My plea is for the building and its history. The building and its place in Berlin's DNA.

I implore you to understand what you are doing and the terrible consequences of a Baustopp for this magnificent theatre. I implore you to reconsider and allow the renovations to proceed.

Please protect our beloved Komische Oper in Behrenstraße and do not finish off what the Nazis started. Let that not be your legacy.