The outstanding Position of Berlin State Opera „Unter den Linden“ or “Lindenoper” beyond Opera Houses in Germany results from its long lasting History.

In the 2nd Decade of 21st Century it is undergoing a comprehensive restauration.

Building is closed right now for construction works and is supposed to reopen in 2013.

Berlin State opera is performing right now in an interim theatre, the “Schillertheater”.

Berlin State Opera – Staatsoper unter den Linden
History of the Building:

18th Century:

Architect Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff started in July 1741 in order of Friedrichs II, to construct the Building named that time „Königliche Hofoper“.

Hans Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff (17 February 1699 – 16 September 1753) was a painter and architect in Prussia.

A soldier in the service of Prussia, he resigned his commission in 1729 as captain so that he could pursue his interest in architecture.

In 1737 he travelled to Italy and in vain tried to hire Italian castrates for the Royal court in Berlin.

In 1740 he travelled to Paris and Italy to study at the expense of the new king, Frederick II of Prussia.

Knobelsdorff was influenced as an architect by French Baroque Classicism and by Palladian architecture.

With his interior design and the backing of the king, he created the basis for the Frederician Rococo style at Rheinsberg, which was the residence of the crown prince and later monarch.

Knobelsdorff was the head custodian of royal buildings and head of a privy council on financial matters.

In 1746 he was fired by the king, and Johann Boumann finished all his projects, including Sanssouci.

His design for the Royal opera included a facade in Style of Palladio. He had to face some problems with the building ground. Oak trees, not available in Prussia, had to be imported from the east to reinforce the soil, which led to a tremendous increase of costs.

Months before the building was completed the opera house was inaugurated on December 7nd 1742 (Carl Heinrich Grauns Cleopatra e Cesare). Building was finished in 1743.

Beside Main hall it included a reception hall (“Apollosaal”). By technical means it could be connected with the Main Hall.

Main Hall could be converted by rising and lowering the parquet level into a ballroom.
Importance of the State opera comes from its position in the city. It was Germany’s first freestanding theatre building. Before that theatres were integrated in palace complexes.

That time it was the tallest opera House in Europe.

19th Century:

Building burnt down in the night between 18th and 19. August 1843 almost to the ground. It was reconstructed by architect Carl Ferdinand Langhans who relocated the entrance to the northern side. It was reopened in 1844.

Minor conversions took place in 1869. During the change to 20th century steel fire escape staircases were mounted.
20. Century

After the end of monarchy „Hofoper Unter den Linden” was renamed as „Staatsoper Unter den Linden”. Orchester „Königliche Kapelle” was named then „Kapelle der Staatsoper”.

Between 1924–1928 the stage was modernized, stage tower had to be underpinned. Stage tower was heightened and new side stages were added.

Stage tower covered the view to nearby Hedwig-Church, a view which both Langhans had in mind when he rebuilt the opera in 1844.

Main stage was modernized by providing hydraulic double storey stage elevators and side stage wagons.
During the Nazi-Dictatorship, the opera building served for representation of state and NS-party. As Prussian Statetheater it was under authority of prussian ministry president Hermann Göring.

Jewish singers, musicians, directors and other staff were mobbed out of the house, no more engaged and partly even murdered.

During Second Worldwar State Opera was hit twice by bombs, second time damaged totally to ground floor walls.

After Second Worldwar the building kept first its name „Staatsoper Unter den Linden“.  

Latest at point of foundation of GDR in 1949 the house was named „Deutsche Staatsoper“. Doing so, GDR regime reinforced the aim once to reunite whole Germany under socialistic society order.

In consequence of that the frieze inscription „Fridericus Rex Apollini et Musis“, which led to the historical Prussian character of the building was demolished and replaced by the new name of the building.

During GDR period it was reconstructed between 1952–1955 by architect Richard Paulick following closely Knobelsdorff’s original. Some parts of the historical facade were integrated by Paulick into the reconstruction.

The Paulick-Reconstruction is in its National-Style of former GDR considered now as heritage building itself.
Detail of proscenium and singer view in 1955 reconstruction

Auditorium right now has 1396 seats and is compared to other German opera houses quite small:

- **Bavarian State Opera** 2101 Seats
- **State Opera Hamburg** 1698 Seats
- **Deutsche Oper Berlin** 1954 Seats
- **Metropolitan Opera** 4065 Seats
- **Vienna State Opera** 2276 Seats
After reunification of Germany opera got back its name „Staatsoper Unter den Linden”, this to avoid any mix up with the “Deutsche Oper Berlin” in the west of the city.

21st Century

The next reconstruction, planned after the Millennium change, was discussed for a long time controversially.

Feasibility studies propose these changes:

- Improve acoustics for main hall
- Underground transportation corridors between main building and decoration storage building.
- Several rehearsal stages
- Separated building

An architectural competition was held in 2008.

Design of architect Klaus Roth was awarded with the first prize.

He proposed demolition of the Paulick-Reconstruction of 1955 and a totally new organization of auditorium.

1. Preis: Klaus Roth Architekten, Berlin
After massive protests led by media, population of Berlin, the major of Berlin and senator for culture, Klaus Wowereit skipped the result.

The next selection procedure to find an architect for the renovation was orientated more under the aspect of protection of the monument.

**Costs, budget:**

Since the end of season 2009/2010 the restoration with a budget of 240 million Euro is started.

Reconstruction of the opera building itself costs approx. 126 Mio. €, from that will go approx. 50 Mio. € into the renovation of stage technique. Approx. 90 Mio. € will be provided for the administration building, the magazine building the new rehearsal rooms and the underground connecting building.

The federal government of Germany supports the reconstruction with 200 Mio. €, this means that the city of Berlin has to take over only 40 Million Euro.

**Other aims of restoration:**

Main reasons for restoration are damaged seals of the foundation of the building, missing fire protection and the old stage machinery.

The new underground building will provide personal pathways, separated from material transportation corridors.

Nowadays transport of decoration is over the streets surrounding opera building.

Rehearsal stages a ballet rehearsal rooms are too small, also the ones for chorus and orchestra.

Only a part of decoration will be stored in situ, the main part will be brought to an external storage building.
Time Schedule of renovation:

During this reconstruction period the whole ensemble has been relocated to "Schillertheater".

"Schillertheater" was a drama theatre till 1993 and had to be reconstructed before it could house state opera. It is intended to use this theatre after the reconstruction of Linden-Opera for other future reconstructions (Komische Oper, Deutsche Oper Berlin) in the same way as now for the Linden-Opera.

Performances are intended to come back to the opera "Unter den Linden" with the start of the season 2013/14, on National Holyday October 3rd 2013

During that period improvements of acoustics will take place and sightlines shall be improved.

Auditorium volume will be by rising the ceiling up for 4 meters brought from 6,500 to 9,500 cubic meter and reverberation time will be increased from now 1,3 to then 1,6 seconds. It will happen by means of a 4th gallery which is not accessible by the audience.

This will not be visible from the outside. Acoustic volume is provided inside the roof.
Model of auditorium after reconstruction 1

Site plan:

Main building will be connected with administration and decoration storage in the future by a underground building with separated pathways for personal and decoration. Former decoration building will be used also for rehearsals.
Underground building:

Underground building with stage (bottom left), premontage hall. Stage elevators (redundant) bring decoration from understage transportation corridors up to stage level.

Musical and artistic History of Linden-Opera

Early years

Although not entirely completed, the Court Opera (Hofoper) was inaugurated with a performance of Carl Heinrich Graun’s Cesare e Cleopatra on December 7, 1742. This event marked the beginning of the successful, 250-year cooperation between the Staatsoper and the Staatskapelle Berlin, the state orchestra, whose roots trace back to the 16th century.

In 1842, Gottfried Wilhelm Taubert instituted the tradition of regular symphonic concerts. In the same year, Giacomo Meyerbeer succeeded Gaspere Spontini as General Music Director. Felix Mendelssohn also conducted symphonic concerts for a year.

On August 18, 1843 the Linden Opera was destroyed by fire. A new building designed by architect Carl Ferdinand Langhans, known as the Königliches Opernhaus (Royal Opera House), was inaugurated the following autumn by a performance of Meyerbeer’s “Ein Feldlager in Schlesien”.

In 1821, the Berlin Opera gave the premiere of Weber's Der Freischütz. In 1849, it premiered Otto.
Nicolai’s *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, conducted by the composer himself.

20th century

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Royal Court Opera, Berlin, attracted many illustrious conductors. They included Felix von Weingartner, Karl Muck, Richard Strauss, and Leo Blech.

After the collapse of the *German Empire* in 1918, the Opera was renamed *Staatsoper unter den Linden* and the *Königliche Kapelle* became *Kapelle der Staatsoper*.

In the 1920s, Kurt Adler Wilhelm Furtwängler, Erich Kleiber, Otto Klemperer, Alexander von Zemlinsky, Bruno Walter occupied the conductor’s post. In 1925, Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*, was given its premiere in a production conducted by Erich Kleiber in the composer’s presence.

After having undergone an extensive renovation, the Linden Opera reopened in April 1928 with a new production of *Die Zauberflöte*. In the same year, the famous Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin and Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes with conductor Ernest Ansermet are guest performers. In 1930 Erich Kleiber conducted premiere of Darius Milhaud’s *Christoph Columbus*. However, in 1934, when symphonic pieces from Alban Berg’s *Lulu* were performed by Kleiber, the National Socialists provoked a scandal and he was forced into exile.

After Hitler’s Nazi takeover, members of Jewish origin were dismissed from the ensemble. Many German musicians associated with the opera went into exile, including the conductors Kurt Adler Otto Klemperer and Fritz Busch. During the Third Reich, Robert Heger, Herbert von Karajan (1939-1945) and Johannes Schüler were the “Staatskapellmeister”.

- 1938 Werner Egk conducted the first night of his opera *Peer Gynt* on November 24. Herbert von Karajan’s interpretation of *Die Zauberflöte* was performed on December 18. Karajan continued as Generalmusikdirektor, the principal musical director of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden between 1941 and 1945.
- 1939 Karajan conducted a performance of Rudolf Wagner-Régeny’s *Die Bürger von Calais*.
- 1940 On October 21, Karajan conducted a symphonic concert with the Staatskapelle at the Old Philharmonic.
- 1942 The Lindenoper was bombed. The House reopened on December 12 with Wilhelm Furtwängler’s interpretation of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.
- 1944 When Joseph Goebbels proclaimed his “Total War”, the Staatsoper was closed. The last performance was Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*, conducted by Johannes Schüler on August 31. The Staatskapelle continued to perform symphonic and opera concerts. On October 4 and 5, Karajan conducted Bruckner’s 8th symphony.
- 1945 The Lindenoper was once again destroyed on February 3. The concerts were relocated to the Admiralspalast and the Schauspielhaus. On February 18, Herbert von Karajan conducted his last symphonic concert with the Staatskapelle in the Beethoven hall.

Postwar years
The second rebuilding took a long time. From 1945, the opera company played in the former Admiralspalast (today's Metropoltheater).

From 1949, the company served as state opera of the GDR. It moved back to its original home after the rebuilding in freely adapted baroque forms was finally completed in 1955. The newly rebuilt opera house was opened, again, with Wagner's Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg.

After the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, the Opera was somewhat isolated, but still maintained a comprehensive repertoire that featured the classic and romantic period together with contemporary ballet and operas.

After reunification, the Linden Opera rejoined the operatic world. Important works that had already performed in the past were rediscovered and discussed anew within the framework of a "Berlin Dramaturgy". Baroque Opera in particular was at the center of attention, with Cleopatra e Cesare, Croesus, L'Opera seria and Griselda. These works were performed by Belgian conductor René Jacobs together with the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin and the Freiburger Barockorchester on period instruments.

In the 1990s, the opera was officially renamed "Staatsoper Unter den Linden".

In 1992, the Argentine-Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim was appointed Music Director. In 2000, the orchestra (according to its official website) elected Barenboim "conductor for life." During the 2002 Festtage, he led a Wagner cycle in ten parts, a production created in collaboration with director Harry Kupfer.

Foto credits:
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