



## **The History of the Berlin Peace Clock**

*by Jens Lorenz*

It all started on a Thursday, the day of Jupiter, and good fortune.

It stands three metres high and weighs over two tons and it is driven by an old Benedictine clockwork mechanism; its rising marble columns frame it like an inviting, ancient portal; its soft yet heavy tick has a musical quality. Its architrave bears the inscription: "Time bursts all walls asunder".

We are talking about the original Berlin Peace Clock, which was designed, constructed and first presented to the public by Mr. Jens Lorenz at Juwelier Lorenz in 1989, where it can still be seen today.

It was originally intended as a art clock, as a timely surprise for guests attending the celebrations commemorating the 115th anniversary of one Berlin's first jewellers and clockmakers. Over 250 guests of honour attended this long-planned Lorenz celebration in the district of Berlin Frieden'au. As they entered, they were given a champagne welcome and entertained with delightful piano music. At about 7 p.m., Jens Lorenz begins to address his guests. Very soon, the imposing new artwork will be unveiled. We are in "West" Berlin, in the middle of a new district founded as a "meadow of peace" (Frieden'au) on 9th November 1874 - the very same year that Juwelier Lorenz was established. We are in the district of Frieden'au, whose coat of arms displays the angel of peace. It is the evening of 9th November 1989.

Nobody could have suspected what was about to happen that very same evening - not far away - on the other side of the Wall in "East" Berlin. The impending crisis within the Eastern Bloc (which had not faced such a grave crisis since 1961) - the insolvency of the German Democratic Republic, mass protests, people fleeing en masse and, last but not least, the political pressure - particularly from Moscow, Prague and Budapest - forced the Socialist Unity Party in "East" Berlin to grant the first humanitarian concessions. At 7 p.m. (or rather 6.57 to be precise) Schabowski, a member of the Politburo, was asked at a quickly convened press conference when the new travel regulations would take effect. Schabowski replied dryly: "Immediately, according to the information I have received". Who could have suspected that with these words Schabowski would be giving the signal for what was perhaps the most peaceful upheaval in world history. And yet that is exactly how it happened! And by 7.20, the entire Springer press building was alive with the news: "The Wall is open!" That very same evening, on 9th November 1989, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, opening the door to a new age. Without a single drop of blood being shed, the Cold War had come to an end and the division of the world been overcome. Suddenly, the gate to the future was open. And everyone felt it. Soon, people were dancing from East to West and from West to East. At 11 p.m., the last command was issued at Bornholmer Strasse border checkpoint: "Stop all the controls. We're opening the floodgates!" - It was the most wonderful revolution ever to take place in Germany, a glorious moment for the world, for Europe, for Germany: a golden age of peace.



## Berliner Friedensuhr

Later, the BZ newspaper carried a headline on the 9th November declaring: "When the monster was defeated". And you weren't really sure whether the newspaper wasn't also referring to that Germany which had opted for war during two impending international crises and had always opted for war, and whether this blood-tainted Wall wasn't part of its final death throes. No. The Berlin Wall was not just any wall: it was a symbol of that international disease known as the Cold War. Until 9th November 1989, people had felt certain of one thing: that we would pay for this Wall with a third world war. And what if the abominable remains of that Germany which had been so responsible for so many war crimes, had roared: "Shoot!"?

But the monster had finally been vanquished. On 9th November 1989 a new Germany was united, for the first time, in a determination not to opt for war and violence in a looming international crisis, but to venture a new future in peace and freedom. Right there and then, in the middle of Berlin, a new age began; and it began as naturally as the swing of a pendulum.

But let's return to "West" Berlin, to the 115th anniversary of Juwelier Lorenz, to that meadow of peace, where nobody had even the faintest idea of the epoch-making events about to take place - or did they? Shortly before 7 p.m., just as Schabowski was issuing his press statement in "East" Berlin, Jens Lorenz unveiled the evening's great surprise: 'Dear guests, we worked on, and rejected, many designs before we finally arrived at this art clock that stands before you now. It carries a message of hope: "Time bursts all walls asunder"'. And then the pendulum was released: it was precisely 6.57 p.m. The imposing clock began to tick, and the room was filled with its soft yet heavy tone. People began to comment on the clockwork, the inscription, the shape of the clock. Doesn't the art clock conjure up visions of a gate inviting you to pass through and enter a new age?

Then the unimaginable happened: the word suddenly spread among the guests that the Berlin Wall had just fallen. Someone managed to get hold of a television set. It really was true: the first pictures said it all: the Wall was open! And here the clock, which had just been set in motion, proclaimed the joyful message: "Time bursts all walls asunder". With tears in their eyes, the guests gazed in wonder at this "timely colossus", listened to its Benedictine clockwork gently ticking away, examined the rising columns, read the inscription "Time bursts all walls asunder" and marvelled at the news, which had arrived with such incredible coincidence, that Wall had fallen peacefully. Finally, one of the guests cried out: "Hey, it's a peace clock. - A genuine Berlin peace clock."

And so the Berlin Peace Clock's hour of birth coincided with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Could there have been a more perfect testimony qualifying the Peace Clock to proclaim the words: "Time bursts all walls asunder"? And like time itself, this first witness-in-time to the fall of the Wall on 9th November 1989 did not stop there: for Juwelier Lorenz soon began manufacturing precious copies, approximately 30 cm high.

In 1992, the first three Peace Clocks were presented to Michael Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl. In 1999, another Peace Clock was handed over to the former US President, George Bush sr. For, ultimately, we also owe it to the co-operation between East



and West that the fall of the Berlin Wall provided grounds not for a *casus belli* that could have drawn in the entire world but for an exemplary *casus pacis*. Are the policies with which the great powers peacefully ended the Cold War the multilateral counterpart to those now being pursued by the US administration under George W. Bush?

In 1996, a Peace Clock was presented to Pope Johannes Paul to symbolise that peace is not only a political but also a religious matter, and that unless people respect other faiths and believers of other faiths there will always be hostilities. So when, in 1993, Mother Teresa was awarded Peace Clock number one in India, this gesture addressed far more than the North-South conflict, since Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity also work in Germany. Charity involves profane day-to-day peace work; it begins with your neighbour and knows no divisive walls.

On one man's private initiative, seven Peace Clocks were sent out to different parts of the world as timely symbols of hope between 1992 and 2000: to Russia, Rome, the United States of America, Bonn and India. They were awarded to leading figures in world politics, world religions and, one could add, world ethics. Each Peace Clock is a timely witness to the 9th November 1989, a harbinger from Berlin of a better world, the embodiment of hope for the future: for a time in which there will be no more walls of malice, walls of envy, walls in people's hearts and minds, walls of inhumanity, and walls of hatred. This is the message expressed in the inscription on the Berlin Peace Clock: "Time bursts all walls asunder".

In 2002, the history of the Berlin Peace Clock entered a new, "official" phase. For that year, the Berlin Committee for UNESCO, in co-operation with Juwelier Lorenz, and supported by the Berlin Senator for Science and Culture, instituted the "Berlin Peace Clock Award". The award is backed by distinguished sponsors and will be presented in Berlin on 9th November. A committee comprising prominent figures will decide who is to receive the next award.

The clock can be awarded to individuals or institutions from all over the world that symbolise hope and help to overcome walls dividing classes, races, peoples, nations, cultures, religions, ideologies, parties and human beings from one another. On 9th November 2003, the Berlin Committee for UNESCO awarded, for the first time, the "Berlin Peace Clock Award". The Senate Office announced: '(Today), at Friedrichswerdersche Church, the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, is presenting the Berlin Peace Clock Award to Mr. Avi Primor, the former Israeli Ambassador in Germany. This award honours Mr. Primor for his commitment to overcoming the differences between Israel and Palestine and for his endeavours to bring about peace in the Middle East.

In his speech, the Governing Mayor declared: 'The 9th November is probably the most sensitive day in the German calendar. (...) It is a day of the greatest joy and deepest sorrow, and a day of the most profound shame. (...) The fact that this day is now inextricably linked with the Peace Clock adds to the many paradoxes surrounding 9th November. It was unveiled the same evening that the Wall fell. As a consequence, the Peace Clock will be awarded on its anniversary to a prominent figure.



Today, this honour goes to Avi Primor. I think this is a good choice. Nor could the time and place be better. For Avi Primor has made outstanding contributions to Berlin and to peace, and he has also set high standards, in particular, with respect to striving for reconciliation between Germany and Israel.' In the statement he gave on 9th November 2003, Avi Primor declared: 'The Berlin Peace Clock will also encourage my friends in Israel to convince our population that it must find time to burst these walls of mistrust asunder.'

With the initiation and institutionalisation of the Berlin Peace Clock Award, the Berlin UNESCO Committee has accepted the transnational commitment embodied in the 9th November 1989: For the fall of the Berlin Wall and the movement of 1989 was not just a German-German evening sideshow in a supporting TV programme. It was an event of epochal proportions that erupted with sparks of joy and hope, a movement which demanded that its hopes be shared by all people everywhere.

Fortune smiled on us, humble bearers of this hope, when it gave the Berlin Peace Clock to us. At the very same time as the Wall fell, this original and timely symbol of a world without walls was born. Let us take this symbol, this timely symbol of hope, to those who - in ways great and small - are overcoming walls through exemplary actions and creating openings so that we can all build a world in which people may coexist peacefully. And let us go to 'the tired... poor..., huddled masses yearning to breathe free' and say to them: 'If this nightmare, frozen in concrete, of a world caught in the grip of the Cold War... if this nightmare called the Berlin Wall could fall as peacefully as it did, then other walls can also come tumbling down peacefully - in time. And then other paths can and will open up elsewhere in the world to create a more human future - in time.'

If the 21st century turns out to be a century of peace, of freedom, and of freedom from violence then it was born on Thursday 9th November 1989 at 6.57 p.m., when the Wall collapsed and the time of the Berlin Peace Clock began.