Berlin

A city once divided by a wall, Berlin has been home to some of history’s biggest thinkers and talents.
The dramatic story of the city of Berlin is explored in a new three-part documentary written and presented by Matt Frei. This series reflects on 200 years of history through architecture, music, cinema, painting and literature – revealing how the culture of this intriguing city has shaped national identity.

Starting with the fall of the wall in 1969 it reflects the story of the city through many regimes; from the Prussian years, through a united Germany, to the Third Reich and a divided Germany. Throughout, Berlin has always been a city of contrast and controversy – divided and shaped by its history. Matt Frei unfurls why Berlin provokes such strong reactions, and reveal how art and culture have always been at the heart of the dramatic story of this city.

**Episode One**

Struggles between the state and the people have marked the culture and history of Berlin – and Matt recounts experiencing the iconic event of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; a stark reminder of this tension.

Matt tells the story of the building of Berlin by the Kings of Prussia, who were overthrown by the people of the city. He visits the Reichstag, built when Berlin was capital not just of Prussia but the whole of unified Germany – the result being that the city boomed once more. The biggest industrial city in Europe at the turn of the 18th – 19th century, Berlin hid a darker side which eventually would simmer over.

**Episode Two**

In the inter-war years, an ideological battle was being waged in the galleries, theatres, clubs, publishing houses and architects practices of Berlin as culture became a powerful weapon.

During the inter-war years as Communists and Fascists fought on the streets, an ideological battle was also being waged in the galleries, theatres, clubs, publishing houses and architects practices of the city. This is a story of the fear of art on the streets of Berlin.

Berlin was the centre of a revolution in architecture, the Bauhaus group of architects. Their work offered a new vision of ‘social projects’. These and other famous names such as Christopher Isherwood frame the vision of the city for Matt. What he sees is a divided Berlin, one in which the nightly cabarets and parties are punctuated by daily street-fights.

**Episode Three**

The post-war division of Germany created two nations, both trying to lay claim to German cultural heritage. The battleground was Berlin and the Berlin Wall became a cultural symbol in its own right.

Post-war was a period of destruction as well as of construction for Berlin – as each part of the city was rebuilt decisions had to be made about whether to restore or demolish. Matt tells the story of how two different visions of a city sprang from the ruins. Two parallel cultural capitals began to emerge and Matt explores the haven that West Berlin became for artists and liberals.

Matt traces the death-strip of the Berlin Wall, still an overgrown gash though the heart of the city, and looks at the place the wall has now taken in the culture of Germany and the world – in photography, spy literature and painting, it has become an iconic symbol of international division.

Maybe the only place where there was no divide in Berlin was on the airwaves. Easterners could pick up Western television and vice versa. As the Communist bloc was slowly crumbling, the west side of the wall was becoming the world’s largest canvas.