

Did David Hasselhoff really help end the Cold War?

Baywatch star David Hasselhoff is griping that his role in reuniting East and West Germany has been overlooked. So what part, if any, did the hunk in trunks play in ending the Cold War?

Barely a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the city that had been divided by politics for more than 40 years was united in song.

And leading the chorus of several hundred thousand voices was a man hitherto known to the rest of the world for driving a talking car.

David Hasselhoff, star of the hit 80s TV series Knight Rider, is renowned in celebrity-obsessed circles for being Big In Germany; not only as an actor, but as a purveyor of soft rock anthems.

For that seminal concert, on New Year's Eve 1989, Hasselhoff stood atop of the partly-demolished wall and belted out a tune called Looking for Freedom.

It was during Hasselhoff's current promotional tour of Germany that the Hollywood star made headlines for a remark about this event.

HASSELHOFF THE HIT MACHINE

He's released 10 albums in Germany

He's now promoting his latest, David Hasselhoff Sings America

In 1993 he made no. 35 in the UK with If I Could Only Say Goodbye

Speaking to Germany's TV Spielfilm magazine, the 51-year-old carped about how his pivotal role in harmonising relations between the two sides of the divide had been overlooked.

"I find it a bit sad that there is no photo of me hanging on the walls in the Berlin Museum at Checkpoint Charlie," he told the magazine.

So what, if anything, was David Hasselhoff's influence in helping settle the Cold War?

For those in the UK and US who know him mainly for his TV roles, most notably as leading lifeguard Lieutenant Mitch Buchannon in Baywatch, it's hard to appreciate Hasselhoff's influence on the German cultural scene.

Capture the mood

Hasselhoff was already a singing star in Austria and Switzerland when, in 1989, he had the wisdom to cover a 1970s German hit, Auf Der Strasse Nach Suden.

Renaming it Looking for Freedom, with Hasselhoff singing in English, the song raced up the

charts in the late summer, just as a wave of revolt began sweeping through Eastern Europe.

By the time Berliners started hacking away at the concrete wall that had divided their city for a generation, the torch-bearing anthem had been number one for several weeks in West Germany.

With its lament, "I've been lookin' for freedom; I've been lookin' so long; I've been lookin' for freedom; still the search goes on," the song embodied the frustrations of Germany's years of division.

The album of the same name topped the charts for three months and, that December, Hasselhoff was invited to headline a New Year's Eve concert in the recently reunited city. The gig was apparently rubber-stamped by the then German chancellor, Helmut Kohl.

The singer himself has powerful memories of the performance. "It was the first time Germany had been unified, and close to a million East and West German fans stood together in the freezing cold at midnight watching me perform. I was overcome with emotion," he recalls.

Hasselhoff, who by now was appearing in Baywatch, scooped a clutch of top German music awards and went on to become one of the country's biggest selling artists of the 90s.

His popularity even prompted a headline in one German newspaper, "Hasselhoff: not since the Beatles".

Forgotten role?

So, do German fans think their idol has been overlooked as a history man?

John Stuellenberg, who was won over by the Hoffmeister as a 14-year-old schoolboy watching that New Year's Eve concert, believes he deserves recognition at the Checkpoint Charlie museum.

"It's a big museum from what I hear, so I can't see why they wouldn't have room for a photo."

But according to Sascha Tauber, who runs The Hasselhoff Foundation - David's Munich-based official fanclub - this could be an example of the notoriously humourless Germans getting one over on the rest of us.

"Did David Hasselhoff help bring an end to the Cold War? No, I think this is just a joke."

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3465301.stm

Published: 2004/02/06 11:38:19 GMT

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