Karl Löwenberg (Carl Loewenberg) and the Beneficencia Kammerspiele.

In memory of Karl Löwenberg 23.1.1896 – 14.10.1975

Unlike great theater, world-class producers are lost to time. The Jewish Community in Quito benefited from a great theater producer before and during WWII, until 1950, when Karl Löwenberg moved back to Germany.

Mr. Löwenberg had a successful theater career in Hamburg, Germany, before the Nazi's put an end to it in 1933. I know of Mr. Löwenberg for his production of Lessing's Nathan der Weise and his leadership of the Beneficencia theater program Kammerspiel. (As a sidebar, the silent movie Nathan der Weise was produced by Manfred Noah, a first cousin of my grandfather; maybe more on that in another post.)

Like most Jews who lived in Quito before World War II, Karl Löwenberg was able to escape Germany before the start of the war. He left Germany in 1933 when the Nazis closed his theater. Mr. Löwenberg first went to Italy, and when Jews were no longer accepted there, he moved to Quito, Ecuador, in March 1938. Why Quito? No one really knows, but if he was like anyone else at the time, it was where fate was able to lead him.

As JOEs, we all know that the Jewish community in Ecuador before World War II was European in nature, highly educated and cultured, and consisted mainly of German speakers. Sources estimate the pre-WWII population at around 4,000. The Beneficencia was central to everyone's life and served as a European refuge in Ecuador.

To maintain his skills, Karl Löwenberg organized an "amateur theater" group, with productions mainly in German. He became a central figure in the German-speaking emigrant theater scene. In my family's case, my Grandfather and my Mother were frequent actors in the productions he presented (and later on he was an influential force in leading my Mother to establish other amateur productions in English like "Tom Sawyer," and the Pichincha Playhouse in Quito).



Figure 1 Karl Löwenberg with his wife Hilda in Quito circa 1940

It would be interesting to find Mr. Löwenberg's lecture titled "Theater as a Cultural Asset" at the *Beneficencia*, where he announced his plan to establish a theater in Quito in 1941. Through May 1948, the theater performed roughly thirty plays in German, about one new production every two months. The repertoire consisted mostly of comedies and farces, with Franz Molnár, Arthur Schnitzler, Anton Chekhov, and George Bernard Shaw as the most frequently performed authors (take your time to look these authors up). Yes, my family was very active in this amateur theater guild.



Figure 2 Siegfried Rosenthal in a Beneficencia Kammerspiel presentation circa 1942

The Kammerspiele was one of the best-known German-language emigrant theaters in South America, and it competed in quality against the Freie Deutsche Bühne in Buenos Aires and Die Komödie in Montevideo.

From 1946 onward, the group began performing in Spanish, renamed itself Teatro de Cámara, and Mr. Löwenberg established an acting school in Quito, open to Ecuadorians and taught in Spanish. By 1951, the Kammerspiele had effectively ceased to exist as a German-language theater.

Löwenberg returned to Germany in the 1950s to live in Hamburg. The reason for his departure from Ecuador and his activities in Hamburg are unknown. He died on October 14, 1975, at age 79, and was buried at Friedhof Ohlsdorf in Hamburg.



Figure 3 Der Raub der Sabinerinnen date unknown from Elio (Moselio) Schaechter scrapbook

Sources

The primary sources for this information are the German Wikipedia article on Karl Löwenberg and the article on the Kammerspiele theater group, both citing Maria-Luise Kreuter's chapter on Ecuador in the *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933–1945*, the *Biographisches Lexikon der Theaterkünstler*, and the P.-Walter-Jacob-Archiv in Hamburg and my conversations with Eva Balcazar nee Rosenthal.

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1. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Löwenberg
2. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kammerspiele_(Theatergruppe)
3. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teatro_Nacional_Sucre