

THEATER ON THE MOVE

Routes to Buenos Aires

Ludwig Ney was born into a German military family in the village of Landau on May 29, 1901. The son of an officer, Ney was inspired to become an actor during his days as a cadet. Ney participated in a local theater project while stationed near the Baltic Sea and immediately realized that his future lay not in the army, but on the stage. Like his rival in Buenos Aires, Paul Walter Jacob, Ney faced vehement opposition from his family when he told them of his decision. He was forced to flee home, and at the age of twenty was living in an attic in Mannheim with no furniture, no money, and little food.¹ His dedication was rewarded when the City College of Music and Theater in Mannheim admitted him to its theater department. Shortly thereafter, in 1921, the Mannheim National Theater engaged him to perform bit pieces and minor roles. Though fortunate to have found work at this storied theater, Ney became

1. "Gespräch mit Ludwig Ney," *Teutonia*, September 1938.

frustrated by the limited roles available to a young, inexperienced actor such as himself.² He soon left Mannheim for a provincial stage in Sonneberg, Thuringia, where he could play leading roles. It was a humble start. Ney had to study his lines during intermissions because, with thrice weekly premieres, it was impossible to prepare well for each performance.³ He even had to fashion his own costumes because of the theater's tight budget and the scarcity of supplies in rural Thuringia. Later, in Argentina, Ney claimed that these conditions were invaluable training for his work in South America, because they taught him optimism, resilience, and improvisation.⁴ The formative days of Ludwig Ney's acting career reveal a buoyant appetite for adventure and passion for theater.

Like many actors of the antifascist Free German Stage, the early years of Ney's acting career mark a meandering course through the German provinces, passing through Konstanz, Detmold, and Bielefeld to his first major engagement as actor, director, and choreographer in Recklinghausen.⁵ Thereafter, director Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard contracted Ney to collaborate on Handel's scenic oratorios with Kurt Jooss in Münster and later at the renowned cultural festivals held annually at the Heidelberg Castle. Esteemed by Joseph Goebbels, who entrusted him with artistic oversight for the opening ceremony of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin and performances honoring the German capital's 700th anniversary in 1937, Niedecken-Gebhard later reported to the Reich Theater Chamber that Ney's innovative vision would help to fill a palpable void in German theater. According to the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*, Ney's activities with these luminous figures earned him a position in the theater department at the Essen Folkwang School in 1931,⁶ where Jooss directed the Department of Dance.⁷

2. "Ludwig Ney: 70. Geburtstag—50. Bühnenjubiläum," *AT*, June 3, 1971.

3. Ney, interview by author, February 3, 2009.

4. "Gespräch mit Ludwig Ney," *Teutonia*, September 1938.

5. "Ludwig Ney: 70. Geburtstag," *AT*, June 3, 1971.

6. The *La Plata Zeitung* has generally proven to be a reliable source on Ney's biography; however, I have been unable to confirm its report that he was employed by the Folkwang School.

7. "Zusammenarbeit mit einem Künstler," *DLPZ*, January 5, 1941.

While in Essen, Ney attended concerts and dramatic productions at the municipal theater, where a frequent conductor and director was none other than his future adversary in Argentina, Paul Walter Jacob. Within a year, just weeks after the establishment of the Propaganda Ministry on March 11, 1933, Essen's theater critics derided Jacob as a Jew and Social Democrat and forced him from the city's stages.⁸ Whether or not Ludwig Ney read of Jacob's dismissal, the case clearly signaled that his own acting career was contingent on the goodwill of Nazi authorities. In 1934, together with his former student and future wife, Irene Winkler, Ludwig Ney left Essen to work full-time as an actor and director. In Berlin he founded a group called the Romantic Cabaret, which gained funding from the National Socialist Culture Community and Strength through Joy and toured throughout Germany from 1934 to 1936. Its life span thus coincided with National Socialists' efforts to consolidate their domination of German cultural life.

A branch of the German Labor Front, Strength through Joy had the self-declared goal of creating a National Socialist people's community while facilitating the perfection and refinement of the German populace.⁹ Perhaps best known for its activities in the tourism sector, Strength through Joy also provided the German working class affordable access to cultural events, such as concerts and theater. The primary goal of such performances, as articulated in the theater journal *Die Bühne*, was to cultivate ethnic unity through shared experiences of German cultural heritage.¹⁰ In addition to theater ensembles, critics were also conscripted into this endeavor. Pressured by the Reich Press Chamber and the 1933 Editors' Law, reviewers had the task of assisting—or impelling—theaters to inculcate citizens with Nazi values.¹¹ In the Romantic Cabaret's theater programs, Ney affirmed the National Socialist agenda of achieving a cohesive citizenry through cultural heritage by declaring his group's aspiration to reinforce the timeless virtues

8. "Randbemerkungen," *Essener National Zeitung*, March 26, 1933.

9. Baranowski, *Strength through Joy*, 40–42.

10. Strobl, *Swastika and the Stage*, 52.

11. Ruppelt, *Schiller im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, 116.



Figure 2. Ludwig Ney during a rehearsal.

Source: Regine Lamm Collection.

of the German race through art. As a “soldier of art” he exhorted his entire cast to devote themselves to this objective.¹²

On September 8, 1934, the Romantic Cabaret debuted at the well-known Tingel Tangel Theater, a political cabaret venue that had been founded in 1931 by the Jewish composer Friedrich Hollaender in the cellar of the Theater of the West in Berlin. Though Hollaender already had fled to Paris, in 1934 the Tingel Tangel had yet to be fully coordinated to Nazism. Remnants of its political program persevered until 1935, when the Gestapo arrested actors Walter Gross, Günther Lüders, and Walter Lieck for subversive remarks during performances. The venue’s reputation notwithstanding, there appears to have been no subversion in Ney’s debut, which garnered approving reviews from local media. The *Berliner Zeitung* praised Ney as the “father of the group,” and

12. Romantische Kleinkunstbühne Program, July 1, 1935, Cornelia Ney Collection (CNC).

lauded the outstanding performances of his troupe.¹³ The Romantic Cabaret's repertoire ranged from canonical figures such as Hans Sachs and Matthias Claudius to lesser-known regional folk songs from Mecklenburg and Franconia, many of which Ney had unearthed himself during his travels throughout Germany. Reviewers across Germany commended Ney for utilizing the cabaret genre to revitalize obscure works from the rich tradition of Germanic song, dance, theater, and poetry: "The director draws from the reservoir of history—German history."¹⁴ Reporting on the ensemble's performance at the Residence Theater in Wiesbaden, the *Landeszeitung für Rhein-Main* argued that the Romantic Cabaret vitalized German cultural history to establish an emotional and intellectual rapport between spectators and performers.¹⁵ Asserting that the presentation represented the soul of unadulterated German folklore, the *Würzburg General Anzeiger* reflected that Ney's greatest accomplishment was to have created cabaret-style ditties that cultivated and informed Germans' sense of national identity. Both papers glimpsed in the group's program a potential vehicle for fomenting German nationalism.¹⁶

Ney's focus on autochthonous German culture as an anchor for national affection neatly dovetailed with the Propaganda Ministry's vision for a new, ethnic German theater. However, Ney abstained from the bellicose depictions of German history that many dramatists were producing at the time.¹⁷ Furthermore, reviewers sometimes wanted stronger affirmation of Nazi ideology in his productions. The *Berliner Zeitung* chastised the stage for its multicultural accents and was vexed when Ney introduced a Hans Sachs poem with—perhaps foreshadowing his emigration to

13. "Romantische Kleinkunsthöhne," *Berliner Zeitung*, September 8, 1934.

14. "Romantische Kleinkunsthöhne," *Berliner Zeitung*, September 8, 1934.

15. "Romantische Kleinkunsthöhne," *Landeszeitung für Rhein-Main*, December 13, 1935.

16. "Ein heiter-besinnlicher Abend," *Würzburg General Anzeiger*, February 7, 1935.

17. Just a few examples include Hans Christian Kaergel's *Volk ohne Heimat* (1932), Kurt Eggers's *Annaberg* (1933), and Hans Kyser's *Lebenskampf der Ostmark* (1934).

Argentina—a tango.¹⁸ Reviewers from Berlin to Nuremberg also asserted that the stage's historical focus rendered its performances insufficiently contemporary.¹⁹ Perhaps the choice of the Tingel Tangel venue, his collaboration with future emigrant Kurt Jooss, and these instances of dissociation shed light on Ney's enigmatic decision in early 1937 to abandon Europe and start a new life in the South American republic of Paraguay.

The vast majority of emigrants from Nazi Germany were refugees. They were victims who fled Hitler's tyranny and sought safety abroad. In this context, Ludwig Ney's emigration is anomalous. Gentile Germans from military families, neither Ludwig Ney nor his partner, Irene Ney, had any apparent reason to fear Nazi oppression. It is possible that Ney had reservations about National Socialism, but his work with Strength through Joy demonstrates that he was not a dissident. Indeed, Ney had many reasons not to emigrate. Not only was his personal life anchored in Germany, but he stood to gain from Hitler's rise to power. The mass exodus of persecuted artists opened professional opportunities for racially and politically unobjectionable actors such as Ludwig Ney. Rainer Schlösser's Reich Theater Chamber recruited and funded artists for German stages, and, as an experienced thespian and pedagogue, Ney was in a fine position to profit from these programs. He had collaborated with major figures in the Nazi German theater milieu, such as Niedecken-Gebhard, and had directed his own modestly successful troupe for three years running. Additionally, he had secured funding from one of the nation's leading entertainment institutions, Strength through Joy. So why, with seemingly everything in his favor, did Ludwig Ney voluntarily emigrate and join the thousands of persecuted refugees fleeing Germany?

One theory is that the Nazi government contracted Ney to establish a German theater in South America. In fact, when Ney launched the German Theater in 1938, it was sponsored by the

18. "Romantische Kleinkunstbühne," *Berliner Zeitung*, September 8, 1934.

19. "Romantische Kleinkunstbühne," *Landeszeitung für Rhein-Main*, December 13, 1935; "Aus Kunst und Leben," *Wiesbadener Tageblatt*, December 19, 1936; "Das war Kleinkunst," *Fränkischer Kurier*, 1936.

Argentine branch of Strength through Joy. However, Ney's arrival and yearlong sojourn in Paraguay do not mesh with this scenario. Strength through Joy did not exist in Paraguay, and reports of Ney's theatrical activities in Paraguay do not mention any association with German institutions.²⁰ Ney's cooperation with Strength through Joy and the German embassy in Argentina appear to have occurred only after he had arrived in South America.

Cornelia Ney, Ludwig and Irene Ney's only child, claims that her father's adventurous spirit—specifically a friend's invitation to visit his farm in San Bernadino, Paraguay—inspired his journey.²¹ As fanciful as this account seems, alternative narratives for Ney's emigration are scant. In interviews, former colleagues of Ney's spoke candidly about his collaboration with Nazi authorities in Argentina. Two of them, Ursula Siegerist and Regine Lamm, knew that he had spent time in Paraguay before arriving in Argentina. Yet nobody other than his daughter could explain why Ludwig Ney had left Europe in the first place. Various newspapers and magazines mention Ney's work in Germany, but only the *Deutsche Zeitung für Paraguay* and the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* note the year he spent in San Bernadino, and neither discusses his motivations for traveling to this far-flung, landlocked country.²² Despite interviews with Ney's former colleagues and his family, as well very extensive archival research, I cannot explain why he left Europe in the first place.²³ Another theory is that his partner, Irene, had Jewish ancestry. Her maiden name, Winkler, could indicate Jewish genealogy. Such lineage might have motivated her and Ludwig Ney

20. "Die Pfingstkutsche," *Deutsche Zeitung für Paraguay*, May 20, 1937; "Deutsche Review in San Bernardino, Paraguay," *DLPZ*, May 30, 1937.

21. Ney, interview.

22. "Ludwig Ney: 70. Geburtstag," *AT*, June 3, 1971; Juan Marian Dafcik, "Ludwig Ney und das deutschsprachige Theater in Argentinien," *Maske und Kothurn* 10 (1964): 640–643; "Cuando empiezan a ser argentinos," *LN*, April 2, 1961; "Ausländisches Theaterwesen," *FP*, January 12, 1953; "Aus dem deutschen Theaterleben in Buenos Aires," *Der Weg*, June 1949.

23. "Ludwig Ney: 70. Geburtstag," *AT*, June 3, 1971; Dafcik, "Ludwig Ney und das deutschsprachige Theater in Argentinien"; "Cuando empiezan a ser argentinos," *LN*, April 2, 1961; "Ausländisches Theaterwesen," *FP*, January 12, 1953; "Aus dem deutschen Theaterleben in Buenos Aires," *Weg*, June 1949.

to emigrate, a decision that otherwise resists explanation. However, there is no hard proof to support this hypothesis; in the last analysis it is limited to conjecture.

In a biographical article following the 1940 theater season in Buenos Aires, the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* speculated that his seemingly innate pioneering spirit had brought Ney to South America.²⁴ From the day he left his home to attend acting school in Mannheim until his arrival in the Argentine capital, Ney was on the move. As he traveled throughout Germany and assumed a wide range of professional responsibilities, the only constant in his life was theater. His abilities as a pedagogue and director were immensely valuable in Buenos Aires, where some members of his ensemble were not professional actors. Furthermore, as he reiterated in interviews in Germany and Argentina, during his travels with the Romantic Cabaret Ney learned to achieve a maximum artistic effect with minimal resources.²⁵ As in provincial Germany, Ney's enthusiasm for his career eclipsed the challenges of acting in South America: "It is the greatest happiness to have a fulfilling profession, one that is a source of happiness in itself. In this situation, difficulties do not really matter."²⁶ Ney's upbeat outlook and professional experience were key attributes of his success as a pioneer of German theater in Argentina. Politically antithetical, Ludwig Ney, Paul Walter Jacob, and many of their colleagues were linked by a mutual, unrelenting passion for the dramatic stage.

Ludwig Ney began performing extraordinarily soon after his arrival to South America. Less than five months after his final engagement in Wiesbaden, the first reports of Ney's theatrical activities in Paraguay surface. Photographs from his first project in Paraguay, "The Pentecostal Carriage," performed on May 15, 1937, reveal very primitive conditions. Since rural San Bernardino lacked a proper facility, performances were held outdoors on a raised patch of grass. The costumes were simple, homemade improvisations.

24. "Zusammenarbeit mit einem Künstler," *DLPZ*, January 5, 1941.

25. "Ein heiter-besinnlicher Abend," *Würzburg General Anzeiger*, February 7, 1935; "Gespräch mit Ludwig Ney," *Teutonia*, September 1938.

26. "Gespräch mit Ludwig Ney," *Teutonia*, September 1938.

To compensate for these shortcomings, Ney took advantage of the open-air performance space and added a working carriage with live horses as a physical inspiration for the narrative frame of his drama. He also incorporated local Paraguayan and German musicians into the production, thus lending a new intercultural dimension to pieces he had performed in Europe. Entertainment was rare in the Paraguayan countryside, and many spectators traveled a full day by horse to the well-attended event. In militaristic jargon, the *Deutsche Zeitung für Paraguay* lavished praise on Ney's "Carriage." The Franconian folk song "It," now accompanied by live musicians instead of a phonograph, delighted the numerous spectators: "salvos of guffaws" roared through the audience. Reviewers were likewise impressed by Ludwig and Irene Ney's performance, referring to their acting as a "huge success."²⁷

The "Carriage" may well have carried Ney all the way to Buenos Aires. Ten days after the piece in the *Deutsche Zeitung für Paraguay*, a full-page article about the performance appeared in the *Deutsche la Plata Zeitung* in Buenos Aires. The report almost surely caught the attention of Nazi officials in the Argentine capital. Galvanized by the success of sporadic guest performances in recent years, German consul Edmund von Thermann and Richard Schröder, regional leader of the German Labor Front, probably realized that a regularly performing local ensemble would be more effective in consolidating supporters of National Socialism in Argentina.²⁸ After reading about Ludwig and Irene Ney's activities in Paraguay, and especially upon learning that they had worked with Strength through Joy in Germany, Nazi officials in Buenos Aires likely glimpsed an opportunity to establish such an enterprise. For his part, Ney would have recognized that the size and resources of the German population in Argentina offered greater professional possibilities than in Paraguay.²⁹ Under the auspices of the German

27. "Die Pfingstkutsche," *Deutsche Zeitung für Paraguay*, May, 20, 1937.

28. "Deutsches Schauspiel 1934," *DLPZ*, May 29, 1934; "Kraft durch Freude Veranstaltung im Teatro Odeon," *Der Deutsche in Argentinien (DiA)*, July/August 1935; "2. Große 'Kraft durch Freude'-Veranstaltung: Besuch bei der Riesch-Bühne," *DiA*, October 1935.

29. Ney, interview.

embassy and Strength through Joy, Ludwig Ney's inaugural performance in Buenos Aires took place on May 19, 1938.³⁰ From his debut, Ney would continue to be a prominent player on stages in the Argentine capital for the next thirty-four years.

Even in 1937 Wilhelm Keiper, a prolific scholar and special adviser on education to the German embassy from 1931 to 1938, had deemed it impossible for German Buenos Aires to support a regularly performing theater.³¹ Without funding from the Labor Front, Strength through Joy, and the embassy, Keiper probably would have been correct. Furthermore, the foundation of the antifascist Free German Stage stemmed in large part from a will to compete against the nationalist German Theater.³² Nazi officialdom thus had a germinal influence on both German theaters in Argentina.

Theater in Times of Crisis

Paul Walter Jacob was born to a middle-class Orthodox Jewish family in Duisburg on January 26, 1905. In 1908 his family relocated to Mainz, where Jacob attended the Hessian Secondary School and also studied music theory, history, and composition at the Paul Schumacher Conservatory. When he completed his studies, Jacob decided to pursue a career as an actor or musician, which enraged his family. His mother lashed him with a dog whip and insisted he become a merchant like his father.³³ This bitter conflict, which Jacob described in letters to a childhood friend, discloses a reserve of willpower essential to his perseverance in European and South American exile. The letters also indicate that his parents likely tried to prepare him for a career in business, which, ironically, later became fundamental to his artistic success. Both in Europe and South America, Jacob's achievements in theater can be attributed in large part to his ability to marry creative talent with business acumen.

30. "Deutsche Kleinkunstbühne Ludwig Ney," *DiA*, June 1938.

31. Keiper, *Der Deutsche in Argentinien*, 29.

32. Jacob to Felix Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.

33. Naumann, *Ein Theatermann im Exil*, P. Walter Jacob, 23.

In 1923, Jacob left his family to study music and art history, philosophy, and journalism at the Frederick William University in Berlin. He also studied at Max Reinhardt's acting school at the German Theater, where he learned from the actor Ferdinand Gregori, a colleague of Otto Brahm. From 1926 to 1929 Jacob worked as assistant conductor at the Berlin State Opera. For the next three years, he found employment as a conductor, director, actor, and journalist in Koblenz (1929–30), Lübeck (1930–31), Wuppertal (1931–32), and Essen (1932–33). At these theaters he developed competencies as an artist, organizer, and businessman, which prepared him for the challenges he later faced in Argentina. Scholars have argued that Jacob learned these skills from others during his European exile; however, Jacob's memoirs from his years in Germany show that he began to hone his skills as a theater director and entrepreneur before 1933.³⁴ Moreover, Jacob cultivated his strategy on managing theaters in times of economic and political crisis largely on his own and often against the will of his superiors.

The comparison may seem unlikely; however, conditions at German provincial stages in the early 1930s were in many ways analogous to the environment in Buenos Aires a decade later. In both settings, Jacob was confronted with the challenge of managing theaters in a politically volatile environment with precarious, insufficient finances, incomplete and traumatized ensembles, and a small, beleaguered public. As a result of a budget shortfall in late 1931, Jacob's first season at the Wuppertal Municipal Theater, local authorities resolved to shut down the city's theater down the following July. Management was forced to rapidly refashion the stage into a solvent business enterprise while maintaining its cultural value. As the representative for the Guild of the German Stage in Wuppertal, Jacob played a leading role in this effort.

At the Wuppertal Municipal Theater and numerous venues throughout Germany, the core of the predicament was dwindling audiences. According to Jacob, Wuppertal's theater was failing because it had neglected its obligations as a community institution.

34. Lemmer, *Die "Freie Deutsche Bühne" in Buenos Aires 1940–1965*, 18; Naumann, *Ein Theatermann im Exil*, 61.

Consequently, it had grown estranged from spectators, a potentially fatal development. Jacob believed the theater could reconnect with theatergoers and boost attendance, but only after comprehensive reform. It had to recover its historical, emotional, and moral appeal. Furthermore, it needed to implement pragmatic business tactics to persevere in the harsh economic climate of 1932. Jacob believed three crucial steps were required to accomplish these goals: (1) establish a close and direct rapport between the theater and the residents of Wuppertal; (2) increase the theater's pull and profile as a popular entertainment option through an aggressive, modernized advertising campaign; and (3) reform its repertoire to better suit the tastes of theatergoers in the turbulent early 1930s. To its details, Jacob's successful strategy for rescuing the Wuppertal theater laid the groundwork for the program he followed to found and sustain the Free German Stage in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, and perhaps unexpectedly, Jacob's plan overlaps significantly with the tactics for publicity and community outreach that Ludwig Ney implemented at the nationalist German Theater.

Jacob believed the crises of 1932 could strengthen the bond between the stage and its local community. He hoped to initiate a sense of interconnectedness between Wuppertal's residents and their theater by publishing open letters to readers of the local newspaper, *Bergische Heimat*. For stage and populace alike 1932 represented, as Jacob presciently described, a grave hour on the threshold of a dark, menacing future.³⁵ Against this backdrop of shared struggle, he outlined his vision of a close, interdependent relationship between Wuppertal and its theater. Depicting their theater as a cultural edifice, constructed with sacrifice by generations of Wuppertal's citizens, Jacob conveyed the ruinous fate of its cast should the stage close its doors. He then exhorted his readers: "Rescue art and artists! Save culture from its downfall!"³⁶ In his appeal, Jacob evoked his readers' sense of empathy for local artists while simultaneously empowering them to protect and preserve their cultural traditions.

35. Jacob, "An die Bevölkerung Wuppertals," *Bergische Heimat*, January 1932.

36. Jacob, "An die Bevölkerung Wuppertals," *Bergische Heimat*, January 1932.

The relationship between theater and city, Jacob stressed in *Bergische Heimat*, was interdependent. Amid deep economic and social tumult, just months before the National Socialists' resounding victories in the Reichstag elections of 1932, Jacob claimed that theater would strengthen and unite Wuppertal as it confronted the looming peril: "*In times of distress, German theater has always given you solidarity and edification!*"³⁷ Jacob reminded citizens that literature, in this case performed on stage, was always an essential source of guidance in times of crisis. A dynamic and highly regenerative repository of knowledge for living, literature provided audiences a vast store of accumulated wisdom, moral support, and guidance.³⁸ Dramatic performances then tested these ideas in a fictional laboratory, enabling theatergoers to hone survival strategies for precarious external environments. Crucially, Jacob noted, theater was a shared experience. An interactive event among thespians onstage and spectators offstage, as well between these two groups, the dramatic performance requires the bodily copresence of the ensemble and the audience.³⁹ While reading is an experience generally limited to individuals or small groups, in live theater literature gains a vitalizing social dimension. Dramatic presentations are rooted in social community. As they unfold they also nurture community between actors and spectators. Moreover, the communal commitment to the labor, time, and funding required to sustain the theater fortify the social union that each performance engenders.

Jacob's article in *Bergische Heimat* closed with a message that both he and German nationalists would reiterate and reinforce years later in Argentina. The Free German Stage and Ludwig Ney's German Theater each echoed Jacob's urgent conclusion: "Become the standard-bearers of a great German future! Preserve the German stage!"⁴⁰ For all their differences, the immigrant blocs agreed that German theater had a pivotal role to play in the tenuous transition

37. Jacob, "An die Bevölkerung Wuppertals," *Bergische Heimat*, January 1932 (emphasis in original).

38. Ette, "Literaturwissenschaft als Lebenswissenschaft," 5.

39. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 19.

40. Jacob, "An die Bevölkerung Wuppertals."

from despair to prosperity. In Buenos Aires, victims and supporters of Nazism advocated that the theatrical experience would consolidate the local community as well as inform and inspire its efforts to withstand times of crisis such as the Nazi and postwar periods.

In tandem with these goals, Jacob elaborated a pragmatic business model that he followed closely in Wuppertal and later in Buenos Aires. Without public funding, in a free-market economy the theater can only survive as a solvent business enterprise. Rather than cutting costs and thereby reducing the quality of presentations, Jacob focused on maximizing income by increasing attendance. An aggressive, modernized advertising campaign was fundamental to this strategy, thus challenging contemporary notions that the high-brow cultural theater was above competing with popular entertainment, such as cinema. Regardless of its status as a sacrosanct German cultural institution, Jacob asserted that the theater was subject to the same competition as any other business enterprise and had to formulate corresponding marketing tactics.⁴¹ Failure to promote its accomplishments amounted to suicidal snobbery.⁴² Essentially, each theater should mirror not only the artistic but also the commercial and administrative spirit of its city. Thus, by adopting a modern business model Jacob also saw an opportunity for the theater to approximate its community.

To firmly anchor the Wuppertal theater in the local population, flyers, posters, programs, and actors promoted upcoming productions throughout the city. Presaging the Free German Stage's engagement with antifascist schools in Argentina, as well as Ludwig Ney's projects with the Goethe, Humboldt, and North Schools, Jacob implemented a publicity campaign in Wuppertal under the maxim "The theater has no future unless it wins over the youth." The cast put on dramas and workshops targeting younger audiences, and made attendance affordable through special ticket packages with discounts for group purchases by educational institutions.

Beyond direct advertising, theaters had to make far better use of local news outlets, a key means of integrating with the community.

41. Jacob, "Bemerkungen zu Theateretat," PWJA IV c) 253.

42. Jacob, "Denkschrift zur Frage Theaterbewerbung," PWJA IV c) 253.

Anticipating cooperation between the Free German Stage and the German Theater with the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* and the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*, respectively, Jacob envisioned thorough previews, personalized anecdotes from backstage, reports on social and economic issues facing the theater, updates on the national theater scene, essays about works being prepared for performance, and written contributions by members of the cast. By deploying newspapers as the primary form of offstage communication between the audience and ensemble, both Paul Walter Jacob and Ludwig Ney aimed to forge a community identity centered around theater.

The third and most polemical tenet of Jacob's program for a modernized theater was to reform the repertoire. A quicker rotation of dramas would best exploit the theater's promotional activities, because the previews and reviews are forgotten if a play remains in the repertoire for months. Furthermore, reducing the number of performances of each drama would diversify the productions and attract larger audiences, thereby enabling management to lower prices.⁴³ While a faster rotation limits rehearsals, Jacob reasoned that this could also be energizing for thespians, whose portrayals could become stale after an excessive number of presentations. Moreover, Jacob insisted that his suggestions must not have a detrimental effect on quality, because the foundation of any marketing is the performance itself.⁴⁴ For this reason, his plans were contingent on a seasoned ensemble working under a director who knew each individual well and understood how to distribute roles for each piece. Finally, an increase in premieres would encourage habitual theatergoers to visit the theater more frequently, generating greater ticket sales and cultivating a closer relationship between audiences and actors.

Most polemically, Jacob argued that highbrow theaters had to attract a broader public by balancing the German classics and literary dramas with a greater number of contemporary selections, including simple, lighthearted comedies. The Guild of the German

43. Jacob, "Bemerkungen zu Theateretat."

44. Jacob, "Denkschrift zur Frage Theaterbewerbung."

Stage was firmly opposed to this measure; however, Jacob was convinced that a rigid position on the issue was untenable. The core of the repertoire had to be literary dramas but, especially in turbulent times, these would be carried by popular, profitable lighter genres, such as the operetta or the farce.⁴⁵ A firm policy at the Free German Stage, this approach has been vigorously debated ever since the group's inaugural performance in 1940.⁴⁶ Jacob formulated his plan in 1932, theorizing that in a period of emotional and economic depression theatergoers would favor the lighter muse.⁴⁷ The theater could assuage audiences' hardships by offering respite from a troubled reality.

Jacob's strategy helped to save the Wuppertal Municipal Theater and was a cornerstone to his success with the Free German Stage in Argentina. Furthermore, in Buenos Aires, Ludwig Ney incorporated many of these ideas at his rival German Theater. Each enterprise took a remarkably similar approach to community building, advertising, and creating repertoires. Though harshly criticized by friends and foes alike, the survival of all three stages under immensely challenging circumstances lends credence to Jacob's tactics.

"Jewish mimes unwanted": Paul Walter Jacob

At the outset of the 1932–33 theater season, Paul Walter Jacob appeared to have a promising future on German stages. His accomplishments as a director in Wuppertal earned him strong praise from the theater's general intendant, Manfred Maurenbrecher: "Your excellent work . . . has found my fullest recognition. You represent a new, young and progressive generation, which will exert

45. Jacob, "Denkschrift zur Frage Theaterbewerbung."

46. Julius Bab, "Deutsches Theater in Argentinien," *Sonntagsblatt: Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, May 16, 1948; Pohle, "Paul Walter Jacob am Rio de la Plata: Der Kurs der FDB—eine exilpolitische Gratwanderung"; Trapp, "Zwischen Unterhaltungsfunktion und der Erwartung politischer Stellungnahme."

47. Jacob, "Bemerkungen zu Theateretat."

a formative influence on our stages.”⁴⁸ That year Jacob also began a more prestigious position as director and conductor for theater, opera, and operetta in Essen. Yet, the Nazis’ ascension to power abruptly halted his professional development. On March 26, 1933, the *Essener National Zeitung* printed a sinister preview of Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman*:

The conductor, of all people, is the Jew and Social Democrat Walter Jacob.

One question [to the opera administration]: Are you so secure that you can dare to insult the German people with a Jewish conductor now that the Jewish spirit has finally been eliminated from German stages, thank God?⁴⁹

Jacob was dismissed from the Essen Municipal Opera and Theater immediately. On March 30, 1933, the *Essener National Zeitung* rejoiced that he would no longer continue to defile German art, and threatened Jewish thespians with further attacks.⁵⁰ The next day Paul Walter Jacob purchased a one-way ticket on a night train to Amsterdam.

Theater was a precarious, liminal space for Jewish actors in Europe during the 1930s. The public nature of their work on the stage exposed them to anti-Semitism very quickly, often forcing them into an early exile. For Jacob, theater was a source of both survival and peril in exile. It created opportunities and earned him a living, but it was a visible profession that made him vulnerable.

Jacob’s European exile corresponds to Bertolt Brecht’s poetic portrait of exiled artists, who changed countries more often than their shoes.⁵¹ After working as a journalist in Amsterdam and Paris, Jacob was engaged as an actor and director in late 1935 by a newly founded Luxemburg touring theater, The Comedy, under Walter Eberhard. Although Eberhard promised good pay and an

48. Maurenbrecher to Jacob, Wuppertal, May 19, 1932, PWJA II b) 203.

49. “Randbemerkungen,” *Essener National Zeitung*, March 26, 1933.

50. “Jüdische Mimen nicht mehr gefragt,” *Essener National Zeitung*, March 30, 1933.

51. Bertolt Brecht, “An die Nachgeborenen,” in Grimm, *Bertolt Brecht*, 72.

ambitious repertoire, his enterprise went bankrupt in less than two years. Rather than having learned from Eberhard, as some scholars have claimed, in fact Jacob attempted to advise his older colleague on personnel and budgeting.⁵² One example is the two men's conflicting views on contracting personnel. In Jacob's view, The Comedy's precarious finances required it to maintain a small ensemble. Despite his repeated warnings, Eberhard contracted several new thespians following the 1935 season.⁵³ Then, a few months later, the director realized he could not afford such a large cast and terminated their contracts. By contrast, Jacob insisted that for an exilic theater sustainable budgeting is a moral obligation, because its refugee ensemble will be in dire circumstances if the stage fails. When The Comedy went bankrupt in 1936, its cast was left penniless and unemployed. The actors even had to sue Eberhard for unpaid wages.⁵⁴ In Buenos Aires Jacob took every precaution, even against the will of his colleagues, to ensure that the Free German Stage did not repeat the fiasco of Luxemburg.

After The Comedy collapsed, Jacob arrived at the final station of his European exile: Teplitz-Schönau, Czechoslovakia. This resort town of approximately 50,000 inhabitants had a very limited public, similar to the refugee population in Buenos Aires. Jacob implemented a repertory featuring a wide variety of plays with an extremely fast rotation, just six presentations per drama. Thanks to this policy, the Teplitz-Schönau City Theater enjoyed successful seasons in 1936 and 1937. However, this respite could only be temporary.⁵⁵ Jacob's work exposed him to Nazi authorities as an antifascist Jewish actor and journalist, and in March 1938 he was stripped of German citizenship.⁵⁶ The German annexation of Austria followed later that month. In July, he wrote to a former colleague that the "living space for myself and my peers has become

52. Lemmer, *Die "Freie Deutsche Bühne,"* 18; Naumann, *Ein Theatermann,* 61.

53. Jacob to Eberhard, December 17, 1935, PWJAK.

54. Jacob to Eberhard, January 26, 1936, PWJAK.

55. Paul Walter Jacob, "In Prag vor fünf Jahren," *AT*, September 14, 1942.

56. *Deutscher Reichsanzeiger und Preussischer Staatsanzeiger*, April 20, 1938.

hopelessly small.”⁵⁷ Frantic, by August 1938 Jacob had written to contacts of the vaguest kind in England, Sweden, Switzerland, Greece, Palestine, the United States, South Africa, and Australia—all to no avail. His acquaintances warned him either that conditions were intolerable or that acquiring an entrance visa was impossible.

Jacob’s chance to flee Europe arrived through his work in Teplitz-Schönau, where he met Liselott Reger, a Jewish actress and Argentine citizen. As the situation in Europe worsened, they became romantically involved and decided to escape together to Argentina. Jacob had renewed his German passport in May 1937, and in Prague he was able to purchase a visa to Paraguay. With this document he procured a transit visa for Argentina, which he converted to a residence permit when he became engaged to Reger in Buenos Aires. Shortly thereafter Reger, Jacob, and a small auxiliary cast performed scenes from Curt Goetz’s comedy *Menagerie* (1919) for an audience of potential donors. Six months later, with Reger and Jacob as founding members and business partners, the Free German Stage put on its inaugural performance.

In addition to Reger, several actors who played with Jacob at The Comedy and in Teplitz-Schönau also performed at the Free German Stage. In Luxemburg Jacob acted together with Georg Braun⁵⁸ and Jacques Arndt,⁵⁹ and in Czechoslovakia he shared the stage with Ernst Wurmser⁶⁰ and Liselott Reger.⁶¹ As they were all Jewish antifascist thespians, their shared experiences in exile contributed to cohesion in the Free German Stage ensemble. Moreover, as he had noted in Wuppertal, Jacob’s familiarity with his cast facilitated his plans for a diverse repertoire and quick rotation of dramas.⁶² Separated for years and oceans at a time when hundreds of thousands of refugees were fleeing Europe, they were reunited, often through sheer coincidence, in South America’s Southern Cone.

57. Jacob to Carl Ebert, June 7, 1938, PWJAK.

58. “*Der Mann, den sein Gewissen trieb*,” *Luxemburger Zeitung*, October 7, 1935.

59. “*Kabale und Liebe*,” *Luxemburger Volksblatt*, December 27, 1935.

60. “*Es ist serviert!*,” *Wegweiser*, June 21, 1937.

61. “*Kabale und Liebe*,” *Der Abend*, March 4, 1937.

62. Jacob, “Bemerkungen zu Theateretat.”

The Makings of a Hitler Youth: Jacques Arndt

Having married an Argentine citizen, Paul Walter Jacob's path from his last performance in Europe to his debut in South America was relatively smooth. For Jacques Arndt, whose career on Argentine stages spanned six decades, the journey was more adventurous. This section discusses Arndt's winding route from Vienna's Court Theater to the Free German Stage in Buenos Aires.⁶³

Although he was born in Sarajevo, Arndt's family moved to Vienna when he was still an infant, and from his earliest childhood Arndt's parents took him to the theater. As a young boy he began acting at the prestigious Court Theater, where he played smaller supporting roles for children.⁶⁴ After he finished middle school, Arndt enrolled in the Viennese State Academy of Music and the Performing Arts, where many of his instructors were actors in the Court Theater's first ensemble. Simultaneously, Arndt acted in the Youth Theater at the Vienna People's Opera.⁶⁵ Targeting a youthful audience, this theater gave less experienced actors opportunities to play leading roles in canonical dramas.

In July 1938, shortly after the German annexation of Austria, the Youth Theater staged Schiller's *Wallenstein*.⁶⁶ Enthusiasm for the Nazi regime was at a high pitch, and even before the presentation had begun, an official gave a speech that culminated: "Hail the new day! Hail the new *Führer*!"⁶⁷ Backstage the Jewish Arndt was

63. The interviews I conducted with Arndt represent the most thorough account of his emigration that I have encountered; however, I consulted multiple sources for verification: Guy Stern, "Die Odyssee Jacques Arndts: Vom Theater der Jugend in Wien zum argentinischen Musical-Star," *Aufbau*, November 22, 1985; Naumann, *Ein Theatermann*, 116; Douer and Seeber, *Wie weit ist Wien*; Lemmer, *Die "Freie Deutsche Bühne"*, 104–105; "Vom Burgtheater ins Exil," *Die Furche*, August 11, 2005; "Evocaciones," *LN*, July 9, 2006; "Der verhinderte Burghauspieler," *Radio Österreich 1*, August 14, 2006.

64. Posters, *Der Kaiser von Amerika*; *Die Majorische*, December 30, 1933; Jacques Arndt Collection (JAC)/Exilbibliothek im Literaturhaus Wien (ELW).

65. Poster, *Des Meeres und der Liebe Wellen*, April 10, 1935, JAC/ELW.

66. "Wallenstein im Theater der Jugend," *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, March 11, 1938.

67. Arndt, interview by author, August 2, 2006.

appalled, but onstage his role of hunter-cum-soldier harmonized with the new order. The contradiction proved untenable. In one scene the hunter, flush with admiration for the great general, rallies a skeptical cuirassier to join his troops. The fateful moment occurred when Arndt uttered the lines: “Only with strength is freedom mine, I’ll live and die with Wallenstein!”⁶⁸ Arndt spoke his character’s lines with conviction, but the audience’s reaction horrified him. His lines incited the young audience, which understood “strength” as the annexation and Wallenstein as Hitler. A pro-Hitler demonstration erupted, and “Heil Hitler” chants disrupted the performance. Aghast, in the emotion of the moment Arndt committed an actor’s worst sin—he fell out of character and openly rebuked the audience from onstage.⁶⁹ His performative identity gave way to his phenomenal one, and he was held accountable for expressing his true opinions. When a spectator threatened to report him, Arndt exited his role again, this time retorting with a quote from Goethe’s *Götz of Berlichingen*—“Lick my arse.”⁷⁰

Arndt’s inability to adhere to his fictional role held potentially fatal consequences. A few days later two policemen entered his apartment, where he lived with his mother. Born into a patriotic family, Arndt’s deceased father had been an army officer, his mother a nurse in World War I. To his death, Arndt remained uncertain who these men were, but he imagined they must have come to his home because of his father’s role in the military. The strangers admonished his mother that her son had to flee immediately, because his name was on an arrest list. Decades later Arndt concluded that they, too, were actors: double agents. Jeopardized by his error onstage, from this moment forward his survival depended on his acting ability. The two men described an intricate route out of Nazi territory, but he was not permitted to write any of it down. Instead, he had to memorize all the information, which was, as

68. Friedrich Schiller, *Wallenstein and Mary Stuart*, ed. Walter Hinderer, trans. Jeanne Wilson (New York: Continuum, 1991), 42.

69. Arndt, interview, 2006.

70. Goethe, *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Werke, Kommentare und Register*, 4:143.

Arndt later reflected, no problem for a young actor.⁷¹ The problem was the route itself, which was even more terrifying than remaining in Vienna.

The men instructed Arndt to escape the Gestapo by heading straight to Germany. There was logic to the idea, bizarre and fearsome though it seemed. The men explained to him that the only Austrian border where guards would not be looking for him and other fugitives was the frontier with Germany. Most people fleeing the Nazis would try to cross into Switzerland, Italy, or Hungary, and that is exactly where the authorities would be waiting for them. Arndt's escape route followed a zigzag course on commuter trains and local buses across Germany, from the border near Salzburg north almost until Berlin and then southwest to Trier. Despite the rationale behind the plan, Arndt still shook his head seventy-five years later as he recalled the men's advice: "utter insanity, going to hell to flee the devil."⁷² He had to remember the proper trains, imitate local customs, and speak with regional accents to avoid arousing suspicion, all the while behaving as if each situation was nothing out of the ordinary. The French actor and director Jean-Louis Barrault described the skills of an accomplished thespian as an exceptionally strong will and well-trained pliability of body posture, as well as a high degree of flexibility in breathing and range of voice.⁷³ These were all skills Arndt had been honing since his childhood. Convincing the people around him that he was an ordinary German was a matter of performance, and he had already rehearsed for the role. In 1935, reviewing his portrayal of Eital in Maurice Rostand's pacifist drama, *The Man I Killed* (1930), the *Luxemburger Volksblatt* noted: "Jacques Arndt has the makings of a Hitler youth."⁷⁴ Arndt's work as an actor had cultivated the talents he now needed to escape Nazi persecution.

71. Arndt, interview, 2006.

72. Jacques Arndt, interview by author, December 25, 2008.

73. Barrault, *Ich bin Theatermensch*, 177.

74. "Theater im Volkshaus," *Luxemburger Volksblatt*, October 7, 1935. See also "Vorschau auf Winterspielzeit," *Luxemburger Zeitung*, September 27, 1935; "Bunbury," *Luxemburger Wort*, November 11, 1935; "Prinz Übermuts Fahrt ins Märchenland," *Der Landwirt*, December 7, 1935.

Later, when people asked him if he had been frightened during his journey, Arndt offered the simplistic, almost childish response that his actor's imagination had enabled him to remain calm and confident. As he crossed Germany, acting skills became survival skills: "I imagined it like a play in the theater. Ten meters ahead of me, the SS troops marched and I watched them as if I were onstage. I was young, blond, and completely convinced of my role in this crazy drama."⁷⁵ The philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel has claimed that a compelling actor gives the impression that he is presenting himself; his actions and sufferings should seem to unfold in real life. In other words, the actor's phenomenal body—his bodily being in the world—should be indistinguishable from his performative body in his fictional role onstage.⁷⁶ Arndt believed strongly enough in his self-created drama that he achieved this effect: "I just followed the script, and nobody paid me any heed. They never asked: 'Hey, who are you anyway?'"⁷⁷ Nobody saw the fleeing Jew behind the ordinary German.

When he arrived in Trier, Arndt's instructions were to act as though he were a tourist and stroll among the Roman ruins, slowly making his way down to the Mosel River. After crossing the Mosel and following the left bank past its intersection with the Sauer River, he would reach the least guarded way out of Germany. Here he would verify that there was no major patrol in the area, then dive into the Sauer and swim across to Luxemburg. If all went well, he quickly would be in safety. If border guards saw him, however, they would shoot. Everything went according to plan until he reached the middle of the Sauer, at which point he heard gunshots. Diving underwater he swam hard, holding his breath until he reached the far bank. He was hardly a great athlete, Arndt explained, but "in this situation, everyone is Diego Maradona. It is a matter of life or death."⁷⁸ In this moment, Arndt indicated, his

75. Arndt, interview, 2006.

76. Georg Simmel, "Zur Philosophie des Schauspielers," *Internationale Zeitung für die Philosophie der Kultur* 9 (1920–21): 339–340.

77. Arndt, interview, 2006.

78. Arndt, interview, 2006.

phenomenal body merged with his performative body, which on-stage is capable of acts it could never accomplish in reality.

Arndt's next destination was a charity organization in Luxembourg City, which doubled as an underground refugee assistance network. Wary of infiltration, they made him repeat his story dozens of times to see if he might eventually reveal inconsistencies.⁷⁹ Finally convinced, the group found him shelter in an attic and told him to keep a low profile, although they occasionally sent him out on small errands so neighbors would grow accustomed to seeing him about, and he would feel more comfortable in his environment. On one of these errands Arndt brought a letter to an office. When he delivered it, the recipients told him to go straight to the train station. Several other refugees already were waiting there, all strangers to him. A member of the relief organization ordered them to board the next train to Marseille, where another agent would greet them by reciting the first line of a French poem to which Arndt, the lone French speaker, would respond with the second line. Each refugee was told to sit in an exact seat in separate compartments. They had neither tickets nor passports. When they reached France, border guards entered Arndt's compartment and checked all the passengers' documents, except for his: "It was the same for everyone else. I don't know how they did it, but the escape was masterfully organized."⁸⁰

When they reached the station in Marseille a man came up to the group and mumbled a few words as he walked past. Unsure, Arndt remained silent, and the man disappeared. The group then stood on the platform for several hours, with no documents, no money, and no contacts in a foreign city. Finally, the man returned and said something. Arndt, still unsure—and terrified—responded with the corresponding line. "Hurry, come with me," the man answered. Arndt and his companions then rushed through the streets of Marseille, following a complete stranger. Abruptly, the man shoved them inside a small door that opened to a flight of stairs leading under an adjacent building: "It was the cellar of the beggar

79. Jacques Arndt, telephone conversation with author, April 2007.

80. Arndt, interview, 2006.

king Jeremiah Peachum from the *Threepenny Opera*. There were beggars, fake beggars, false blind men, and us suddenly in the middle of it all!”⁸¹ Aided by his actor’s imagination, Arndt compared the scene to Brecht’s play, which concludes with an unlikely happy ending, and was able to create an uplifting sense of familiarity.

Before sunrise, another man brought Arndt and his companions to the port and instructed them to wait for a signal. Given up to the hands of others, he had no choice but to continue following the script. Suddenly a sailor whistled, shoved a board through an opening in a freighter and motioned for him and a few others to climb in. The same sailor returned later with blankets and appeared once daily with food. For weeks Arndt and several other refugees huddled among cargo crates in the middle deck. They were cold, hungry, and with absolutely no idea of what awaited them, as Arndt put it, “in the next act.”⁸² Gradually, the weather grew warmer and the days longer. The ship docked at various harbors. After one stop, the sailor informed them that they had just departed from Santos, Brazil. The next stop was Montevideo, in democratic Uruguay. Here, the stowaways would disembark. The sailor gave them fake passports with their real names, plus forged vaccination records. There was a ten-dollar bill in each passport. At the last minute they scurried out of the ship on a wooden plank, just as they had boarded in Marseilles. The sailor called out “Good luck!” as the freighter left port.⁸³

And there he stood. The twenty-four-year-old Jacques Arndt spoke no Spanish, could not place Uruguay on a map, and with ten dollars and fake papers had to begin his life anew. Unsuccessfully, he tried to speak with passersby in German, French, and bits of English. He attempted time and again until finally a person stopped and responded in a foreign language he somehow understood, Yiddish. Arndt claimed to have had no contact with Yiddish in Vienna, but he could understand the man well enough to follow his directions to a pension.⁸⁴

81. Arndt, interview, 2006.

82. Arndt, telephone conversation, 2007.

83. Arndt, interview, 2006.

84. Arndt, interview, 2006.

Next, he began to look for work. His acting ability had rescued him from the Nazis, but guests told him it would not get him employment in Uruguay: "Someone asked me, 'What are you?' And I said proudly, 'I'm an actor.' 'Ah, very interesting. What language?' 'German.' 'Mmm, no good. Not useful here.'" But scores of German-speaking emigrants were arriving in Uruguay every week. Businesses run by refugees for refugees were springing up all over Montevideo. One such enterprise was Hermann Gebhardt's antifascist radio program, *The Voice of the Day*. The talented lawyer from Berlin designed content, found advertisers, did the accounting, even wrote copy—but he stuttered: "For him it was a godsend to find a professionally-trained speaker. And for me it was a miracle to find work on a German radio show in Uruguay. My salary was very small, but it was a start."⁸⁵

Arndt quickly learned customs, mannerisms, and some Spanish by observing and mimicking his environs. As a young, blonde, Viennese actor, he was something of a curiosity. The Uruguayan owners of the radio station enjoyed chatting with Arndt, who held their attention with his scanty repertoire of words, plus hands, feet, and gestures. One day they approached him with a record. To his astonishment, the men requested that he announce the song, a Viennese waltz, on the airwaves. When he had finished, they asked him to do this daily with a few waltzes, narrating an anecdote before playing the record. It was, Arndt recalled, an effective if intimidating form of language instruction: "They forced me to learn Spanish by speaking it live on the radio."⁸⁶ As an actor Arndt had developed skills in language acquisition and communication, abilities that now gained him employment and facilitated his integration into Uruguayan society.

Arndt's knack for entertainment and his comical efforts at Spanish pleased listeners. The gimmick received positive reviews and became a full-scale program, *Viennese Stamps*, which aired twice weekly on the station, *The World*. One radio magazine urged readers not to miss the "young European actor of elegant bearing and refined culture, who tells the most charming and diverse tales from

85. Arndt, interview, 2006.

86. Arndt, interview, 2006.

Austria's great city."⁸⁷ A few weeks later he was surprised by two men waiting for him when he arrived at the station. When Arndt confirmed that he was the actor named in the article, the men told him to expect them at the studio later that evening. Flattered by his success, Arndt had forgotten that he was in Uruguay illegally. Now, he was afraid that he would be deported. He was thus perplexed when, as they drove off, one of the men called out to him that he should put on a tie.

When the men returned, they wordlessly whisked Arndt into the car. Upon reaching their destination, they escorted him up a wide flight of marble stairs and through the grand entrance of a government building. Bewildered, Arndt was brought to a table where several well-dressed civilians, military officers, and a bishop were seated. Clearly, Arndt remembers thinking at the time, "this here is no prison."⁸⁸ Strangely, everybody knew him. Eventually, one person asked who wrote the texts he read on the airwaves. Arndt explained that he wrote them himself; most he had experienced personally. This led to more questions, and Arndt told them about his childhood in Vienna, the German annexation, and his expectations for the future. As he struggled to grasp who these people were, Arndt wondered why he was at this banquet, where he was so utterly out of place: "Actors can speak about one topic while thinking about something entirely different. As I spoke, I sensed that this situation was an opportunity." He confessed to his companions that he had no right to be dining with them. They were dignitaries; however, he had no idea who they were. Surprised, the others at the table introduced themselves as the chief of the Montevidean police, the minister of the interior, an army general, and so on. Arndt responded that in this case he had even less of a right, because he was in Uruguay illegally as a refugee: "They answered that if it this was only the problem, they could help me. Forty-eight hours later I had a Uruguayan visa, residence permit, everything. Suddenly, I was a free man!"⁸⁹

87. "Jacques Arndt evoca en 'Estampas Vienesas' el romanticismo de la bella ciudad austriaca," *Mundo Uruguayo*, December 6, 1940.

88. Arndt, interview, 2006.

89. Arndt, interview, 2006.

Shortly after Arndt had acquired his papers, he received a letter from Paul Walter Jacob, who had read about the radio show and needed a younger male actor for the Free German Stage.⁹⁰ A few weeks earlier the trip to Argentina would have been impossible, but now it was no problem. Seduced by the opportunity to play regularly in a professional theater, he traveled to Buenos Aires: "Then I got my first role, my wages, and was an actor again. Actually I had been acting the entire time since leaving Vienna, but now I was back onstage."⁹¹ Jacob engaged Jacques Arndt as stage designer and young male actor for the 1941 season. Affiliated with the Free German Stage until 1962, he performed in Argentine and international theater, radio, and film for the next sixty-eight years.

Jacques Arndt's story typifies an interpersonal acumen inherent in numerous cases of successful immigration. He and other members of both the Free German Stage and the German Theater demonstrated what the literary scholar Ottmar Ette has identified as a critical tenet of survival skills: knowledge for living together.⁹² Their faculty for deftly navigating an array of human relationships enabled many immigrant actors to integrate into Argentine society. As Arndt stressed repeatedly, of all the talents he needed to reach the triumphant conclusion of his extraordinary journey and continue on to a flourishing acting career in Argentina, much of his fortune came down to an ability to get along with others.⁹³ Irrespective of their politics, ethnicity, and religion, thespian emigrants thrived only if they understood how to improvise and adapt amid a foreign constellation of individuals and institutions. In German Buenos Aires such "border skills" were transcendent; they were a prerequisite for victims and supporters of Nazism to attain professional and personal prosperity in Buenos Aires.⁹⁴ Arndt and his fellow immigrants acquired this knowledge for living together through intense engagement with literature in a capacity, as thespians, that

90. Jacob to Arndt, January 23, 1941, PWJAK.

91. Arndt, interview, 2008.

92. Ette, "Literature as Knowledge for Living, Literary Studies as Science for Living," 989.

93. Arndt, interview, 2008.

94. McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*, 3.

created a very close link between reading and living. Exemplified by Arndt's tale, their biographies are testimony to the Lebanese writer Elias Khoury's thesis that literature and life should not diverge, but rather should inform and enrich one another.⁹⁵ Drawing from the myriad of relationships and situations they encountered in literature and onstage, antifascist and nationalist actors accumulated the reservoir of knowledge for surviving and living together that facilitated their adept transition from emigrants to immigrants in South America.

Theater to the Rescue: Ernst Wurmser

Liselott Reger and Paul Walter Jacob had the fortune to begin a new, fully legal existence in Buenos Aires, the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan city in South America at the time. Despite his dangerous escape from Europe, Jacques Arndt was also lucky to quickly become a legal, employed immigrant in democratic Uruguay. The experiences of Viennese comic Ernst Wurmser followed a contrasting trajectory, one shared by many blue-collar refugees.

Born in Vienna on March 20, 1882, Ernst Wurmser was a comic actor on stages in Prague, Vienna, and Berlin, where Wurmser also launched a promising career in film. Between 1931 and 1933 he played minor roles in ten feature productions, including *The Captain from Köpenick* (1931) and *Poor as a Church Mouse* (1931). After the NSDAP seized power in 1933, the Jewish Wurmser fled to Czechoslovakia, where he coincided with Paul Walter Jacob and Liselott Reger in Teplitz-Schönau.⁹⁶

Like many last-minute refugees, including several of his colleagues, Wurmser purchased visas for himself and his wife to Bolivia, one of very few countries that accepted emigrants after 1938.⁹⁷ Often corrupt, Bolivian officials in Paris and Prague issued

95. Mejcher, *Geschichten über Geschichten*, 131.

96. Te-The-Re Cabaret Program, February 28, 1938, PWJA V c) 262.

97. The actors Georg und Lotte Braun, Olga Keller, Erna Terrell, and Ernst Wurmser all received visas for Bolivia through the country's embassy in Prague.

visas at exorbitant prices.⁹⁸ Though fortunate to escape Europe, emigrants found scant opportunity to begin new lives in Bolivia, which was the poorest and least developed nation in South America. Indigenous Aymares and Quechuas, most of whom were illiterate and spoke little or no Spanish, made up 95 percent of its population. Furthermore, in 1939 Bolivia was in political turmoil, its economy obliterated after the nation's loss in the 1935 Chaco War. Most refugees in Bolivia were bitterly poor, and professional life was often reduced to a daily regimen of manual labor for meager pay.⁹⁹ Georg Braun, who had acted with Jacob and Arndt in Luxemburg, even wrote that he was near starvation.¹⁰⁰ As a friend of Jacob's wrote from Oruro, a mining town, those who did eke out a living still suffered, because they were deprived of intellectual stimulation.¹⁰¹ The dearth of cultural life made it nearly impossible for actors to earn a living in the theater, especially in German. Ernst Wurmser, too, lived in material and cultural poverty in Bolivia. When he learned in October 1940 that his former colleague had founded a German theater in Argentina, he wrote him asking for work immediately.¹⁰² The Free German Stage played a vital role for refugees because, as the only regularly performing exilic theater worldwide, it represented a unique opportunity for thespian refugees to earn a living in their chosen vocation.

The psychological importance of this prospect can hardly be overstated. Many persecuted thespians felt a deep inner drive to act and were devastated when they were unable to practice their profession in exile. As Wurmser wrote to Jacob from Cochabamba, for him theater was a vital necessity. He left the terms of his employment entirely up to Jacob, because he was lost without collaborating in a dramatic ensemble and performing for an audience.

Approximately 7,000 German-speaking refugees emigrated to Bolivia, nearly all of them after October 1938.

98. Douer and Seeber, *Wie weit ist Wien*, 38.

99. Schwarz, *Keine Zeit für Eichendorff*, 64–90.

100. Braun was engaged by the FGS in 1946. Braun to Arndt, February 13, 1946, JAC.

101. Olga Keller to Jacob, October 9, 1941, PWJAK.

102. Wurmser to Jacob, October 21, 1940, PWJAK.

In Bolivia he saw no hope in working toward a more prosperous future, the *raison d'être* of immigration. He pleaded with Jacob: "We've always gotten along well . . . it would be very kind if you could answer me *immediately* . . . I'm desperate for your reply."¹⁰³ Despite Wurmser's entreaties, Jacob was in the midst of the Free German Stage's inaugural season when the letters arrived. He was, he later explained, too busy for correspondence of any sort.¹⁰⁴ Three weeks later Wurmser wrote again. His second entreaty was that of a frantic man, verging on suicidal: "I urge you to send me a contract (even a fake contract) with the FGS, so I can get the visa. . . . Life here is unbearable and probably in a short time utterly impossible! I beg you to help me find my way to back to the theater, otherwise I will perish completely. Please answer me!"¹⁰⁵ Ernst Wurmser saw the Free German Stage as his only chance to escape Bolivia and withstand the trauma of exile.

Jacob's measured response to Wurmser in January 1941 gives detailed information about the FGS's procedures for engaging refugee actors. Pleased to contract an experienced and familiar actor, he offered Wurmser roles for serious older characters as well as slapstick comedy. Nonetheless, Jacob warned, everybody had to play even the smallest bit parts. Since the stage produced weekly premieres, there were no days off. The cast had two full rehearsals even on days without performances. Although he promised to help by organizing benefit events, he could not guarantee wages for the six-month offseason. The salary, 120 Argentine pesos monthly, sufficed to provide an austere livelihood.¹⁰⁶

When communicating with prospective actors Jacob always took care, consistently using the same phrase verbatim, "to describe things exactly as they are."¹⁰⁷ Unlike Wurmser, Jacques Arndt pondered joining the Free German Stage from a relatively

103. Wurmser to Jacob, October 21, 1940, PWJAK.

104. Jacob to Wurmser, January 1941, PWJAK.

105. Wurmser to Jacob, November 11, 1940, PWJAK.

106. Jacob to Wurmser, January 1941, PWJAK.

107. Jacob to Wurmser, January 1941, PWJAK; Jacob to Marc Lerner, February 8, 1941, PWJAK.

comfortable situation in Uruguay. Initially, he was unsatisfied with Jacob's offer and requested higher wages. Jacob flatly refused, explaining that he was determined not repeat the fiasco they both endured at The Comedy back in Luxemburg. Two principles, he continued, guided his management of the FGS. First, he assured Arndt that he was a reliable, honest director. The pay was low, but Arndt would receive his full, promised salary punctually (unlike at The Comedy).¹⁰⁸ Secondly, he maintained a very tight, disciplined budget to ensure the theater's financial viability. Jacob stressed to colleagues and donors alike: "Because of the twenty people who would lose their job and basis of existence anew [if it failed], maintaining the stage is a moral duty to me."¹⁰⁹ Cognizant that the Free German Stage was exiled thespians' only chance to continue acting in South America or probably anywhere at all, Jacob took utmost caution to ensure its solvency.

Ernst Wurmser was one of these twenty people. Effusively grateful for the prospect of performing theater again, Wurmser accepted all of Jacob's conditions, declaring himself ready to play any role necessary. The next concern was to procure travel and legal documents, which he worried would be extremely difficult from Bolivia.¹¹⁰ This was another crucial function that the FGS fulfilled; every actor gained an entry visa and residence permit for Argentina. Jacob even intervened personally at the Ministry of Immigration for difficult cases, such as Wurmser's.¹¹¹

Ernst Wurmser debuted at the Free German Stage on April 27, 1941, and remained in its ensemble until his death in 1949.¹¹² The *Jüdische Wochenschau* newspaper described his debut, a bit part in Ferenc Molnár's *Delila* (1937), as "infinitely accomplished, infinitely touching."¹¹³ For Wurmser and many others, a contract with

108. Jacob to Arndt, January 23, 1941, PWJAK.

109. Jacob to Felix Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.

110. Wurmser to Jacob, January 23, 1941, PWJAK.

111. Jacob to Maspero Castro (General Director of Immigration), February 20, 1941, PWJAK.

112. "Ernst Wurmser gestorben," *AT*, December 13, 1949.

113. "*Delila*," *JW*, May 2, 1941.

the FGS signified a truly decisive turn of fate.¹¹⁴ There was tension in the cast, but, as Jacob attested after the debut season, its members found strength and solidarity in their collective fortune to play in the only regularly performing exilic theater worldwide.¹¹⁵ It was vital for the morale of thespian refugees to recover the creativity, comradeship, and material subsistence that they derived from their work in theater. By providing them with residence and labor permits for Argentina, as well as modest but reliable incomes in their chosen vocation, the Free German Stage enabled victims of Nazism to rebuild their self-worth and establish new lives with prospects for the future.

Despite their obvious differences, Ludwig Ney, Paul Walter Jacob, Jacques Arndt, and Ernst Wurmser had overlapping backgrounds, including their central European origins, language, vocation, professional experiences, and the mutual challenge of prospering as immigrants. In Argentina, they underwent similar processes of adaptation and reinvention, including the struggles to establish financial stability, learn a new language, construct social and professional networks, and contend with the societal norms of a foreign culture. Particularly in the cases of Paul Walter Jacob and Ludwig Ney, their experiences in Germany taught them essential survival skills for professional success and personal perseverance as emigrant thespians. Their story reveals overlapping tactics to surmount the universal challenges inherent in migration.

114. Wurmser to Jacob, January 23, 1941, PWJAK.

115. Jacob to Felix Weil, January 29, 1941, PWJAK.