

## The Eldorado Cabaret

The Eldorado Cabaret was an iconic cabaret that occupied two sites in the Schöneberg region of Berlin. This cabaret was known as a spectacle of gender-nonconformity. The famously bisexual and cross-dressing singer/actor Marlene Dietrich regularly performed there, as did a number of drag artists. Club members could be provided with same-sex dance partners.

Despite its place in Berlin's LGBTQ community – the Eldorado was a haven for many queer people, especially transvestites – this cabaret was seen as mainstream enough to be included in British guidebooks. It attracted a mixed clientele of bohemians and middle-class visitors. Christopher Isherwood, who lived nearby, was a regular.

The Eldorado Cabaret was destroyed early in the Nazi regime as part of the party's crusade against LGBTQ subcultures.

Note: in the 1920s and 30s the word 'transvestite' encapsulated a number of transgender identities and performance styles. Queer people were often described as 'inverts' or 'members of the third sex', although some words we still recognise (e.g. 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'bisexual') did exist by the 1920s.



El Dorado Building, c. 1930s. Photograph of 21st-century-notice-board at the location of the former El Dorado © Anisia Petcu

---

**Read John Chancellor's entry about the Eldorado in his guide for British tourists, *How to be Happy in Berlin* (1929), then discuss the questions.**

---

This cabaret is being included more as a warning to the unwary tourist than anything else. It is situated almost next door to the Kleine Scala, and almost opposite the huge Kleine Scala Music-hall and the Casanova Cabaret,\* so anybody is likely to stroll in. If you go in, go alone and on no account allow your wife or sister to accompany you; and go with no other expectation than that of seeing how a section of the other half of the world lives. Nothing will happen to you; you won't be murdered, robbed, or even annoyed. You will find a fairly gay cabaret in progress, and if you keep away from the tables with the champagne buckets on them, a visit won't cost more than the price of a glass of beer. But leave your women in the comparative holiness of the Kleine Scala, next door.

\* Other sites of Berlin nightlife. Chancellor considered the Casanova club "the finest cabaret in Berlin."

---

### **Questions**

- 1. Is Chancellor recommending the Eldorado, or not? Why? Who does this guide book suggest that the cabaret is for?**
- 2. Why was this form of cabaret so popular in Weimar Berlin?**
- 3. Where in culture can the legacy of cabaret be found today? Explain your answer.**

---

**Extension: Imagine you're a British tourist visiting the Eldorado in 1929. Describe your evening.**

---

**Hint: think about what you do, who you meet, what the atmosphere is like.**

---