

THE ZARAH LEANDER FILES

A Film by Torsten Striegnitz and Simone Dobmeier

Idea by Christian Beetz / Funded by Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg

In coproduction with rbb, NDR and SVT

In cooperation with ARTE

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Zarah Leander – she was the Third Reich’s greatest film star and best-paid film diva ever signed by the UFA. In just six years, from 1937 to 1942, in she starred in 10 films produced in Nazi-Germany. Her extraordinary, deep voice – the trademark of Zarah Leander – constantly confused men and women alike. Her LPs were sold a million fold and until today, Zarah Leander’s songs belong to Germany’s musical DNA.

At the peak of her career in early 1943, Zarah Leander suddenly leaves her mansion in Berlin and returns to her home country Sweden. She leaves behind millions of devoted fans but never explains the reasons for her unexpected departure. Around the same time, rumours are starting to spread which will ultimately determine the myth of Zarah Leander: a Nazi diva, a non-political actress or a soviet spy.

“Could you be a political idiot in the 20th century? I guess she just decided to play that convenient role.” Jutta Jacobi

THE ZARAH LEANDER FILES immerses into the life of the Swedish film diva and reveals the story of a woman who enjoyed the proximity to power and believed she could toy with the mightiest men of the time. But what is really behind her mysterious look, her frivolous songs and her pompous gestures? What do the documents of the Swedish secret services reveal? What do Zarah Leander’s contradictory stories and her silence tell us?

„Sometimes I think Zarah Leander wanted to show a picture of herself that she completely invented.” Richard Rosengren

Zarah Leander-experts, like the biographer Jutta Jacobi, the film scholar Georg Seeblen, the Swedish theatre and screenplay writer Richard Rosengren and the professor for gender studies Tina Rosenberg, look beyond the cliché of the Nazi-Diva. Exploring her biography and the history of her reception, including all rumours about espionage, they create a complex and contradictory image of Zarah Leander that goes beyond the scope of the usual picture of the „Nazi-Diva“. What is part of the myth? What did really happen? And even today, the myth is continuously changing: the gay scene adores the ex-prima donna and celebrates her as a queer diva, a diva whose career ended by performing at booze cruises. But one thing never changes: the exceptional way Zarah Leander polarises. Up to the present day, she is despised as intensively as she is loved.

„Zarah Leander is an art object. She is able to create a surface in such a superficial manner, that it hits the deepest feelings you can imagine. That works pretty well in pop art, so she could have been invented by Andy Warhol.” Georg Seeblen

The film THE ZARAH LEANDER FILES portrays an ambivalent woman who, till this day, remains a puzzle. Directors Torsten Striegnitz and Simone Dobmeier draw a picture of a dazzling personality in sinister times who was one thing first and foremost: a projection surface for the desires and fears of the people in the 20th century. And they raise the question: is okay to love an artist who is the icon of the Nazi-era.

Ali Soozandeh's artful animations ("The Green Wave") visualise the mysterious world of rumours and contradictory stories. Never seen before footage from Sweden and Germany feature Zarah Leander's shows from the 60s and 70s.

The film THE ZARAH LEANDER FILES is one episode of the 3-part TV-series "The Culture Files" which will be broadcasted in October 2013 on ARTE. This novel TV-format tells European cultural history in the style of a crime-scene-investigation series. The vivid pace and investigative story line is designed to engage a younger audience with some of Europe's greatest cultural icons.