

SYNOPSIS



Hitler's Useful Idols - A Star for all Seasons

Hitlers nützliche Idole - Ein Star für alle Jahreszeiten

Adolf Hitler was full of admiration. He sent a splendid flower bouquet and congratulated her on her artistic mastery. In return, he received a telegram of thanks: «If I somewhat diverted you, mein Führer, for a few brief moments from the burden of your important responsibilities, I shall be forever proud and happy. With a German salute, your Marika Röck.» It was November 1940, and the Führer's «important responsibilities» had already lacerated the continent. Large parts of Europe were subjugated to German rule, Nazi racial laws were in full force, and many Jews had either fled or been expelled, among them elites in music, theater, and film. Through her skill in dance and song, Marika Röck sought to entertain not only the Führer, but an entire people. Positioning herself as entirely nonpolitical, she claimed allegiance only to art, laughter, and entertainment. By the time Hitler rose to power, she was already a star, internationally acclaimed for her revue appearances in New York, London, Paris, and Monte Carlo. Her film career, launched in 1934, made her an idol for an entire generation - even after the war. The Nazi regime was «celebrity-crazy». It paid court to its «Aryan artists» and exploited their vanities. After the expulsion of the Jewish artists, it took stars like Marika Röck, popular names, public endorsements and other such reassurances to prove that the German nation's entertainment industry and cultural achievements would continue under the Nazi swastika. Excepting Zarah Leander, the Röck, as she was commonly referred to, was the most prominent female «morale booster» of the terrible war years. In a system that allowed no art without ideology, Röck's upbeat cheerfulness became an invaluable contribution to both the regime and the people, not only on the home front but also in the theater of war. At her concerts, whether on the front or in the German cities suffering more and more bombings, Marika Röck presented herself as a merry whirlwind even in the face of imminent defeat, offering an artistic sedative against the grim toll of the bombings and the shattered economy. Particularly her revue films with their stereotypical and idealized world-view counteracted the grueling reality of the German «total war». These «hang in there» movies offered people their last escape into illusion. After 1945, she suffered a brief fall from grace. Röck hadn't appeared in any propaganda films. «So what did I have to pay for?» she asked rather rhetorically and bitter after she was banned from public appearances until 1948. Her inclusion on the «black list», however, was quickly counterbalanced by her performances for the American occupying forces. Allegations that she had been a Nazi spy were soon dismissed, and a court of honor of the actors' union provided her rehabilitation. Her talent was independent of any political system or ideology. It wasn't just a Nazi dictator who loved her but the Americans and Russians too, especially in the newly established democratic Austrian republic. She was, indeed, a star for all seasons and would soon divert her audiences again, this time from the daily routine under Allied occupation and life between the ruins left by the relentless bombings of war.

Year: 2010

Run-Time: 1 x 50 min.

Directed by Andreas Novak

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