

# Zarah!

## Director's Statement

When playwright Carol Polcovar originally asked me to direct a reading of *Zarah!*, I have to admit I knew nothing about Zarah Leander. Nazi propaganda films were something I preferred to keep deprived of oxygen. Even in Germany, those films largely remain locked away. But the film at the center of this story, the wartime romance *Die Grosse Liebe* (*The Great Love*) is still frequently played on television and home video, after the editing of Nazi imagery here and there, and lives on in the hearts of Germans. As does Zarah Leander. To this day, Zarah is fondly impersonated in European drag circles due to her height, her distinctive contralto voice, and the dramatic performance style associated with her songs. Her height and frame also resulted in speculation that she might have been transgender (gender confirmation surgery was just beginning to occur), but she was not — though she was a staunch ally for her many LGBT+ friends being targeted by the Nazi regime. Some suggested she was actually a Russian spy, though she denied it. In actuality, she was a Swedish singer and struggling actress who made a trip to Hollywood for a screen test. When Reichsminister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels got wind of it, he offered her a fortune to come to Berlin and star in his films. She accepted, and quickly became Germany's greatest star, all the while sending her pay home to her family in Sweden.

Carol Polcovar's fascinating play explores Zarah's ingenious plan to force Goebbels to humiliate himself and to mock Hitler's Aryan ideal on film, because she had the upper hand. It was a treacherous move with potentially deadly consequences, for her and for the artist friends she enlisted to help her. But she pulled it off; and once you see the result, you can't unsee it. Eighty years later, though it is still a relatively unrecognized moment in film history, Zarah's miracle is right up there on the screen, in glorious black and white.

Written by Carol Polcovar

Directed by Miles Phillips

## CAST (In Order of Appearance)

Zarah Leander..... Brook Channon  
 Bruno Balz ..... Garrett Hols  
 Joseph Goebbels..... Brandon Karrer  
 Greta..... Taylor Gruver  
 S.S. Officer..... Christopher Denton

## Artist Biographies



**Carol Polcovar** (Playwright) is a poet, playwright, director, teacher, producer, dramaturge, play doctor, Interfaith Minister, and Founder and former Artistic Director of All Out Arts' Fresh Fruit Festival, a multi-genre international LGBT festival in New York City. An award-winning playwright, Carol's plays have been produced in

New York, Italy, and Honolulu. She has directed dozens of cabaret and Off-Broadway Shows.



**Miles Phillips** (Director) is a multiple award-winning actor, director, nightclub vocalist, and recording artist with appearances in theaters, clubs, and concert halls from Honolulu to London. He received his graduate training with the American Conservatory Theater and his MFA from the National Theatre Conservatory. His

award-winning directorial ventures span from regional companies to New York, from contemporary to classical theatre, from full-scale musicals to concerts, cabaret, film, and TV. He served as Artistic Director for Musical Theatre Renegades (Chicago) and The Hot Spot Theatre Company (Hot Springs, Arkansas). He's been honored with the Hollywood Drama-Logue and Chicago Jeff Awards for his work as an actor, by the Manhattan Association of Cabarets and Clubs for four of his nightclub acts, and twice by the NY Nightlife Awards. Since his return to Hawai'i, Miles has been honored with Po'okela Awards for his direction of *Shear Madness* (MVT) and *1776* (Paliku), and for his performance as Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol: The Musical* (DTH). During the past year, he found inventive ways to create socially distanced, site-specific/environmental theatre, most notably in KOA's acclaimed "Drive-In Theatre" productions of *An Iliad* and *Laughing Wild*. Currently, he is back in rehearsals for the January 2022 opening of *Desperate Measures* at Mānoa Valley Theatre.



Brooke would like to extend Mahalo Nui and warm Aloha to the producers of PlayBuilders PlayFest 2021.

**Brooke Channon** (Zarah Leander) was deeply honored to be asked to portray this awe-inspiring character and to tell a story so very much worth telling in *Zarah!*. This is her second collaboration with director Miles Phillips; the first was her KOA debut, *Laughing Wild*. Other regional credits include *Baskerville*, *A Sherlock Holmes Mystery* at MVT, and *Fox on the Fairway* at DHT.



received a Po'okela award. Christopher has also been seen at MVT as Jerry *The Full Monty* and as Mike in *Wait Until Dark*; he also portrayed John Dickinson in *1776: The Musical* at Paliku Theatre.

**Christopher Denton** (S.S. Officer) has worked with Hawai'i's Mission Houses museum in their Cemetery Pupu Theatre as Nathaniel B. Emerson in *Muses of Hawai'i*; received a Po'okela Award in 2018 for his role as William Cooper Parke in *At Your Service*; and most recently portrayed Charles Montague Cooke, Sr. He was in *Noises Off* at DHT, for which he also



**Taylor Gruver** (Greta) is a choreographer, a film enthusiast, and occasionally an actor. Taylor graduated from the United States Coast Guard Academy in 2009; she served five years active duty and three years in the Coast Guard Reserves. Upon completing her service, Taylor left active duty to pursue a career in film. She graduated from City College of San Francisco in 2016 with an associates degree in Cinema Production, and began her career working as a sound effects editor and assistant editor in the Bay Area. Taylor currently lives on O'ahu where she works as a filmmaker and choreographer.



**Garrett Hols** (Bruno Balz) is primarily a local theatre actor in Hawai'i, but he has a decade of experience on both stage and screen. Notable shows include *Daddy Long Legs*; *Peter and the Starcatcher*; *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*; *Noises Off*; *Something Rotten*; *Ragtime*; *Shrek*; *Monty Python's Spamalot*; *we, the invisibles*; and *The Pillowman*. Screen credits include a co-starring role on *Magnum PI*, and voice credits for *Finding Kukan*. He can be followed on Instagram at @thisismygarrett.



**Brandon Karrer** (Joseph Goebbels) recently appeared in the acclaimed productions of *Laughing Wild* at KOA and *Popcorn Falls* at Mānoa Valley Theatre, and can currently be seen in commercials for Hele and Marriott Ko Olina, heard in commercials for Outrigger Hotels. In 2018, Brandon stepped back on the stage after a seven-year break to perform in Sam Shepard's *True West* at TAG. Since then, he has appeared in *Home of the Brave* at HTY, *Way of a God* at Kumu Kahua Theatre, and *A Steady Rain* at KOA, which was the first time he had the pleasure of working with Director Miles Phillips. Brandon would like to thank his wonderful family, who remind him every day that magic can be found in the most unlikely places.