

***The Drowned Girl* / Press Kit**

Art. Memory. Complicity.

A new film from Pandora Machine.



The Drowned Girl is a tale of complicity – and why it is such an essential element in how evil takes root in the world and spreads into the fiber of our society. Set largely in Nazi film industry of the 1930s and 1940s, it is also a tale of how art can be perverted and deployed in the service of genocide and destruction.

SYNOPSIS:

A once-famous starlet of Nazi film is condemned to haunt the waters of a tortured afterlife. In folklore, such water spirits often reemerge in human form to lure us back into the depths with them. Can the famous “drowned girl” of the Third Reich cinema find redemption by retelling her tale of complicity with evil – or remain banished in her watery oblivion?

LOGLINE:

A once-famous starlet of Nazi film returns as a water spirit (or Nixie) seeking redemption. Will she grapple at last with her toxic legacy – or remain condemned to her watery oblivion?

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THE ESSENTIALS:

Runtime: 1 hour 10 minutes 02 seconds

Shooting Format: HD

Film Color: Color

Completion Date: July 14, 2023

Production Budget: 12,000 USD

Country of Filming: United States

Locations: Triad Theatre (Manhattan); Popsicle Studios (Brooklyn); Art Factory (Paterson, NJ); Tiber Island Cooperative Homes (Washington, DC); William J. Brennan Court House (Jersey City, NJ)

CREATIVE TEAM



Annalisa Loeffler (The Drowned Girl) is a Swedish-American actress (AEA) based in New York who has been performing since she was 4 years old, specializing in classical theatre. While hoping fervently for the full return of independent theatre in post-pandemic NYC, she currently keeps busy with her band, The Buttery Barmaids.

Andrew Bellware (Director/Composer) has directed nearly 20 feature films and has composed and conducted numerous theatrical, film, and opera scores. Andrew was a founding member of Manhattan Theatre Source and a sound designer on hundreds of plays. A resident of Jersey City, NJ, he has a Master's degree in music composition from the University of Chichester and is presently finishing a PhD in music composition by practice at the University of Salford.

Laura Schlachtmeyer (Producer) has more than 13 feature films to her credit, in collaboration with Andrew Bellware and Pandora Machine LLC. Currently living and working in Washington DC, she's also an award-winning theatrical stage manager with years of productions in Chicago, Baltimore, San Francisco, New York, and DC.

Paula D'Alessandris (Performance Director) is the Artistic Director/ Founder of Mind The Gap Theatre (MTG), New York's premiere Anglo-American theatre company dedicated to producing new British plays and creating an exchange of works between the U.S. and UK. She primarily focuses on new play development and has produced the work of over 115 writers featuring over 203 actors to date.

Richard Byrne (Screenwriter) has written plays including *Burn Your Bookes* (First Prize, Prague Post Playwriting Festival / Taffety Punk) and *Nero/Pseudo* (WSC/Avant Bard) and short films including *Let the Darkness In* (Prague Fringe), *A Pair of Shoes* (Vancouver Fringe), *Flamingo* and *Helsinki*. His play *Hotel Mayflower* is forthcoming in a bilingual edition from Moloko Print (Germany).

INTERVIEWS



Our creative team reflects on making The Drowned Girl – including what it was like to work safely to create a film during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q: Is The Drowned Girl a fable? How does the script mingle myth and history?

Richard Byrne (Screenwriter) : In *The Drowned Girl*, a water spirit (or Nixie, in German) – who was once an actress in the Nazi film industry that supported and glorified the Third Reich – grapples with her own complicity in events. She seeks our understanding, our pity, and even our forgiveness.

Yet fables surrounding water spirits warn us that these beings usually appear to lure us into the depths with them. So the central questions of *The Drowned Girl* are: Can we resist explanations and equivocations for complicity? Can we recognize it for what it is: a necessary element in how evil takes root and thrives in human society?

Q: What elements of the character did you find most satisfying to portray? Which were most challenging?

Annalisa Loeffler (The Drowned Girl): The Drowned Girl is a storyteller ... and getting to inhabit the stories of her human past – whether about growing up, or the process of shooting a film, or being a celebrity – was the most satisfying element of her character for me. (Also, I love dialect work!)

What was both satisfying and challenging was navigating her utter lack of self-awareness in spite of her intense self-focus: She's shockingly narcissistic, but (I hope!) still somehow sympathetic.

The most challenging part of was finding the levels of rage and willful ignorance that were appropriate for the culture and time period, while not making her utterly incomprehensible to modern-day sensibilities.

It was also very challenging to portray a character who is essentially on the wrong side of history. She is both a victim (of her culture, time period, gender roles) and a perpetrator (even if only a passive one). Her inability to address both sides of that dichotomy is why she is stuck in what I came to think of as a watery Purgatory.

INTERVIEWS (continued)



Q: What specific challenges did the script for *The Drowned Girl* pose for you as a director? What in it appealed to you?

Andrew Bellware (Director): The screenplay is beautiful and subtle. The character of *The Drowned Girl* is not really “evil” so much as she is “evil adjacent”— which I think is more interesting. The “world” of the film is not really ever in a specific place or time. The story takes place in the “idea” of various places, such as a theater (but not a specific theater) a courtroom (but not a specific courtroom) and a soundstage (but, again, not a specific soundstage.) Creating this non-specific time and place with very specific emotional realities was a delicate balance.

Q: You composed a compelling score for the film as well. What was the interplay between the sounds you were creating for the film and your visual approach?

Bellware: When I first began the score for *The Drowned Girl*, I was thinking: “What sort of music could I make that the Nazis would definitely hate?”

Historically, Nazi musicology was very much a real thing. But it was, not surprisingly, rather hypocritical – so it’s difficult to find an actual style or theory of music which was musically antifascist in and of itself.

On a more practical note: The scale of the film and the scale of the music have to match. *The Drowned Girl* is an intimate character portrait, which led me to score the film for a quartet – piano, flute, cello, and harp. This kind of quartet gave me a wide range of timbre, but also has an immediate and close sound. The visual approach is to have a “frame” or a claustrophobic effect, which I tried to reflect in the score, while also widening out and delving deeper into the “score” that is in her mind.

INTERVIEWS (continued)



Q: What's it like producing a film in the teeth of the pandemic?

Laura Schlachtmeyer (Producer): Because we've always made no-budget films, working within constraints is nothing new! In fact, I'd probably call *The Drowned Girl* efficient, rather than constrained. We had ample access to the locations we wanted, especially the theater and the courthouse, because their normal operations were suspended anyway. And, by that point in the pandemic, everyone was accustomed to virtual meetings and rehearsals, so our production discussions and rehearsals were smooth – even with all our participants in different parts of the East Coast.

Without COVID-19 restrictions, we also might not have worked hard to find the exterior locations that ended up adding so much to the final look of the film.

Q: What was it like working with an actor on performance during the pandemic? How did it change your approach?

Paula D'Alessandris (Performance Director): Working with an actor over Zoom during the pandemic was fairly similar to a normal, in-person rehearsal. Most likely because it was a solo piece that didn't require much specific blocking. Having a brilliant actress also made it an easy process! As someone who works on a lot of new plays, I really appreciated the ability for us to rehearse anytime from anywhere with the writer.

When theaters were closed – with no telling if or when they would reopen – it was a godsend to be able to rehearse with Richard and Annalisa. I think it was also helpful as a theatre director to work the performance that would be on film using a similar medium.

INTERVIEWS (continued)



Q: *The Drowned Girl* excavates one of the darkest moments in modern history. What compelled you to explore that moment?

Byrne: The role of Joseph Goebbels in the Nazi film industry is one of those shocks to the system that makes perfect sense despite it being so terrifying. Read his statements about the evil was trying to accomplish, as well as the obsessive energy, brutality, and persuasive power he brought to doing so, and you have a horrifying case study in the power that mass media can have on the human mind. He knew exactly what he was doing.

Yet another thing you notice when you read Goebbels' diaries about film making, and read accounts of his dealings with directors, production teams, and actors when making a film like *Jud Süß*, is how normalized – and even mundane – this activity was in its execution.\

Making *Jud Süß* was – apparently – a lot like making any film of its era. Egos. Rewrites. Locations. Yet Veit Harlan was indicted for a war crime for making *Jud Süß*. The film was an immense and insidious assault on the foundations of human dignity – and an utter perversion of a narrative art form.

I began to fasten on the stories of those who survived their collusion and complicity with the Nazi film industry – and continued to work. If complicity is so evil, why is it often not punished – or punished unevenly? A number of those involved with *Jud Süß* somehow managed to survive their connection with that atrocity, including Kristina Söderbaum – the Swedish starlet of Nazi film and wife of Veit Harlan.

I soon discovered that no mere rehashing of biography could explain it. Her notoriety for being drowned – or almost drowned – in so many Nazi films that she was derisively called the Reichwasserleiche (“Water Corpse of the Reich”) evoked German and Scandinavian myths of Nixies – or water spirits. Her ambition to be taken seriously as an artist – a common thread in film actors who boast mass commercial appeal in familiar vehicles – steered me into Goethe and his Faust.

The confluence of these varied materials fascinated me. They permitted me to fashion a character who is both of history and positively beyond it. They also allowed me scope to bring home the unique horrors of the Holocaust to viewers at deeper levels of conscience and consciousness.

INTERVIEWS (continued)



Q: We've heard that the film examines the complicity that is necessary to do evil. Why do we need to tell these stories – and retell them?

Schlachtmeyer: In entertainment today, we watch a lot of superheroes and supervillains. In those movies, fighting evil is big and splashy and earth-shaking. In *The Drowned Girl*, we try to show evil on a more human scale. Once we see that the drowned girl doesn't face her own culpability, it opens the door to understanding that many people during her time didn't examine their culpability either.

From there, we can recognize that people generally have trouble seeing how easy it is to enable wrongdoing – and we might even recognize it in ourselves. It's very human, very relatable, this blindness to our own complicity. But it's all that's needed for evil to succeed and spread, in history as well as today.

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