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Marlene Dietrich Played The Saw

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Marlene Dietrich
Played the saw
For the troops
At the USO

Marlene Dietrich
German femme fatale star of the silver
screen
Naturalised glamorous American since

1939

Left Hollywood for
Mere miles from German line
And with hands that studied violin
Played the saw

Marlene Dietrich who
The Nazi Party could not bring back
With money nor the Führer's love

Crossed the Atlantic
With a 3 month supply of cosmetics,
Labelled in huge nailpolish letters to be
Read by torchlight,
2 glittering gowns and
In a black leather case
Her singing saw
To play for the troops

Marlene Dietrich
Maria Magdalene Dietrich
Said "It was the decent thing to do";
Followed her recorded voice, with special soap,
Back to where she helped birth the talkies
And with frozen hands in the Ardennes
Played her saw for the troops
In the USO revue

Marlene Dietrich played
On an arc of bending bladed metal,
bowed
A mercurial formless freely moving

sound
A mournful, pitched howl of something
Without a mouth; an eerily haunting
Unembodied unearthly mutation of Hawaii

A lonesome limbo call predicting
 A searchlight swinging over a future
 1950s Nevada B-movie highway
 A tremulous oscillation, a clean vibration, free sound
 That almost bypasses your ears
 For something deeper

DB Fishman is an Edinburgh-born poet living in Oxfordshire, UK. [@TheDanPrism](#) on Twitter, they write about drag, thrash metal, gender and film. Their poetry 'greatest hits', [Grit for Traction](#), is published this year.

Photos: Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. "[Marlene Dietrich](#)" The New York Public Library Digital Collections.