

Hedy Lamarr: Beauty and Brains

Episode 26 of *Exile*

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**JOSHUA MALINA:** It's a brisk fall day in 1937. Somewhere in the mid-Atlantic, on a luxury cruise liner called The Normandie, a young woman named Hedy Kiesler is putting the final touches on her outfit for the evening. The ship is extravagant—the largest in the world. A triumph of art deco style flying across the Atlantic towards America.—It's been two days since they left England. Hedy has slipped into her most expensive dress. She carefully places a sparkling necklace at her throat and diamonds in her ears. Her dark hair is arranged in long, wavy layers, framing her face perfectly. Hedy Kiesler is dressed to impress. She makes her way to the upper deck and into the sprawling main dining room. She pauses, straightens her shoulders, and takes a deep breath. Time to shine. The second she steps through the door, all eyes are on her. Slowly, intentionally, she makes her way across the room. She smiles flirtatiously at a young man she met at the pool earlier—and a few more, who will surely approach her later in the evening. But she only has eyes for one man: Louis B. Mayer, co-founder of MGM Studios. Her ticket to stardom.

*THEME MUSIC*

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Welcome to Exile, a podcast from LBI, the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. I'm Joshua Malina. When everything is taken away, then what? From LBI's archives, untold stories of Jewish lives in the shadow of fascism. Today, the story of a woman whose beauty made her famous, but whose *mind* changed the world.

*THEME OUT*

**JOSHUA MALINA:** When she was 16 years old, Hedy Kiesler told her parents that she was dropping out of school to become an actor. They were not impressed. It was 1930, and Hedy had recently arrived back in Vienna. The previous year, the Kieslers had sent

their daughter to an exclusive finishing school in Switzerland—only for her to run away and take the train back home. And now she wanted to abandon her schooling entirely! But what could they do? Once Hedy knew what she wanted, it was very difficult to change her mind. And besides, she had always been passionate about performing.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** She loved American movies, American motion pictures. She was fascinated. She knew at a very early age she wanted to be an actress. And when she was 16 years old, she passed the Sascha Studios in Vienna and saw a film in production. She actually made it through the gate of the studio and applied for a job as a script girl.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** This is Stephen Michael Shearer. He's a film historian and author of several books about the stars of Hollywood's Golden Age. With her parents' reluctant approval, Hedy started her new job on set. On her first day, they needed an extra for a nightclub scene. Hedy saw her chance to get in front of the camera, so she asked the director for the part. He said yes.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** So she became a film extra in one of Vienna's very first talking motion pictures, a movie called *Geld auf der Straße*, which was *Money On the Street*. And it was released in 1930. And she was an extra in it, but she got a good close-up!

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Even at her young age, Hedy's dark eyes and wavy, chin-length hair were striking. She was also smart and determined. Her parents had raised her that way. The Kieselers were an affluent, assimilated Jewish family. Hedy's father, Emil, was a banker, and her mother, Trude, was a former concert pianist. Trude was from Budapest, and Emil was from Galicia. They were part of a wave of Jewish people who came to Vienna seeking opportunity in the early 20th century. After immigrating to Austria, Trude converted to Catholicism. This meant that Hedy was technically raised in a "mixed household."

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** A great deal of the Jewish immigrants that came into Vienna, a lot of them either converted to Catholicism or very quietly practiced their religion at home. But everybody in Vienna came from somewhere, and they didn't define themselves on what their religion or what their heritage or faith were.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Hedy was Emil and Trude's only child, and they spoiled her. They had a parlor maid, a cook, and a nurse. Her father called her "Little Princess Hedy". Emil wanted his daughter to be active and inquisitive. They went on long walks through the Vienna Woods, during which he would explain the inner workings of everything from the printing press to the streetcar.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** She adored her father. Some people say that Emil Kiesler was the love of her life. But he spent a lot of time educating her on things that he knew she was interested in, other than acting. He encouraged her sense of... What made a clock work, and they would take apart clocks. And he knew she had a very intelligent, quick mind. So he encouraged that.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Hoping to pass on her love of the arts, Trude put Hedy in piano and ballet classes, and even occasionally took her to the theatre and the opera. But, the way Hedy told it, her first passion had always been acting. And according to a magazine interview she did in 1938, her first role was... her mother.

**HEDY LAMARR:** I acted all the time. I copied my mother. I copied the way she walked and the way she talked. I copied her mannerisms, her facial expression. I copied the guests who came to our house. I copied people I saw in the streets. I copied the servants. I was a little living copybook. I wrote people down on me.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** So when Hedy got that first on-camera role in *Money on the Street*, she was inspired. It quickly led her to a small speaking role in another film. Around this time, Hedy caught the attention of acclaimed German theatre director Max Reinhardt.

Some sources say he discovered her, others that they met at a party, and still others believe she attended his acting school in Berlin. Regardless of how they met, the end result was the same: Hedy was cast in a small role in the Berlin production of a play called *The Weaker Sex*. Several months later, when Hedy was in rehearsals for the Vienna production of the same play, Reinhardt would make a statement that would change her life.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Hedy was doing this play and there just happened to be a handful of journalists backstage with Max Reinhardt and Hedy was finishing a scene, she only had a few lines in the play, and Reinhardt leaned back to the correspondents and he said, "There is the most beautiful girl in the world."

**JOSHUA MALINA:** 17-year-old Hedy was beautiful. And she knew it.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Hedy knew at an early age what she could get with her looks. She could charm men, charm professors, charm boyfriends at an early age, and she used that. She knew exactly what she was doing.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** For young Hedy, beauty was power. But she was about to see the other side of that coin.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** In 1933, Hedy accepted a film role in Czechoslovakia with the great film director Gustav Machatý. It was a film called *Extase: Symphony of Love*. Very little dialog, beautifully filmed motion picture.

*[CLIP FROM EXTASE]*

**EVA:** *Okay, this evening. But I have to drive into town alone because of the people...*

**JOSHUA MALINA:** *Extase*—or *Ecstasy*, in English—was a drama about a young woman in a loveless marriage to an older man. One day, she meets a handsome young man while out for a swim, and they start an affair. Hedy would play the lead. The role was a scandalous one, but Hedy took it anyway.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** It did have a brief nude scene of Hedy running through the woods into a lake. And it had perhaps a more notorious scene where she and her lover, actor Aribert Mog, portray having sex and all it shows is her breaking her pearl necklace.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** The film was very successful. It sold more than 70,000 tickets during its first two weeks in theatres, and it won awards at that year's Venice Film Festival. But it was also a scandal. The film was condemned by the Pope. Adolf Hitler, the newly appointed chancellor of Germany, banned it entirely, citing, among other things, the film's young Jewish star.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** After making *Extase*, Hedy has written that her parents were very upset when they viewed the film for the first time and made her promise to end her film career, which she did.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** But Hedy didn't give up on acting. She just needed to avoid the silver screen. She quickly got a role in a play called *Sissy* about Empress Elisabeth of Austria. *Ecstasy* had given her some notoriety, and audiences wanted to see her. Especially one audience member in particular: a wealthy, 33-year-old munitions mogul named Fritz Mandl.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Every night during her run in 1933, dozens and dozens of bouquets would be brought to the front of the stage or be backstage, and one in particular was repetitious, every single night, and it was a bouquet from Fritz Mandl.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** At the time, Fritz was the third richest man in Austria. Despite his Jewish father, he was known for rubbing shoulders with the leaders of Europe's burgeoning fascist governments. He was *also* known for enjoying the company of women.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** So he had a bit of a reputation as a rogue, as a lothario. And it was interesting when he finally did appear backstage to meet this beautiful Hedwig Kiesler. He said, I suppose you've heard about me. And she said, yes, and nothing good.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** But Fritz was charming. Just like Hedy, he knew how to use his good looks to get what he wanted. And he was knowledgeable on everything from chemistry to politics. In a 1938 magazine interview, she explained what drew her to him.

**HEDY LAMARR:** I began to feel attracted by the brain of the man, by his tremendous power, by his charm which, when he wished, could be as powerful as his brain. I love strength. I love it. I think that all women love strength in a man.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Eventually, after many more gifts, and a meeting facilitated by her mother, Hedy agreed to marry him.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Hedy and Fritz were married, and they settled in their various homes. They ate off solid gold plates. They had sometimes up to 14 servants in each establishment, and they had a fleet of some of the most expensive automobiles made at that time.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** But life wasn't all glitz and glamour. Fritz was jealous and paranoid. He was convinced Hedy was having an affair. He had the household staff listen in on her phone calls. Just like her parents, he forbade her from pursuing an acting career. He despised the role she had played in *Ecstasy*. Some sources say he spent over

\$300,000 dollars—the equivalent of \$7.5 million today—trying to destroy every copy of the film in existence. In a 1938 magazine interview, Hedy spoke about how it felt to be married to a man who only wanted to control her.

**HEDY LAMARR:** I knew very soon that I could never be an actress while I was his wife. He was the absolute monarch in his marriage. I was like a doll. I was like a thing, some object of art which had to be guarded—and imprisoned—having no mind, no life of its own.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** On top of all of that, Fritz was rarely around to give Hedy any attention.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Fritz was very busy with his munitions work, and often, Hedy would sit at the table along with the other wives of Fritz and his cronies and have to listen to endless conversation of the build-up of munitions in Europe. Hedy would sit night after night listening to these conversations and acting as a trophy wife, acting as if it did not matter, but she was listening to every piece of conversation that was going on.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** After four years of isolation and loneliness, Hedy couldn't take it anymore.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** When Hedy finally decided to leave Fritz, there are many legends of how she did it.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** In one version of the story, Hedy hired a maid named Laura, who shared her dark coloring and approximate height. Late one night, she grabbed a suitcase, snuck sleeping pills into Laura's coffee, and stole her bicycle. In another version, Laura was in on the plan. She and Hedy had become great friends, so she helped her pack her things and even drove her to the train station. In yet another, Fritz *helped* Hedy leave. It was 1937. Knowing she wasn't safe in a country that was

becoming more antisemitic by the day, he agreed to a divorce in order to ensure her safety. Here's what we know is true: Hedy carefully packed two of her best gowns and all of her most expensive jewelry, and got on a late night train from Vienna to Paris. From Paris, Hedy made her way to London, and got to work restarting her film career. She met an American agent who managed to get her a meeting with the co-founder of a major Hollywood studio. His name was Louis B. Mayer. The studio was MGM.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** Louis B. Mayer was known for discovering European talent and bringing that talent to Hollywood. And Hedy Lamarr is probably one of the greatest examples of that.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** This is Noah Isenberg. He's a film historian and professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Louis B. Mayer was born Lazar Meir, the son of Ukrainian-Jewish immigrants who had come to North America when he was a child. While working for his father's scrap metal business as a teenager, he became interested in vaudeville, and eventually started a business renovating old movie theatres. By 1937, when he met with Hedy in London, Mayer was one of the most powerful men in Hollywood.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** Mayer was a titan, as so many of these sort of gritty immigrant studio moguls were. He drove a hard bargain. He felt very proprietary about his studio and everyone attached to that studio—actors, writers. You know, about the actors, their tagline was “more stars than in the heavens.” MGM had this kind of imprimatur that exuded polish and gloss and glamor and it really stood apart from the other studios.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Throughout the 1930s, a wave of Jewish emigre artists came to America to escape the antisemitism of their home countries. Filmmaker Billy Wilder, actor Peter Lorre, and director Fritz Lang all came to Hollywood during this period. It made sense. Like Mayer, many of the powerful studio heads of the era were Jewish immigrants themselves.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** There were a lot of German-speaking emigres who were finding opportunities in the studios, in particular Universal, which was run by a German-speaking Jew by the name of Carl Laemmle. Affectionately referred to as Uncle Carl.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Laemmle had a habit of giving his relatives executive positions at his studio. But he also sponsored hundreds of Jewish artists fleeing the Nazis to immigrate to America, saving them from the Holocaust. Louis B. Mayer was not like Carl Laemmle.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** I don't think he stuck his neck out for anybody, to quote from Rick Blaine, I just, I don't think that was who he was. But if he saw a good opportunity, I think he pounced. He was a ruthlessly ambitious Hollywood mogul. And I think that also accounts for a good part of his success.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Mayer agreed to meet Hedy in his London hotel room. With the help of a translator, he explained that, while she was beautiful, he could never hire an actress who had been in a movie like *Ecstasy*. Stephen Michael Shearer again.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** She said she was very young when she made *Ecstasy*. She was forced to do these scenes with the great Gustav Machatý.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Finally, Mayer suggested that, if she could pay her own way to Hollywood, he could give her a six month contract at \$125 per week.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** And Hedy stood up, Louis B Mayer and his entourage, roomful of men, and she said, "In Europe, I am a star," and walked out.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** But Hedy soon realized that she had acted without thinking. She couldn't stay in England much longer without work. She had to do something, or she would be sent back to Austria. Her agent found out that Louis B. Mayer was sailing back to America on a luxury cruise liner called *The Normandie*. The tickets were prohibitively expensive and very difficult to come by, but they had a way in: Hedy's agent had another client, a 14-year-old violin prodigy who was returning to America after a European tour. Hedy could be his governess. She sold most of her jewelry to cover the fare. The next day, she boarded the ship in a gray tailored suit and gloves. She had \$900 in her handbag. Just a few days later, Hedy found herself dressed to the nines in the dining area on *The Normandie*. She *knew* she could impress Mayer if she was given a little more time. And she succeeded. By the end of the voyage, Mayer agreed to give Hedy a seven-year contract at \$500 per week. She was about to become a huge Hollywood starlet. But there were conditions.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Louis B. Mayer had sent her to some of the stores on board the *Normandy* to buy new luggage and to acquire a new wardrobe. In New York, she was told on the five-day trip across the United States on the train: learn English and work on your appearance. And become American.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** "Becoming American" meant losing weight, plucking her eyebrows, and trying to lighten up her accent. It also meant changing her name. "Hedwig Kiesler" was just a Viennese-Jewish girl with a dream. So instead, she took on a name that sounded, to her, like the name of a star: Hedy Lamarr. Hedy Lamarr was a mysterious European beauty. Hedy Lamarr had never appeared naked on film. And Hedy Lamarr definitely wasn't Jewish.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** What Louis B. Mayer asked of Hedy Lamarr was nothing unique. Rather, it was common practice in the studio era that when actors were put under contract, men and women alike, they were packaged. These were factories, I mean, so-called dream factories, but they really were. And so you have the costume department working with the art department working with the

publicity department. And so they are packaging their properties, so to speak. And they are their properties. They are under contract.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** These studios weren't concerned with representing reality. They wanted their stars, and by extension, their films, to have mass appeal. So Jewish studio heads required Jewish emigre actors to change their names and wear makeup or even get surgery that would de-emphasize their Jewish features. They refrained from mentioning Judaism or Jews in their films.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** These studios were very much in sync with that drive toward assimilation. And so, yes, they happened to be helmed by either European-born or newly arrived American-born Jews who saw the opportunity to enter into the film industry during its infancy. But the product that they produced, and it was, after all, a product, I mean, it was aimed at mass consumption. It was stripped, for the most part, of any traces of Jewishness.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** MGM, in particular, was known for a kind of glossy glamor that seemed to exist outside of reality.

**NOAH ISENBERG:** And Hedy Lamarr's story is a great example of that as well. I mean, her beauty is perceived as a kind of Hollywood beauty. She's an MGM girl and she represents that to the core. The fact that she was born in Vienna, Hedwig Kiesler, and from a relatively well off Jewish family, that's utterly secondary, tertiary, insignificant.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** By the time Hedy arrived in California, she was a different person. She had quickly styled herself into the American film star she had always wanted to be. Now, all she needed was a role.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** One stormy, rainy night, she and her date went to a party being held at Walter Wanger's house. Charles Boyer was there.

During the party, everybody noticed Hedy Lamarr. And Boyer spoke French with her, asked, you know, would you like to test for a movie that I'm making, and she spoke with Walter Wanger. Louis B. Mayer lent her out to make a movie for United Artists called Algiers. This was the movie that made Hedy Lamarr a star in Hollywood.

*[CLIP FROM ALGIERS]*

**PEPE:** *Suppose you don't come tomorrow?*

**GABY:** *Suppose I don't?*

**PEPE:** *If you don't come back, I might do anything.*

**GABY:** *Tomorrow, Pepe.*

**PEPE:** *Tomorrow?*

**GABY:** *I never break a promise.*

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Algiers came out in 1938. It was about a French jewel thief hiding out in Algeria. Hedy played his love interest, a mysterious and beautiful French tourist. It was a smash hit.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Suddenly Hedy Lamarr's name was on everybody's lips. Fashion changed at that time. Turbans became popular. Every actress in Hollywood, from Lucille Ball to Joan Crawford, parted her hair in the middle, shoulder length, because Hedy Lamarr patented that look.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Hedy was on the cover of all the movie magazines. There were features describing her as exotic, alluring, a picture of European elegance. One even called her "The Dream Girl of 50,000,000 Men." In a magazine interview from early 1939, Hedy said she was thrilled with her newfound fame—but it was also disorienting.

**HEDY LAMARR:** I cannot yet believe that my apparent good fortune is real...that the name, Hedy Lamarr, that I see blazoned over movie marquees is my own.

Perhaps it is only a dream and I shall wake one day to find glory vanished and failure confronting me, after all.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Hedy appeared in more films, often as the exotic femme fatale opposite a handsome leading man. She starred alongside Robert Taylor, Spencer Tracy, and Clark Gable. She even had another hit in 1940 called *Boom Town*, a neo-Western about Texas oil men. While Hedy's career was taking off, she often thought about her life before Hollywood. Her father had died before she left home, but she was still worried about her mother. Their communication had become inconsistent since the war began. After the Anschluss in 1938, Hedy asked the higher ups at MGM to help get her mother out of Vienna. By 1940, Trude was able to leave Austria and move to London, but Hedy still desperately wanted her to come to America. She knew the war was only getting worse, but she didn't know what she could do to make a difference. Until one day, she met someone who understood her fears—and her desire to do something about them. Now that she was a Hollywood starlet, Hedy was always attending soirees and events around the city. Late in the summer of 1940, she received an invitation to a dinner party hosted by her friend Janet Gaynor. A decade earlier, Janet had been the first-ever recipient of the Academy Award for Best Actress, but now, at just 34 years old, she was retired from Hollywood. She was also newly married to famed costume designer Adrian. Hedy gladly accepted the invitation to their new home in the affluent Taluca Lake area of Los Angeles. When Hedy arrived, Janet and Adrian invited her to sit down at the table. Their other guest, they said, was running late. The rest of the group was already enjoying some appetizers by the time he arrived. His name was George Antheil. He wrote about this meeting in his 1945 memoir.

**GEORGE ANTHEIL:** I sat down and turned my eyes upon Hedy Lamarr. My eyeballs sizzled, but I could not take them away. Here, undoubtedly, was the most beautiful woman on earth.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** George was an avant-garde composer. He was best known for an off-the-wall film score called *Ballet Mécanique*. To perform it, you needed 16 player

pianos, two regular pianos, three xylophones, seven electric bells, four bass drums, a tam-tam, a siren, and three airplane propellers. When the piece was performed, the propellers would blow the toupees off of men in the audience. This earned him the nickname “the bad boy of music.” While George was intimidated by Hedy at first, she greatly enjoyed his company. The group spent the evening in lively conversation.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Somewhere in the evening, the conversation had switched to the world conflict. There had recently been an ocean liner bringing refugee children to the United States, and it was torpedoed. But the torpedo did not go off. It was embedded in the ship, and they were able to fortunately bring that ship with its children into port, and then they studied the torpedo.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** It turned out that George had a personal connection to the war. His younger brother Henry, a diplomat, had been one of the first Americans killed in World War II when his plane was mysteriously shot down by Soviet fighters earlier that year. Hedy felt like she had found someone who understood her fears about the war. And when she left the party that night, she stopped in front of his car, took out her lipstick, and scrawled her phone number across his windshield. The next day, he called her, and she invited him over for dinner.

**GEORGE ANTHEIL:** That evening I found myself looking across the dinner table at Hedy Lamarr. Her butler served us, just like in the movies. I was very nervous.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Once again, the conversation turned to the war.

**GEORGE ANTHEIL:** Hedy said that she did not feel very comfortable, sitting there in Hollywood and making lots of money when things were in such a state. She said that she knew a good deal about new munitions and various secret weapons...

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** They talked about the torpedo and Hedy knew things. She knew what Fritz had talked about at the dinner table, those many, many boring nights in Vienna. And she remembered the fact that wireless communication was spoken about and that the fascist governments wanted to learn and develop that more.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Hedy told George about an idea that had been percolating in her mind for years. She knew that the Navy needed a way to guide torpedoes through the water remotely and without enemy interference. She wondered if it would be possible to synchronize a radio transmitter and receiver to hop randomly from frequency to frequency together. The enemy couldn't jam every frequency, so there would be no way to interfere. George had experience with a similar mechanism—he had used it to synchronize the player pianos for *Ballet Mécanique*. So they got to work. While Hedy was making films and becoming more and more famous, she had never forgotten those long walks with her father, learning about the mechanics of streetcars and clocks, and she was still fascinated with how things worked.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** She always was inventing things. She had a soda pop cube that she invented. However, she invented it for the soldiers, the boys overseas, so that if they wanted a soda pop, all they had to do was locate some water. Problem with that was that those cubes, the water varies from whatever area you are, and those cubes always didn't work. So it was kind of a flop.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** She also had a brief affair with the eccentric engineer and businessman Howard Hughes, who piqued her interest in airplanes.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** She went to Howard Hughes and she said, why do you design the wings of the planes like World War I aircraft? She said, have you never looked at birds? Have you never looked at fish? She said, those

wings should be curved. The bodies of the fuselage should be structured like that of fish so that the air currents can flow.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Hedy's mind was always on the move, and she was starting to tire of playing exotic and mysterious love interests to more interesting men. This new project with George Antheil, which they had dubbed the "Secret Communication System," was just what she needed. Hedy and George worked on the invention for months. Hedy usually had to be on set during the day, but she spent evenings with George, writing down her ideas and drawing diagrams in his spiral notebook. In 1941, they submitted their idea to the National Inventors Council. They were then connected with a physicist at CalTech, who helped them design the electronic part of the device. And on August 11, 1942, Hedy and George were awarded US Patent No. 2,292,387 for their "frequency hopping" technology. Hedy felt vindicated. In interviews, she often spoke about how people underestimated her because of her looks.

**HEDY LAMARR:** People seem to think because I have a pretty face I'm stupid. I have to work twice as hard as anyone else to convince people I have something resembling a brain.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Certain their invention would change the course of the war, they submitted the patent to the US Navy. But to their shock, the Navy said they couldn't see an immediate use for the technology. To add insult to injury, the patent was labelled top secret and kept from the public until the war was over. The Navy representative suggested Hedy could better serve the war effort by using her fame to sell war bonds—which she did, in the amount of \$25 million. Over the next several years, Hedy's life was tumultuous. She married and divorced twice, and had two children with her third husband, actor John Loder. She starred in a series of box office disappointments. She felt undervalued at MGM, and angry that her patent had never been put to good use. Finally, in 1949, there seemed to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** Cecil B. DeMille had her in *Samson and Delilah*, perhaps the one motion picture that Hedy Lamarr will be best remembered for. And it was one of the top-grossing films of 1949, 1950.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** But despite its success, *Samson and Delilah* was not enough to reignite Hedy's career. The studios stopped sending her good roles. She tried to produce her own biblical epic like DeMille, but lost millions of dollars when she couldn't find an American distributor. Finally, in 1958, Hedy officially retired from Hollywood. And on August 11, 1959, her patent for frequency hopping expired. As her life went on, Hedy became increasingly secluded. Her beauty, the thing that had made her famous, had started to fade with age.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** She realized that her youthful beauty was Hedy Lamarr. That was the trademark. But she wasn't Hedy Lamarr anymore. Nobody could maintain that forever.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** In 1969, Hedy wrote to a friend in the Navy to find out what had happened to her patent. She learned that her invention was eventually put to use in military communications.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** In 1962, when our ships blockaded Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis, our government readdressed that patent because they had to develop some way that our ships could communicate without the Russians intercepting these messages. And over the years, certainly during the Vietnam conflict, the wireless communication was applied to armament.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** The technology that Hedy and George had scribbled out in his notebook had become indispensable to the United States military. And over the decades, the idea evolved. "Frequency hopping" laid the groundwork for "spread

spectrum communication”—the idea of spreading a signal over a wide range of frequencies in order to make communication faster, more secure, and more reliable.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** And eventually—this is the contribution that Hedy Lamarr made to our world, was eventually it became the nucleus of every cell phone, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, Mil-Star, in existence today.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** Now nearly all wireless systems rely on spread spectrum communication to deliver the information we access every day. The estimated market value of this technology is \$30 billion. Neither Hedy nor George ever made a dime. Hedy lived the rest of her life in Florida, spending most of her time alone at home. She rarely saw her family. Age and plastic surgery had dramatically changed her appearance. But shortly before her death in 2000, something amazing happened.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** The international scientific community recognized her contribution to science and did say that Hedy Lamarr had one of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** In 1997, the Electronic Frontier Foundation awarded Hedy and George with their Pioneer Award. The same year, Hedy was the first woman to receive the Bulbie Gnass Spirit of Achievement Award from the Invention Convention.

**STEPHEN MICHAEL SHEARER:** I think that kind of recognition for a life that she felt had been dismissed once her beauty faded, I think, that meant a great deal to her.

**JOSHUA MALINA:** In 2014, Hedy was posthumously inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame for the development of her frequency hopping technology. Books have been written and documentaries have been made about her life and contributions to science. And perhaps most notably, her birthday is celebrated as Inventor’s Day in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Decades after the invention of their remarkable

technology, Hedy Lamarr would undoubtedly be pleased to be remembered not only as “the most beautiful woman in the world,” but as a woman who was far more brilliant than anyone gave her credit for.

### *THEME MUSIC*

**JOSHUA MALINA:** LBI Collections include rich materials from German-speaking Jewish immigrants and refugees in the Hollywood film industry, from Universal Pictures founder Carl Laemmle to director Ernst Lubitsch to film composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold to actors like Peter Lorre and Hedy Lamarr. Learn more at [lbi.org/exile](http://lbi.org/exile). Exile is a production of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York and Antica Productions. I’m your narrator, Joshua Malina. This episode was written by Emily Morantz. Our executive producers are Laura Regehr and Stuart Coxe. Our producer is Emily Morantz. Research and translation by Isabella Kempf. Sound design and audio mix by Gaëtan Harris, with additional mixing by Philip Wilson. Theme music by Oliver Wickham. Voice acting by Cyrus Lane and Athena Karkanis. This episode of Exile is made possible in part by a grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which is supported by the German Federal Ministry of Finance and the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future.