

# ACF Conference at Evian Detailed Program

## Director's Note

When Leon brought *Conference at Evian* to my attention a decade ago, I was immediately onboard to do whatever I could to get it on the stage. As with many works of art, as we all know, the wheels of progress, even for things about which we are passionate, grind exceedingly slow. The first staged reading of *Evian* was seven years ago. But during that time, Leon and I had many conversations about how best to share the story of intentions and decisions by government functionaries with little if any concern for the moral, ethical, or historical implications of their decisions.

While directing this reading, I have had the privilege of working with a most generous, intelligent, and talented team. Each of them has given their time, talent, and enthusiasm to a difficult and sensitive script. I am grateful for them and especially for Leon, whose dedication to bringing this almost lost piece of history to light has never lagged.

In 1940, a group of Jews in France had managed to enter Spain, where they were issued transit visas to Portugal, the jumping off point to countries that had issued them immigration visas. However, when they arrived in Spain, Franco had their transit visas revoked and ordered the Spanish police to send them back to Vichy France. That night, September 26, 1940, fearing repatriation on his return to France, one of those Jews killed himself. That man, Walter Benjamin, was a German Jew who abandoned his homeland for France when the Nazi regime began poisoning the lives of its Jews in 1933. His tombstone, in Spain, is engraved with his own words, "There is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism."

Yvonne Paretzky

## About the Conference at Evian

This play dramatizes the events of the real-life Evian Conference, which took place in Evian, France in the Summer of 1938.

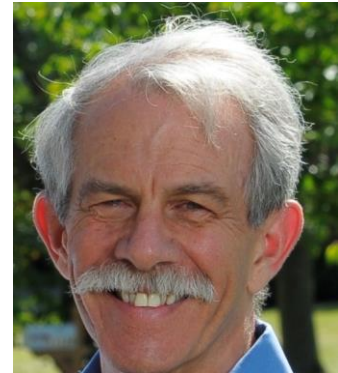
On March 13, 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria. Between them lived about 692,000 Jews - 500,000 in Germany and 192,000 in Austria. As the humanitarian situation in Germany and its territories worsened, pressure mounted in the international community to respond to Germany's growing restrictions and the Jews' declining safety. Acting on those pressures, FDR called for a conference of nations to explore possible responses to the quickly-growing masses of Jewish refugees. The French agreed to host the meeting in Evian.

When delegates of more than 30 countries arrived at the conference, they were faced with a shocking all-or-nothing proposal from the Nazi Party. More shocking was the spokesperson the Nazis chose to present the plan: Dr. Heinrich Neumann, a prominent Viennese Jewish Physician.

Excerpts of the delegates' official statements have been included in this play. While the text has been broken into segments or rearranged for dramatic effect, the words spoken by actors depicting the official proceedings are the same words that appear in the real-life official transcript of those proceedings.

### About the Playwright

**Leon Weintraub** was actively involved in speech and theatre as a college student in New York City, both on stage and working behind the scenes on scenery, costumes, and lighting. His career interests were changed dramatically after he served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the early years of the Kennedy Administration. Following graduate studies and marriage, he had an almost thirty-year career as a U.S. diplomat, serving in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe.



Though his career took him out of active participation in theatre, Leon enjoyed watching both professional and amateur productions in several countries. His experiences in attending diplomatic conferences led him to look at the Evian Conference, where his reading of the official proceedings convinced him there was a story arc that should be dramatized. He and his wife Nancy are now volunteer ushers at three area theatres, and he has occasionally wielded a hammer to help in scenery construction.

### Production Team

**Yvonne Paretzky (Director)** is an actor, director, writer, and producer. During the recent actors' strike she kept her creative juices flowing writing a feature screenplay and directing. Her directorial work was recognized with a nomination for a Helen Award for Best Ensemble Performance. In January she directed a multimedia play, *Abdication!* by Naya James, with 26 cast members. Currently, she is gearing up for her role as executive producer of the US premiere of *Lowlands*, a play by German Nobel Prize-winning author Herta Müller, that will be directed by Natalia Gleason Nagy. A member of Actors Equity, Yvonne has performed on many area stages, including Folger Shakespeare Theater, Atlas Center for the Performing Arts, and the Kennedy Center. Her on-camera work includes *Coronaville*, a tv mini-series for which she created a character and wrote three episodes in collaboration with UK director Emily James. Yvonne's film work includes Debbie Camper's award-winning feature film, *It's Still Not About Me*, and *Maud*, starring Nancy Robinette. Yvonne earned a BA in journalism and philosophy from The George Washington University and an MA in public policy from Antioch University. She is an alum of the Studio Acting Conservatory and vice president of ExPats Theatre, a winner of the John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging



Theatre. Yvonne is awed every day. She believes that everything is connected. She is grateful for her children, grandchildren, and her sturdiest supporter, friend, and husband, Ken.

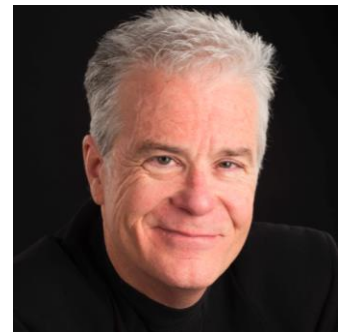
**Robert Summers-Berger (Assistant Director)** is a director, playwright, and dramaturg with a decade of experience both on stage and behind the scenes. His dramaturgy credits include leading the script development of Logan Rodger's *That's All We Got*, which debuted at Minnesota Fringe 2021, and *On the Line* by Rowan Dunlop. He has directed a number of new and established works, including several self-written plays. Robert wrote and directed *Lemmel Writes to Julia* for the At Home Artists Festival and directed a staged reading of his play *Coventry's Godiva*. His directing credits also include Tom Stoppard's *15 Minute Hamlet*, Sunny Drakes' *Absolutely Nothing of Any Meaning* (Purnell Center workshop), and *Puppet SLAM!* (Playground Festival 2021). Robert has multiple years of conservatory training from the Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama.



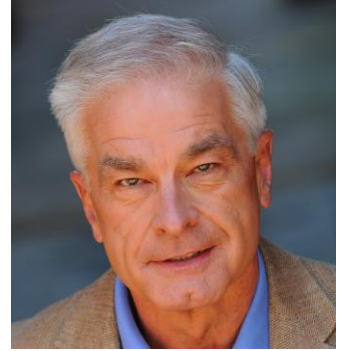
**Leon Swerdel-Rich (Sound, Scenic, and Projection Design)** is a Washington-based independent filmmaker, editor, and screenwriter. He has previously lent his talents to institutions seeking to tell their stories in new ways through video, including the Folger Shakespeare Library and the National Cathedral. Recent film works include *Maud* (2022, cinematographer) and *The Reborn* (2023, editor). His next screenplay, *The Garden Scientist's Daughter*, follows a runaway opera singer who must solve the mystery of her mentor's murder before the killer—or her past—find and destroy her new life. Leon earned BAs in creative writing and Classical Mediterranean and Middle East civilization studies from Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

### Onstage Actors

**Dana Scott Galloway (Dr. Heinrich Neumann)** is honored to be participating in Leon Weintraub's *Conference at Evian*. His stage and TV credits include Off and Off-Off Broadway, dinner theatre, and appearances on soaps, sit coms, cop shows, and commercials. While in Manhattan he spent a year portraying Detective Ascher in the Off-Broadway hit *Perfect Crime*, (the longest and still running nonmusical show in the history of New York theatre), and has appeared on stage and television with Leslie Nielsen, Adam West, Tom Ewell and Shelley Berman. Most recently Galloway performed his solo play *Augustus The Sissy* at the Burning Coal Theatre in Raleigh, NC, a show that has been performed on rooftops, front porches, and in the more sedate surroundings of the United Solo Festival Off Broadway in NYC. A native of Floydada, Texas and a longtime member of SAG/AFTRA/AEA, he splits his time between Washington and Raleigh, North Carolina.



**Bill Wilburn** (*Nazi Officer, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Various Delegates*) is grateful to help enact this drama of the Evian conference. An actor and writer, Bill has authored novels, short stories, and comic pieces. He lives with his wife in Chevy Chase, MD. [www.billwilburn.com](http://www.billwilburn.com).



**David Gamble** (*Narrator, Agent Nelson*) has worked at a number of Washington and Baltimore theaters: Silver Spring Stage, Chesapeake Shakespeare, Peter's Alley, We Happy Few, Molotov Theatre, Theatre Alliance, Fells Point Corner Theatre and Vagabond Players, to name a few.



**Christopher Farrar** (*Myron Taylor, Josef Neumann, Rabbi Milestone, Cano*) is a trained comedian and improviser through Second City, Groundlings, Washington Improv Theater, National Comedy Theater, and Flappers. When not making people laugh, he pursues acting through Lesley Kahn Los Angeles and HB Studios out of New York. He is a member of SAG-AFTRA and a native of Southern California, and is thankful for all the support from family and friends in pursuit of his passion and dreams.



### Voice Actors

**Rabbi Irving Elson** (*Villa Michel, Garcia Calderón, Gastelu Concha*), a native of Mexico City, earned his undergraduate degree at Yeshiva University and his rabbinic ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He spent most of his rabbinate as a chaplain in the United States Navy and Marines, where he ascended to the rank of Captain (highest ranking Jewish chaplain in all of the U.S. Armed Forces). Upon retirement, Rabbi Elson became the Head of the Jewish Chaplains Council and the Director of Armed Forces and



Veterans Services at the Jewish Welfare Board. He spends his time recruiting rabbis to serve in the armed forces and veterans affairs chaplaincies.

**Henrique Ozur Bass (*Helio Lobo*)** was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After completing a degree in Telecommunications Engineering from the Instituto Militar de Engenharia, Hazzan Ozur Bass worked for two years as an engineer for IBM and Petrobras. In 1989, he left Brazil to fulfill his childhood dream of becoming a Hazzan, enrolling in the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. As part of his six years of training, he spent a year in Israel at the Masorti Rabbinical School in Jerusalem. Hazzan Ozur Bass also led services in congregations throughout Israel, Brazil and the United States. During the course of his studies, he received many awards for his musical and cantorial abilities, and graduated in 1995.



**Martin Holmberg (*Engzell*)** is a Swedish-born economist, international development advisor, and climate policy expert. He currently works at the World Bank as an Advisor to the Executive Director.

**Jacob Popper (*Berenger*)** is thrilled to make his voice acting debut in *Conference at Evian*. He works as a financial analyst for the Vancouver Island Health Authority, in Victoria, British Columbia. Born in Silver Spring, Maryland, Jacob received his Bachelor's degree at McGill University in Quebec. He is fluent in English and French.

### **Further Reading**

For further information about the Evian Conference and its participants, here are some links that may be helpful:

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Holocaust Encyclopedia**

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-evian-conference>

**The Wiener Holocaust Library. The Holocaust Explained**

<https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/what-we-do/learn/the-holocaust-explained/>

**The Washington Post, July 15, 2023**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2023/07/15/holocaust-hitler-fdr-jewish-evian-conference/>

**Brookings: Refugee crises and the sad legacy of the 1938 Evian conference**

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/refugee-crises-and-the-sad-legacy-of-the-1938-evian-conference/>

**Yad Vashem, Shoah Resource Center**

[https://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206305.pdf](https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206305.pdf)

**National World War II Museum “Even the Dead Won’t Be Safe: Walter Benjamin’s Final Journey”**

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/walter-benjamin>

**You Tube: Evian Conference - How Do You Solve a Problem Like The Jews?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQFttX6oOMM>

**Reliefweb: Look back and learn: The Evian Conference, 1938**

<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/look-back-and-learn-evian-conference-1938>