

# Foster Set to Play Riefenstahl

By **Jamie Portman**

**Jodie Foster** knows she could jeopardize her image by taking on the role of an infamous figure from the Nazi era. But she says she never thought twice about deciding to produce and star in a new film about Leni Riefenstahl, the superb filmmaker who worked for Adolph Hitler.

“Playing Leni is a risk,” Ms. Foster said in an interview. “It’s an enormous challenge — I think it will be the most challenging film of my life. But it’s something I’ve wanted to do for a long time.”

Ms. Riefenstahl, now 97, applied her cinematic genius to two notorious Nazi propaganda films during the 1930s. One was the 1936 *Triumph of the Will*, a subversively compelling account of the rise of Nazi Germany. She followed this up with *Olympia*, a two-part pro-

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*The Talented Ms. Foster: Actor, Director, Producer.*

paganda documentary glorifying Germany’s performance at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Both movies continue to be hailed as masterpieces — even by critics sickened by what they represent.

Ms. Riefenstahl has spent the last half-century seeking to rehabilitate herself by suggesting that using her great gifts to advance the cause of Nazism in Europe was a necessary career move forced on

her by Hitler. But a 1994 film portrait, *The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, is less forgiving. When it was released, film historian and critic Joseph McBride wrote that “director Ray Muller’s thoughtful documentary portrait provides a bracing antidote to the historical revisionism of Riefenstahl’s Faustian pact with Hitler” and said the film offered “incontrovertible evidence” of Ms. Riefenstahl’s “willingness to accept and glorify Nazi ideology.”

Ms. Foster says she knows she’ll enter a minefield but that’s one reason the project fascinates her. “There is no other woman in the 20th century who has been so admired and vilified simultaneously,” she acknowledges. Indeed, the incendiary subject matter was the prime reason she decided to produce the film herself. ■