

ARTS & BOOKS

[A rough diamond in the dark](#)

By Radan JOVANOVIĆ

The glamorous American diva Diamanda Galás sings memorial songs for the forgotten victims in History.

Diamanda Galas is a singing monument to experimental music and performance. Her sonic adaptations of poems written by Adonis, de Nerval or Michaux are striking pieces, broaching serious and painful themes. "For some, the things of which she sings are too much to bear; for Galás, it would be unbearable to remain silent about them".¹

Diamanda Galás was born in 1955 in San Diego, California of Greek origin. She first appeared on stage as a lead vocalist in the opera "Un Jour comme un Autre" at the festival d'Avignon in 1979.² Then, she started a solo career in 1982 releasing several studio masterpieces and live recordings as well. She also worked with cult figures such as Iannis Xenakis and John Paul Jones, bassist of the highly praised Led Zeppelin and the Berlin grandfathers of industrial music Einstürzende Neubauten. Galas' image has gradually grown into that of a dark demonic diva. She is very popular among underground music groups and aficionados.

Her songs can be quite disturbing at the first listening. This is music and at the same time, it is much more than that. "These are not your ordinary yells, but rather a repertory of skillfully modulated moans, shrieks, whoops, wobbles, gurgles, stage whispers and spitting consonants".³ Her primal screams have a different quality from those of Marilyn Manson, who seems to have been deeply influenced by Galas' theatrical gothic and provocative airs. "But efforts to categorize Galás mostly fail. Though she holds appeal to goths with her "child of Satan" look – jet-black hair and mascara – she is not about that subculture," says journalist Graham Strahle.⁴

Her lyrics also serve History, which starkly differentiates her music from popular entertainment. In "Defixiones, Will and Testament" (2003), her Byzantine tone is a tribute to the forgotten victims killed in genocides committed by the Turks on Armenians, Assyrians, Anatolians and Pontic Greeks during World War I. This album pays tribute to her national and religious roots as she comes from a Greek orthodox family. Her personal history was seminal too as her brother died from AIDS. "Plague Mass" (1996) dealing with AIDS dementia and clinical depression was recorded in St Ann's cathedral in New York. The best way to categorise Diamanda Galás is to describe her as the voice of the fallen and the forgotten.

Diamanda Galás will be on stage on December 3rd, 2005 at All Tomorrow's Parties in Camber Sands, UK.

¹ <http://www.diamandagalas.com/bio.htm>

² "Un Jour comme un Autre" was composed by Vinko Globokar. Galas recorded "Vena Cava" (1992), "Schrei 27" (1996). For further information, visit <http://www.diamandagalas.com/>.

³ Bernard Holland, « Unbearable Grief Given Full-Throated Voice, » *The New York Times* 10 September 2005.

⁴ Graham Strahle, « Diabolically Different Divas, » *Adelaide Review* 28 October 2005.