

SELECTED AND DISSECTED

DIAMANDA GALÁS

'Guilty, Guilty, Guilty'

MUTE

If bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley ever came to hear, some six feet under, Diamanda Galás' effortlessly diabolical rape of his famed reaper ballad 'O Death', chances are his rotting teeth would be clacking in frenzied disbelief. Such is the disarming terror and virtue with which Galás has nullified this characteristic piece of American roots music, making it her own. Her take is primeval, gutsy, gripping, rippling. It curiously stagnates like the sulphuric air of a crusader's age-old, hermetic sepulchre, but is ultimately raised aloft by Galás's trademark soaring banshee cacophony. In many ways it's reminiscent of the Rebetika-style *amanes*, an improvisational form of singing lament from Asia Minor. Similar to American blues, it leaves open a range of depth and subtlety that, while oft painful and panging to the ears, can also be lethally seductive as well. A laboured death with a smile – the aural equivalent of Henri-Georges Clouzot's 'Les Diaboliques'.

So, 'Guilty, Guilty, Guilty', Galás' seventeenth outing, is a collection of "homicidal love songs", tales of modern Carmens, *crimes passionnelles* and Catherine Trammell types bludgeoning their lovers with icepicks. The beacon of bleak may not parade around half-naked, drenched in blood anymore, but a quarter of a century since her seminal debut, you could say the steak knives are out once again. Her political *tour de force* in '03's 'Defixiones' was revolting, invigoratingly impassioned as well as educational; unveiling injustices confined to the dustbin of history. This time, it's intimately personal.

Privileged attendees to her recent shows will attest to the love and care she has invested in reinterpreting these haunted laments, from the manic piano key stabs and New Orleans haunted house reverb of '8 Men And 4 Women' to her extraordinarily 'real' reprise of Burt Bacharach collaborator Timi Yuro's 'Interlude (Time)'. It's probably the first time since 'The Singer' that Diamanda Galás has sounded remotely *human*.

Thing is, Galás could well sing those ditties straight and narrow, but treating things as sacrosanct just isn't her style. Laws, rules, conventions are meant to be fucked around with.

You can count on her ladyship for that.

