

►► device called an SPL Visualizer, which after "a lot of creative EQing," did the trick. "At first, I got this tinny sort of a cappella, and by accident, the SPL brought the vocal to life." With a flip-side mix that stitches "We Will Rock You" over a hyperkinetic jungle jam, this is one 12-inch that'll satiate your deconstructed '70s cravings.

Johnny Vicious's cut-up of "Roadhouse Blues" is more faithful to the Doors, but no less revelatory. Vicious took a big chunk from a CD, looped it, and after a little time-stretching, added drums and percussion and "extra vibe." The striptease rhythm locks with the house beats so well that Morrison howling "keep your eyes on the road, your hands upon the wheel" conjures the same response "yo DJ pump this party" would. "I played it at Roxy and everybody was like, 'What the fuck is this?'" he says. "But everybody knew the words, 'cause that's our generation."

Punters aplenty have warmed up to Vicious's creation, but the club community stands divided. "Pearls" turned scandalous when Sade refused the mix's release and copies still hit the racks. Both Quick Mix and Vicious say they had nothing to do with their records get- ►►

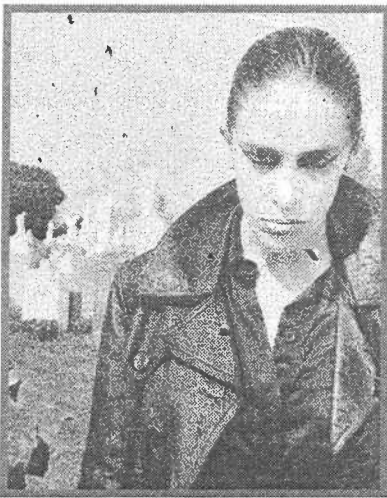
Queen of the Nightmare

Diamanda Galás

Schrei X

P.S. 122 through January 20

BY KYLE GANN



CATHERINE MCGANN

Next, *The Magic Flute*: Galás

You'd have to pity the mugger who'd try to corner Diamanda Galás in a dark alley: her shrieks would give the poor devil bad dreams for months, if not break his eardrums outright. She possesses the most powerful, versatile, and disciplined instrument of any vocalist in new music, and her new piece, *Schrei X*, is more than anything else a showcase for it. And not only the voice itself—that would be a shallow use of her natural endowment—but the astonishing diversity of personae it allows Galás to create. In abrupt succession, as if you're cruising radio stations, she's a torture victim, an old man, an inquisitor, a butchered animal, a withered crone, an alien. What she isn't, in this brief, oddly limited work, is the damning critic of self-righteous society she has sometimes been.

Schrei X begins as a deafening squeal bursting out of darkness. (The photo I wanted to accompany this review would have been a black rectangle.) Some of the 11 movements, with titles like "Headbox," "Cunt," "Vein," simply reiterate motives in the vocal stratosphere, or alternate between shrieks and groans. Subtle but effective electronic processing (designed by Blaise Dupuy) shoots Galás's voice around the room, often

with a halo of echoes. *Schrei X* is based on Galás's 1994 radio work *Schrei 27*, but since that work was 27 minutes long and this hardly longer, the piece appears to have been more refined than expanded. This is no music-theater opus, but a "Queen of the Night" aria for a night that would have startled Mozart awake in a cold sweat. (I'd give anything to

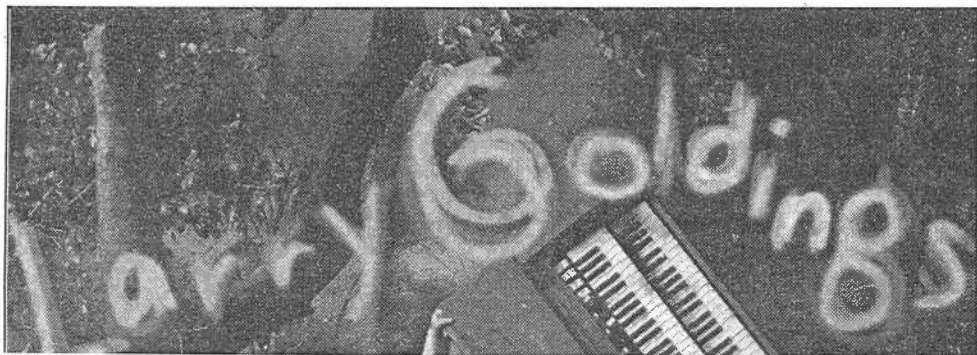
hear a *Magic Flute* production with Galás in that role.)

The piece flows so well as a vocal performance that it moots the unease I've had with Galás's other recent works. For me, her *Plague Mass* is one of the few masterpieces of the 1980s, so insufficiently recognized as such that I wish she'd revive it. The razorlike ambiguity with which she sliced Biblical texts to scathingly indict the Christian Right's paranoid hatred was an achievement whose relevance only increases. Galás's vocalises tend so far toward abstraction that it helped to have them grounded in rock; *Plague Mass* drew much of its power from its demonic subversion of innocuous musical formulas. I love to play the CD for students and watch them scatter, some repulsed, some fascinated, and all thinking for the first time about what the book of Leviticus actually says.

After *Plague Mass*, everyone knew that Galás was driven by her anger at America's failure to deal with the AIDS crisis, and her next pieces seemed to require that prior knowledge. Deprived of textual or musical frame of reference, *Vena Cava* seemed overly abstract and old-fashionedly expressionist. If she felt any similar unease, she might have inter-

preted the problem as a formal one, for in *Schrei X* all the movements are well-defined vignettes, making her sound more than ever like Meredith Monk's evil twin. If *Vena Cava* made neither musical nor political sense, *Schrei X* opts for musical lucidity, with the political present only as a vague overtone.

In a way, *Schrei X* seems a return to the pre-AIDS Diamanda, the pieces like *Wild Women With Steak Knives* whose point was to give voice to schizophrenia. Her pieces have always drawn emotional strength from identification with victims, but where *Plague Mass* fingered the torturer with clairvoyant accuracy, now she's no longer naming names. It's true that *Schrei X* sardonically quotes the same lines from the book of Job that Handel used: "I know that my redeemer lives . . . Even after my skin is flayed, Without my flesh I shall see God." In Galás's raspy mumbling, though, it's rare to pick up more than a phrase or two. Compelling at every moment, the piece barely whets one's appetite, and the opening-night crowd stomped in vain for an encore. No matter. This new work doesn't have nearly as much to say as Diamanda has said in the past. But the way she says it will raise the hair on your neck. ♦



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