

i-D

i-D magazine 193 december 1999



galas gala

Diamanda Galas has diva-like status amongst her legions of fans. Her voice has a four octave range, she plays piano at a virtuoso level and has packed out audiences over the past ten years in cathedrals, alternative art spaces and venues all over the world. That her operatic oeuvre tends to focus on madness,

torture and AIDS - that she is an ex-prostitute and ex-intravenous drug user and has denounced God as "a callous bitch" is by no means irrelevant to her work. Born and raised in San Diego, Galas has established herself as a leading influence on the avant-garde operatic scene. Her voice literally pulls the body apart, her lyrics are laced with violence and

rage. It's well known that when she rehearses in her Greenwich Village apartment, the police have turned up more than once, not to arrest her for noise pollution but because neighbours thought that someone was being murdered. Officially condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, Galas caused controversy when she performed her work *Pague Mass* stripped to the waist and covered in blood. Her records have been taken to priests for exorcism, her fingers are tattooed with the inscription 'We are all HIV+'. (The first singer to compose a requiem for people with aids, her brother, Philip Dimitri Galas, died in her arms from an AIDS-related illness in 1984.) Galas has a body of work which makes PJ Harvey seem like easy listening. People have been known to flee from her

concerts, one man almost getting run over as he charged screaming from the theatre into a busy main road. Needless to say, the romance of requiems of tragedy and death have earned her a dedicated goth following, but her work is also hugely popular in gay culture. She returns to London this December for a one off performance at The Barbican with her latest work, *Defixiones, Will & Testament*. Exploring a (slight) new tenderness within her work, this show should provoke a staggering range of emotions, taking her audience on a cathartic inner journey that will alternate from the passionate to the dourly disturbing. Galas is a voice terrorist and, goth associations aside, she is important in the respect that the voice is treated

as an art form that transcends singing as we know it. Taking texts from exiled poets including Armenian Siamanto, Henri Michaux and Adonis, the performance of *Defixiones* will range in musical style from Greek Rembetika to American Blues and the songs of the deep south. Dedicated to the forgotten people of the Armenian and Anatolian Greek genocides of 1915 and 1922, the work of Galas will always be seen as vengeful testament to any sort of particular pain, that of AIDS and HIV included. She might not be everyone's cup of tea but then again she doesn't particularly care if she isn't. This performance could rip you in two. Be very afraid...

Diamanda Galas is on December 7 at the Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2.