

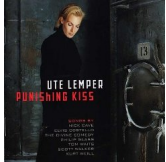
## Ute Lemper - Punishing Kiss (2001)

Written by bluelover

Thursday, 09 June 2016 13:13 - Last Updated Thursday, 31 August 2017 12:03

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## Ute Lemper - Punishing Kiss (2001)



1. *Little Water Song* [04:00] 2. *The Case Continues* [03:52] 3. *Pasionate Fight* [04:13] 4. *Tango Ballad* [04:59] 5. *Couldn't You Keep That To Yourself* [02:50] 6. *Streets Of Berlin* [04:03] 7. *The Part You Throw Away* [04:40] 8. *Split* [03:43] 9. *Punishing Kiss* [04:32] 10. *Purple Avenue* [04:23] 11. *You Were Meant For Me* [05:17] 12. *Scope J* [10:51] Ute Lemper - Vocals Miggy Barradas - Arranger, Drums Stuart "Pinkie" Bates - Accordion, Arranger, Organ (Hammond) John Beal - Bass Jay Berliner - Guitar John Bradbury Orchestra Hugh Burns - Guitar Rob Ellis -Sampling Warren Ellis - Violin Rob Farrer - Percussion Brian Gascoigne - Conductor, Orchestration, Piano John Giblin - Bass, Guitar Neil Hannon - Vocals Jill Jaffe - Violin Evan Lurie - Arranger, Piano Alasdair Malloy - Percussion Bryan Mills - Arranger, Bass (Electric), Bass (Upright) Everton Nelson - Violin Alfredo Pedernera - Bandoneon Jay Reynolds - Mixing, Programming Ivor Talbot - Arranger, Guitar, Mandolin Joby Talbot - Arranger, Conductor, Cor Anglais, Keyboards, Piano, Programming Hal Willner - Producer Gavyn Wright - Orchestra Leader

Ute Lemper has developed a reputation as a successor to Lotte Lenya with the looks of Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich, a northern European chanteuse with a taste for the decadent sound of Weimar Germany; she is arguably the definitive interpreter of Kurt Weill for her generation. *Punishing Kiss*, her first album devoted primarily to songs by contemporary songwriters, extends her reputation by incorporating the work of artists influenced by Weill. Many listeners not previously familiar with her will be drawn in by the presence of previously unrecorded songs by Elvis Costello (who contributed three selections), Tom Waits (two), and Nick Cave (one). But the primary collaborators on the album are the members of the British group the Divine Comedy, who provide the backing tracks on most of the songs, and three compositions by group members Neil Hannon and Joby Talbot, with Hannon singing duet vocals on three tracks. The sound of Weill -- the early Weill -- pervades the album, starting with the inclusion of his "Tango Ballad" (aka "Zuhälter-Ballade" or "Ballad of Immoral Earnings"), written with Bertolt Brecht, from *The Threepenny Opera*, a song in which a couple reminisce about the good old days when he was a procurer and she a prostitute. Such a decadent tone continues in Cave and Bruno Pisek's "Little Water Song," sung by a woman who is being drowned by her lover, and Philip Glass and Martin Sherman's "Streets of Berlin," originally written for the film *Bent*; in

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Costello's complex tales of romantic dissolution with titles like "Passionate Fight" and "Punishing Kiss" (reminiscent of his work on the Burt Bacharach album *Painted from Memory*); and in the characteristic Waits songs of romantic low-life types. Among the most impressive selections, however, are the *Divine Comedy* tracks "The Case Continues," a song about a romantic breakup written as if describing a murder mystery, and "Split," which finds Lemper and Hannon hurling witty insults at each other. From its extensive set of photographs of Lemper in black leather posing in a decaying building to the dramatic arrangements and the singer's powerful, precise vocals, this is highly stylized art music given a pop element by its composers. A daring effort, it deserves more of an audience than it is likely to get, at least at first. (The European edition of the album has a different sequencing and features a different cover. For the Quebecois and French markets, Lemper recorded French versions of "The Case Continues" and "Little Water Song." The Japanese version used the European sequencing and added a bonus track, "Lullaby.") ---William Ruhlmann, *Rovi*

Ute Lemper's is, sometimes, not an easy talent to love. Ever intense, she makes considerable demands on both herself and her audience and her performances often seem short on humour. *Punishing Kiss* takes the singer away from her accustomed recorded milieu of Weill and Berlin cabaret songs into new territory; most of the numbers are by contemporary writers like Tom Waits, Evil Costello and Nick Cave.

The results are mixed. Cave's "Little Water Song" is an extraordinary narrative of a woman being drowned by her lover. Lemper's passionate take on the lyric holds the listener spellbound until the final chilling line: "I glow with the greatness of my hate for you." She also does well with the contributions of *The Divine Comedy*'s Neil Hannon and Joby Talbot. A trio of songs include "The Case Continues," a woman's complaint at being dumped by her lover over the phone. Joby Talbot's swirling string arrangement is thrilling although Lemper's unremittingly serious approach lets her down somewhat when she fails to make the most of rueful lines like "If sex were an Olympic sport we'd have won the gold."

Hannon joins her on the excellent "Split" as a man driven to maudlin self pity by the lover who has betrayed him. They also duet effectively on a resolutely updated version of Weill's "Tango Ballad." Ironically, Lemper is more effective here than on some of her "authentic" Weill recordings. She exhibits a nice sense of irony on this sordid but strangely romantic tale of a whore and her pimp remembering their association with a degree of affection which seems to surprise even themselves.

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While Lemper lightens up a little for Elvis Costello's "Passionate Fight," a surprisingly pretty pop tune which might or might not be about an S&M relationship, she remains resolutely dour on the same writer's "Punishing Kiss." Consequently she misses the humour – and with it the pathos – of a woman who spends her empty days watching soap operas. She also fails to add much to a pair of Tom Waits numbers and the final track – Scott Walker's "Scope J" – begins promisingly but soon becomes almost unlistenable as it succumbs to both the writer's and the performer's worst excesses.

Punishing Kiss will undoubtedly appeal to Lemper's established fans and it may even attract a few put off by her misguided assaults on Sondheim and the repertoires of Dietrich and Piaf. The bulk of the songs are excellent, with strong melodies and intriguing lyrics which reward repeated listening. Lemper uses her dark, brooding voice to great effect throughout but one still cannot help wishing she would take herself a little less seriously and enjoy her talent a little more. She seems unable to resist letting her audience know how demanding performing is. Her unwillingness to shield us from her efforts is ultimately slightly alienating and detracts from her undoubted skill and commitment to some fascinating material. --- Mark Jennett, culturevulture.net

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