

## Diamanda Galás: Biography

Hailed as one of the most important singers of our time, Diamanda Galás has earned international acclaim for her highly original and politically charged performance works, as well as her spectral interpretations of jazz and blues. A resident of New York City since 1989, she was born to Anatolian and Greek parents, who always encouraged her gift for piano. From early on she studied both classical and jazz, accompanying her father's gospel choir before joining his New Orleans-style band, and performing as a piano soloist with the San Diego Symphony at the age of fourteen.

In the 70s, Galás played piano in the improvisational scene around San Diego and Los Angeles with musicians such as Bobby Bradford, Mark Dresser, Roberto Miranda, Butch Morris, and David Murray. She made her performance debut at the Festival d'Avignon in 1979, where she sang the lead role in Vinko Globokar's opera, *Un jour comme un autre*, based upon the Amnesty International documentation of the arrest and torture of a Turkish woman for alleged treason. While in France, she also performed Iannis Xenakis's work with l'Ensemble Intercontemporain and Musique Vivante.

Galás first rose to international prominence with her quadrophonic performances of *Wild Women with Steak Knives* (1980) and the album *The Litanies of Satan* (1982). Later she created the controversial *Plague Mass*, a requiem for those dead and dying of AIDS, which she performed at Saint John the Divine cathedral in New York City and released as a double CD in 1991. In 1994, Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones and Diamanda Galás sought each other out for a collaboration that resulted in the visionary rock album, *The Sporting Life*.

Over the past two decades, Galás' wide range of musical and theatrical works have included *The Singer* (1992), a compilation of blues and gospel standards; *Vena Cava* (1993), exploring AIDS dementia and clinical depression; *Schrei 27* (1996), a radical solo piece for voice and ring modulators about torture in isolation; *Malediction and Prayer* (1998), a setting of jazz and blues as well as love and death poems by Charles Baudelaire, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Salvadoran guerrilla fighter and poet Miguel Huelmo Mixco, occasionally fused with the virtuosic singing of the *Amanes* (improvised lamentation from Asia Minor); *La Serpanta Canta* (2004), a greatest-hits collection from Hank Williams to Ornette Coleman; and *Defixiones, Will and Testament* (2004), a 80-minute memorial tribute to the Armenian, Greek and Assyrian victims of the Turkish genocides from 1914-1923. In 2005, Diamanda Galás was awarded Italy's first Demetrio Stratos International Career Award. Her much-anticipated CD, *Guilty Guilty Guilty*, a compilation of tragic and homicidal love songs, was released worldwide in 2008.

Galás has contributed her voice and music to movies by Francis Ford Coppola (*Dracula*), Oliver Stone (*Natural Born Killers*), Mercedes Moncada Rodriguez (*El Immortal*), as well as Wes Craven, Clive Barker,

Derek Jarman, Hideo Nakata, and many others. Her collaboration with filmmaker Davide Pepe on the film version of *Schrei 27* - an unrelenting portrait of a body suffering torture in a medical facility - premiered at the SPILL Festival of Performance in 2011, and has gone on to be presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and at ARTfreq, in Copenhagen, among other venues.

As important to Galás as her multiple creative projects has been her extensive research and activism around the persecution of homosexuals in the Middle East Ethiopia and Uganda, resulting in the essays *GODHEAD AND ANAL GLUE* and *PRAYERS FOR THE INFIDEL*, which have been translated in French, Spanish, Arabic, Slovenian, German, and Italian, and published internationally.

In the past decade, Galas has continued to tour worldwide, presenting the work of living and dead poets who were imprisoned, exiled, or assassinated from/by their own countries and poets who lived in fear for their lives for real or perceived political/moral dissidence: César Vallejo, Ali Ahmad Said Asbar, Cesare Pavese, Constantine Cavafy, Miguel Huezco Mixco, Jose-Maria Cuellar, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and many others. She has also continued to perform *Defixiones*, *Will and Testament*, and *Defixiones, Orders from the Dead* worldwide.