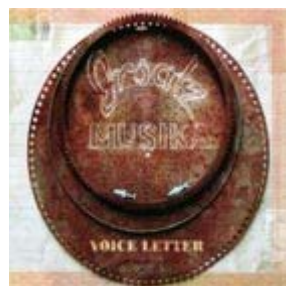


Album



Ersatzmusika

Voice Letter

[Asphalt Tango]

Artist: [Ersatzmusika](#)

Released: 01 October 2007

Key Tracks

[Cranes](#)[Still Water](#)

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Review

by **Garth Cartwright**

19 December 2007

Berlin based but Russian in soul, Ersatzmusika's *Voice Letter* is one of the most remarkable debut albums of recent years. The six piece band are fronted by Irina Dubrovskaja, a Ukrainian singer-composer-conceptual artist, and it is her warm, weary vocal that sets the tone for an album which reflects on life in the Soviet Union. Not that this is a nostalgia trip – anything but! – instead Ersatzmusika (named after the ersatz coffee they had to drink under communism) look at a fractured empire and its secret history: Considering they sing of the Gulags this is a history that Putin and co. are now trying to bury.

Ersatzmusika's distinctive, droning sound recalls Françoise Hardy's finest 60s recordings. If Hardy had grown up on the Black Sea . . . The band operate on an off kilter tempo, often conjuring a Felliniesque fairground waltz tempo, never rushing songs, instead aiming for atmosphere while letting the lyrically beautiful songs drift past. Although all songs are sung in Russian the album's sleeve carries translations of a few lyrics and as several appear to be adapted from poems they are quite mesmerizing.

Opening track, "Beside Myself To You I Came" finds Irina singing to friends who have left the former Soviet Union and resettled across the world (thus the *Voice Letter* of the album's title) while "Cranes" is based on a poem written by an anonymous Gulag prisoner who looks at the cranes flying past and attempts to send them mental messages.

Voice Letter is a very subtle yet striking album, wintry in colour yet warm and human in affection. It is also beautiful and haunting – and I don't speak a word of Russian.



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