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ErsatzMusika Songs Unrecantable Review

Album. Released 10 April 2009.

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BBC Review

Something wonderfully unique


Chris Jones 2009-04-24

Berlin's Ersatzmusika combine Russian gypsy folk with primitive rock, dub and Weimar cabaret to produce something that unexpectedly worms into your subconscious by superficially sounding like something familiar. It's remarkable stuff.

Led by accordionist, conceptual artist, lyricist and singer Irina Doubrovskaja, the band are all Russian emigres. What appears initially miserable and stereotypically Eastern European harbours a wry heart. Whereas their first album, *Voice Letter*, dealt in grim reminiscences (albeit typically Slavic and poetic ones) of Gulags and repression, *Songs Unrecantable* comes across as more 'fun', although there's still plenty of allegory that refers to denied liberties. Titles such as *Oy Pterodactyl* and (*Psilocybin Panic*) *It's The Russian Beat* ("If you've got a watch, means you've got the time") give you the clues. It's a weird, pseudo primitive sway through some subterranean musical terrain that insinuates itself into your ears. A couple of plays will have you hooked even as you struggle to work out why.

Doubrovskaja's voice has the flat dispassionate edge of a latter-day Marlene Deitrich; perfect for intoning the slightly surreal combination of English and Russian. Meanwhile the band never overplay their hand, peppering things up with some clanking bongos and plunking acoustic guitar against droning keyboards, or, in the case of *Tver*, growling bass and flanged guitars that sound like the Cure in their late 70s guise.

Equal parts existentialism and absurdism means an air of chilly mystery is never far away. *Winter 19* is all cold war menace while *Slow Train Adagio* is like Tom Waits trapped in a bierkeller. Something this guileless could have been made 30 years ago but it always avoids irony, instead evoking something wonderfully unique.

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Release Details

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