

VERITAS VAMPIRUS

LEFT OF THE "LEFT"

News from the Undead

The Rude-imetary Truth

By: Mark Tucker

GIULIA MILLANTA - Moonbeam Parade (Ugly Cat Music)

Giulia Millanta's one of those singers who should also be an actress in Fellini or von Trier movies, a cabaretically inclined vocalist dragging rock and roll over to a side alley not too many, unfortunately, have essayed. Those who have, though, have succeeded very nicely - David Bowie, Rupert Wates, Tom Waits, Marianne Faithful, John Cale, etc. - and Millanta can confidently place herself among them, as well as alongside Marlene Dietrich, Edith Piaf, Jane Oliver, Dory Previn, and a few others.

Moonbeam Parade is a 13-act play ranged on an appropriately spare and scattered stage focusing down on the emotional raggedness of our times and wonts. Track titles such as "Shaky Legs", "4th & Vodka", "Play with Fire" give more than a few clues what to expect, with Bowie's "Rock and Roll Suicide" putting the knife in. Millanta's tone is alternatingly dreary, cynical, sympathetic, and exasperated. As with all such artists: in the end a Humanist sentiment informs everything but not before a great deal of tough love, doubt, anxiety, and frustration pervade the panoply. In 2016, with world economies collapsing, interpersonal relationships disintegrating, disaster capitalism more vicious than ever, and two lunatics running for the presidency of the most powerful country in world history, that is: a fulsome catalogue of human madness trotting by our eyes, what on Earth should we expect? The arts reflect the times.

A native of Florence, Italy, now resident in Austin, Texas, and a multi-lingualist (she speaks four tongues), as well as a guitarist and...ukelele-ist (what the hell's the proper term for that, anyway? ukelelian? ukelovian?), Giulia appears to be more than a little the restless and discontent soul, which is all to the good of course, making for a more acute witness to the baboon circus we call life. At the ringing down of the curtain, though, there's always hope and the locating of signal acts fitfully promising better days. Ironic, then, that the cranky, dissatisfied, and moodily mannerist musical compositions are usually the most resolutely realpolitik, no?

Charlie Sexton (solo, Dylan), Hunt Sales (Paris, Tin Machine, etc.), and Gabriel Rhodes (Willie Nelson) appear as sessioneers along with others, so there's no steady base unit save for Millanta herself, the chameleonic rosters making for interesting shifts in emphasis, everything sewed together nicely by Millanta's lyrical, compositional, and arranging hand. This is her fifth release, and the artist's growing fan base exponentializes each time out, listeners hungering for work well beyond the hideous mainstream corporate machine, here sated...temporarily, until turning into a hunger for the next collection.

One criticism, though. Millanta's working against herself in the art department. Her 2014 Funambulist carried the only liner cover giving the consumer a strong indication and taunt of what might lie within (yes, 'taunt', as good marketing either hits you in the face and dazes or teases and seduces), a marvelous piece of atmospheric German Expressionism depicting a phantasmic tightrope walker in greymist. The photo for Dropping Down wasn't bad, a pic of her plummeting thru a dark space, but Dust and Desire featured an amateurishly executed Steadmanesque doodle and this disc, Moonbeam, touts puzzling junior high pencil drawings by the esteemed Rhodes athwart a Laurie Andersony pixie punkette photo of the chanteuse leaning against a wall.

What we're supposed to get out of that, I haven't a clue nor would anyone browsing CD racks...which is

my whole point. Music this good should not go underrepresented any jot or tittle. One of these days, I'm going to publish a pamphlet to help musos who don't understand the graphic arts, the better to get their deserving musics more readily in consumer hands. There's more to that craft than people realize, and it's a good deal more easily accomplished than licensing images from Salvador Dali or Richard Avedon, but, until then, I think I'm going to have to satisfy myself with being exasperated with poor illustrative choices for music warranting much much more, which is my way of prolixly saying: don't let Moonbeam Parade's cover fool you. It whispers "amateur" but is waaaaay past that.