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Ute Lemper, vocalist

Ute Lemper's performing career grows out of a passionate and enduring commitment to art, politics and history, and out of a contentious and complicated relationship with her homeland and its past. Her panache, versatility and sophisticated repertoire - including Berlin cabaret songs and the dark gems of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill - have led her to international acclaim as a recording artist and in the theatre, cabaret and film worlds.

Ute was born in Münster, Germany in 1963. After graduation from the Dance Academy in Cologne and the Max Reinhardt Seminary Drama School in Vienna, she started performing in Stuttgart with roles in plays by Fassbinder and others. She went on to dazzle audiences in Europe and worldwide in musical theatre roles - Velma Kelly in *Chicago* (London, New York, Las Vegas), Lola in *The Blue Angel*, Peter in *Peter Pan* (both in Berlin), *Cats* in Vienna and Sally Bowles in Jérôme Savary's Paris production of *Cabaret*. Yet she has returned again and again to the dark, complex and powerfully creative German past, in solo concerts like Kurt Weill Recital and Berlin Cabaret Evening; in symphony concerts, including *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Songs from Kurt Weill*; in Pina Bausch's *Kurt Weill Revue*; and on the discs *Ute Lemper Sings Kurt Weill (Vols. I & II)*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, *Mahagonny Songspiel*, and *Berlin Cabaret Songs* (comprising works of songwriters censored or persecuted by the National Socialists).

Ute's edgy aesthetic and repertoire also reach far beyond Germany. Though she says "I cannot stress enough my life's journey exploring repertoire inspired by art of the Weimar Republic," she points out that this art also "reflects other philosophical and cultural horizons, other political matters, and other times." In order fully to explore and comprehend the history she has inherited, Ute has naturally and with brilliant success taken up material from other European traditions and from the United States. (To take just one example, Chicago's ironic celebration of "Razzle Dazzle" is of a piece with Mischa Spoliansky's and Marcellus Schiffer's happily cynical 1920s cabaret song "It's all a swindle"). Ute has explored the French chanson from Edith Piaf, Jacques Prévert, Joseph Kosma and Serge Gainsbourg to the Belgian poet Jacques Brel. She has also explored the contemporary alternative rock repertoire – from Tom Waits and Elvis Costello to Nick Cave on her Punishing Kiss album – and finally created her own original material which can be heard on the latest album *But One Day...*

Ute's solo concerts also reflect these pan-European and international interests. These concerts include *Songs from Piaf & Dietrich*, *Illusions* (also material associated with Piaf and Dietrich); *Songbook*, consisting of settings by English minimalist Michael Nyman of

texts by Romanian Holocaust poet Paul Celan; and *City of Strangers*, with chansons of Jacques Prévert side by side with the Broadway of Stephen Sondheim. Not surprisingly, in 1994, Ute was named Billboard magazine's Crossover Artist of the Year, though when you listen to her, the idea of crossover melts away; it's simply Ute's sensibility: penetrating, adventurous, sophisticated, and charged with multiple meanings. Also on Ute's awards shelf: A 1998 Olivier for the London production of *Chicago* (she can be heard on the original London cast recording) and a Molière Award for Best Actress for the Savary Cabaret. She also won an American Theater Award for her performance in *Chicago* on Broadway, an Italian Primo Tenco award for her recordings, and numerous other international recording awards.

Illusions, *Songbook*, and *City of Strangers* all came from Ute's eponymous recordings for Decca. For CBS Records she recorded the sumptuous, trilingual *Crimes of the Heart* (now available on Musicrama); *Life is a Cabaret*; and *Ute Lemper Live*. For Polydor: *Espace Indécent*; *Nuits Étranges*; and *She Has a Heart* (the latter being the recorded but never released English version of the *Espace Indécent* album). Ute also sings on Decca's *Prospero's Books*, Michael Nyman's recording of music for the film by Peter Greenaway (in which Ute appeared), and she mixed songs of Tom Waits, Elvis Costello, Nick Cave, Philip Glass, Divine Comedy's Neil Hannon and others on her 2000 release, *Punishing Kiss*.

Of her recent evolution as an artist, particularly as a recording artist, Ute says, "Beyond the historical recordings I have found my way into my own compositions and storytelling, inspired by the music and literature of the Paris existentialists of the 1960s to off-beat contemporary rock writers like Tom Waits, Nick Cave, Scott Walker, Elvis Costello and Divine Comedy. It has been an incredible satisfaction to produce my own work with a great team of people".

Coincident with her London run in *Chicago*, Ute released *All That Jazz: The Best of Ute Lemper*, on which she let Kander and Ebb, Brecht and Weill, Gershwin, Piaf, Nyman and Celan, and Spoliansky and Schiffer all easily and revealingly cohabit. In Autumn 2002, Decca released Ute's *But One Day...* She spent two years on this album, which mixes works of Weill, Hans Eisler, Jacques Brel and Astor Piazzolla, with five compositions by Ute herself (one inspired by a Brecht text). She describes the record as "falling through the sky of a century of music," and calls her work on it, "an act of love, against all odds with a total belief that contemporary music has an alternative state of beauty not arising out of the clean computer, but out of human performances. I envisioned string arrangements inspired by Ravel and Debussy in harmony with contemporary cool grooves telling these cinematic stories. And the voyage continues!"

In 2007 Ute has undertaken another world tour, with dates in Europe, Japan and the US. The *But One Day* Orchestra accompanies her symphony appearances, and she will also sing with Robert Ziegler's Matrix Ensemble, featured on *Berlin Cabaret Songs*. She has created a new show, *Nomad*, with Robert Carsen for the Chatelet Theatre in Paris. *Nomad* takes its audience through the past century's incidences of oppression, starting in Berlin, then moving through Hungarian, Jewish, Arab, Romany, South American and Russian cultures. Ute insists on presenting some of these songs in her concerts as they evoke an important political journey. Finally, this year also sees the release of the

concert DVD *Ute Lemper Sings Kurt Weill*, from a 1992 Bouffes du Nord performance. The same disc includes a 1992 Hamburg performance of Nyman's Songbook, directed by Tin Drum auteur Volker Schlöndorff.

Ute's extraordinarily supple and expressive voice is not her only creative outlet. In musicals she has, of course, also danced, and Maurice Béjart created a ballet for her, *La Mort Subite*, which premiered in Paris in 1990. Her paintings have been shown at the German Consulate in New York, the Goethe Institute in Washington and, in Paris at the Théâtre de la Ville

"While touring *But One Day* worldwide for many months," she says, "I kept experiencing music as an expression of the heart in the search for ultimate freedom and peace. Highly inspired by the project, *Nomad*, I just created with opera director Robert Carsen in Paris, I am now taking a look at Eastern European and Middle Eastern Music. Based on this, I am currently writing new, original material for the next recording, and interpreting a whole different universe of songs. My partner, co-producer, percussionist and best friend, Todd Turkisher, is working with me at the root of this adventure."

In 2006 DRG records / EDEL records for Europe released a LIVE recording of Ute's yearly run in the Café Carlyle in New York. This show was called *Blood and Feathers* and features some of her exciting live versions of Piaf songs, Weill ballads and her own songs. It is a fabulous document of Ute's act in one of the most prestigious Cabaret Clubs in Manhattan.

Ute has just recorded and co-produced, with Todd Turkisher, a complete album with her own original songs. She wrote music and lyrics and together with her band, arranged a unique song cycle of unusual stories about places, cities, lives and love.

Ute and her three children, Max, Stella, and Julian have had a home base in New York City for almost 10 years. Like Weill, Lemper is a German expatriate living in the United States. Unlike Weill and some of his contemporaries, Ute is an expatriate by choice, and is hesitant ever to move back to Germany, but she revisits her culture fearlessly and brilliantly in art. "As a performer," she says, "I like to breathe and live inside the centers of chaos in the worlds of today and yesterday. The longing for a place of harmony and the search for spiritual freedom lives through my new stories and melodies. I will always, though, keep Berlin alive with contemporary and nostalgic eyes," she reminds us, "as the lust and anarchy of Weimar shall live forever."