

## REFLECTING LIVES IN MUSIC

## IN MY LIFE: UTE LEMPER

**Ute Lemper is a Grammy-nominated, internationally-acclaimed performer of screen and stage; a recording artist, composer and painter whose work sells in galleries around the world. She is also a mother-of-four.**

**Best known as the queen of cabaret, Ute performs *Last Tango in Berlin* at the Turner Sims Theatre, University of Southampton, on September 16, at 8pm. This month she speaks to View about her extraordinary life.**

Image: © Stefan Thalemann

**U**te grew up in a divided Germany, and *Last Tango in Berlin* showcases Weimar cabaret songs and the music of Marlene Dietrich, Jacques Brel and Edith Piaf.

But Ute's career spans the worlds of literature and music. She won the Laurence Olivier Award for her performance in Chicago and she's had songs composed for her by Elvis Costello. At 53, she is constantly touring all over the world.

"The only cool thing at school was that I loved music – the expression of music and living in a musical world. I have been able to make this a life-long dedication, but at school I did not have a clear idea of wanting to become an actor though all of it interested me.

"I have two grown-up children, and my younger children are 11 and five. I live in New York and I am never longer than 10 days away from my family, though I am touring constantly all over the world. I have a good balance of home life and children.

"As I have grown older, I've focused on the essence – I don't bother with stuff not hitting the nerve of life with me – my choice of music has to be absolutely essential, sometimes in its purest way.

"I really connect with the souls and lives of all those people who come to the concert – everyone can reflect their lives into the music. As a performer you go out there with your heart and soul on a golden plate and you share it.

"My grown-up son is in the financial world and my daughter is an academic. They don't have that fire to be on a stage, burning the candle down ten thousand times a night – I don't think they are into that!

"My younger children are amused by what I do – they make fun of me, but my older children are in awe of it and the way I love my work and have loved doing it for so many decades. It's an ideal thing and they hope they will find work that

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is as essential and important for them, and keeps them going over the years – supporting yourself and enjoying it.

"When I began recording and cataloguing the Kurt Weill cabaret songs – it was an album that was very important. People after World War Two didn't want to go back to the Weimar republic and the stigma of German language – the Nazis crucified the language. But this album was very important as it rediscovered and revived Jewish composers.

Their music was an expression of the emancipation of women, an expression of homosexuality, of freedom. The satirical context of the songs of the Weimar republic were a revolution – this was about democracy and people being outspoken. It was important to revive.

"My Songs for Eternity contains music banned by the Nazis – the music of Jewish writers who did not make it out of Germany's ghettos or the concentration camps. These are haunting and incredible songs. What drives me is the mission behind all of that – to tell the stories to a new generation to keep history alive.

"Everyone has their own ticket, their own way to live. For me, it was very important to have a real life, to have children and to deal with the real issues of the world: society, justice, compassion for people who are in hopeless situations, like refugees who suffer, and people in vicious circles being neglected.

"The egocentrism of the artist is very self-destructive. My choice to have children was to keep going with real life and real issues. I clean the floor, I take children to school and I look around and see the real world.

"Sometimes my life is glamour but it is a big schlepp between hotels. I have reaped a life I planted – so many seeds. It's very exhausting to take care of all that – I have so many responsibilities for so many people. It's a tough and rough road but very rewarding." *VW*