

# Serge Gainsbourg: Gainsbourg Confidentiel

SC spectrumculture.com/2019/01/06/serge-gainsbourg-gainsbourg-confidentiel-review

Daniel Bromfield

January 6, 2019



*Gainsbourg Confidentiel*, first released in 1963 and reissued this year by Rumble Records, finds Serge Gainsbourg singing over no more than Elek Bacsik's guitar and Michel Gaudry's bass. It's an obscure record, at least in the States, that might startle those used to the lavish orchestrations of *Melody Nelson* or his early records with Alain Goraguer. Think of it as equivalent to *each Boys' Party*. A one-off novelty that burns with the soul of an experimental artist.

The arrangements work so long as Gainsbourg is performing quiet songs. While the "rock" songs, such as "Chez les yé-yé" and "Amour sans amour," beg for a drumbeat, such ballads as "La saison des pluies" and "Sait-on jamais où va une femme quand elle vous quitte" translate better to this setting. Like so much of his music, this is an experiment, but its novelty often outweighs its practicality. It's telling he'd never go back to this format; his next album *Gainsbourg Percussions*, inspired by then-faddish Nigerian drummer Babatunde Olatunji, was another such one-off.

Gainsbourg's songwriting would sharpen as he grew older and more well-read, but some of his tics and obsessions are already apparent, like how material things stand in for romantic dissatisfaction. On "Scenic Railway" it's the train his lover childishly wants him to take her on. On "La fille au rasoir" it's an electric razor, over which she can't hear anything he says. On "Talkie Walkie" it's a device which, as Gainsbourg announces portentously in English, is "made in Japan." Gainsbourg never learned English, but he sings it with a certain arrogant self-assurance.

Another obsession in plain view here, alas, is with very young girls. The girl on "Talkie Walkie" is young enough to find in a schoolyard. "Temps de yoyo" translates to "the time of yo-yos," which he contrasts with "the time of yé-yé"—French teen pop, its name derived from the "yeah, yeah" shouts of its singers. He laments as his love-interest moves from one to the other, and on "Chez les yé-yé" he follows her to the dance, intent on getting "his *Lolita*" lest he do something violent.

One is not sure if these lines reflect Gainsbourg's own sexual preferences, the rampant fetishization of children in early rock history, or his taste for scandal. He infamously performed a duet with his then-12 year-old daughter Charlotte on "Lemon Incest," and his best-known record *Histoire de Melody Nelson* concerns the seduction of a 15-year-old. But considering the lyrics here, and the unwholesomeness of the songs he wrote for yé-yé girl France Gall shortly thereafter, it's worth questioning his intent in shoeorning himself into the teenybopper industry.

"Poupée de cire, poupée de son" celebrated pop stars as puppets for older men, "Les sucettes" was a lollipop-themed double entendre that went over the clueless singer's head and made her a laughing stock. Today, these songs are sort of legendary—victories for the songwriter, no matter their effect on the singer. Gainsbourg is a textbook example of a powerful man in entertainment not only going unpunished but actually being celebrated for his sexual greed. This is something all who encounter his art must reckon with, and on *Confidentiel* it's on naked display.

