

Song Review

Rosalía, “Berghain”

LUX, Columbia Records / Sony Music Entertainment, ES 2025

Rosalía Vila Tobella, the 1992-born Catalan singer and producer known simply as Rosalía, has become one of the most distinctive voices in 21st-century popular music. Her work fuses flamenco heritage with global pop idioms, moving fluently between trap, reggaetón, experimental electronica, and classical instrumentation infused with symbolic imagery: in *El Mal Querer* (Columbia Records, ES 2018) she reinterpreted a medieval tale of confinement and redemption through flamenco; in *Motomami* (Columbia Records, US/ES 2022) she imagined the female body as a site of self-creation. The use of Christian iconography is a leitmotif in all these previous works. In the single “Bagdad” (2018), for example, she works with the idea of redemption and baptism.

Her fourth album bears the title *Lux* (Latin for “light”). Other tracks are likewise weighty in tone, such as “Divinize”, “Reliquia”, “Dios Es Un Stalker”, or “Mio Christo Piange Diamanti”, alongside more profane references to club culture and hedonism common in contemporary pop: “Sexo, Violencia y Llantas”, and “Sauvignon Blanc”. On the cover, Rosalía appears in white couture and a nun’s coif, illuminated by a bright light. Her arms, hidden beneath a robe, suggest a gesture of self-embrace, yet the posture also evokes restraint, as if she is bound in a straitjacket. A gold lipstick accentuates her mouth and hints at a smile.

“Habemus Album”, she wrote on 20 October 2025 on her Instagram account, announcing the release set for 7 November 2025.¹ *Zeit Online* describes the album as signalling a new phase of artistic self-stylisation,

1 Rosalía via Instagram Post, <https://t1p.de/fmc5g> [accessed 24 November 2025].

marked by sacred imagery and aesthetic provocation.² The eighteen songs are arranged into four chapters, inspired by the stages of canonisation in the Roman Catholic Church. In the booklet, two mottos precede the music: one by Rabia al-Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya (“No woman has ever claimed to be God”), the other by Simone Weil (“Love is not consolation, it is light”). At a central moment in the album, Rosalía proclaims: “Ego sum nihil / Ego sum lux mundi” (“I am nothing / I am the light of the world”), explicitly echoing John 8:12.

With these citations, the album establishes its guiding tone: the citation, rupture, and remix of Christian tradition through a pop-feminist lens. This tension between *devotio* and *blasphemia* has long shaped pop iconography, from Madonna’s *Like a Prayer* onward. Rosalía stands in this lineage while reworking it on her own terms.

Rosalía’s new lead single and video “Berghain” (2025) surpassed ten million views within three days of release. The piece features contributions from Björk and Yves Tumor and includes orchestral arrangements performed by the London Symphony Orchestra.

The title alludes to Berlin’s famed club, yet the video does not depict it literally. Rather, it evokes a symbolic place where sound and body intersect. In an Apple Music interview with Zane Lowe, Rosalía clarifies her intention: she interprets “Berghain” as the German compositum *Berg-Hain*, literally “mountain grove”. For her, the word carries metaphorical weight – an image for the inner landscape of our thoughts, in which we can lose ourselves. She explains: “We all have these labyrinths in our minds, these forests of thought.”³

Musically, “Berghain” blends orchestral strings, choral textures, and lyrical expansiveness, signalling a departure from the urban-pop and reggaetón palette of Rosalía’s earlier work.⁴

The track is trilingual. It opens with German verses – “Seine Angst ist meine Angst / Seine Wut ist meine Wut / Seine Liebe ist meine Liebe / Sein Blut ist mein Blut”⁵ – and then shifts into Spanish and into an imagery of dissolution. In the middle section, Björk appears as a bird resting on Rosalía’s

2 Balzer 2025.

3 Lowe/Apple Music 2025.

4 Richardson 2025.

5 Translation: His fear is my fear, His anger is my anger, His love is my love, His blood is my blood.



Fig. 1: Music video still, BERGHAIN (Rosalía et al., Columbia Record / Sony 2025), 00:00:48.

hand, singing in English: “The only way to save us is through divine intervention”, before Yves Tumor concludes with the outro. The online journal Pitchfork highlights the dramatic architecture of these shifts, calling the track “a trilingual liturgy of dissolution and rebirth”.⁶

The accompanying video places Rosalía in mundane domestic settings, starting in a minimalist apartment, almost monastic in its sparseness, with a statue of the Virgin Mary and a gold icon on the wall. She pulls aside a heavy curtain as daylight floods in, revealing a black-clad orchestra trailing her. Rosalía, however, remains unaware. Throughout the day, she performs ordinary tasks: dipping a sugar cube into coffee, ironing, making the bed (fig. 1). She moves through the city, followed by the orchestra: on a bus, at a medical appointment with an ECG, and at a jewellery shop. One recurring symbol accompanies her: a small gold heart pendant. In the evening, she returns home. The apartment is dark; the orchestra has vanished. Instead, forest animals enter the room and gather around her. The atmosphere shifts: it is unclear whether these animals are companions or intruders. Dark blood streams from a fawn’s eyes; ecstatic, trembling images unfold between dream and trance. Animals undergo metamorphosis into half-human forms

6 Green 2025, <https://t1p.de/wty73> [accessed 24 November 2025].

and back again, intercut with silhouettes of the orchestra members. Then a sudden cut: morning. Light enters the room. Rosalía turns in her bed; in the next moment she has vanished, and a white dove rises from the sheets.

This immersive interplay of sacred gesture and physical exposure in the BERGHAIN performance invites broader interpretive tools. The lens offered by German theologian Wilhelm Gräb proves helpful. His concept of *Lebenswelthermeneutik* – a hermeneutics of everyday life – expands religion beyond doctrine, locating it instead in those very aesthetic and emotional intensities where individuals seek meaning. For Gräb, religion is not limited to institutional belief but emerges wherever human beings interpret their lives in search of ultimate meaning. It becomes visible in everyday aesthetic forms – art, narrative, music, or ritual – wherever experiences of contingency, finitude, and hope come to expression.⁷

The video's movement from domestic mundanity to orchestral transcendence as a back-hum mirrors what Gräb describes as the human effort to reinscribe the ordinary world with significance. The orchestra that follows Rosalía through her apartment makes visible how the sacred accompanies the mundane, revealing transcendence within the contours of the life-world. The mythic club-name functions similarly: detached from literal geography, *Berghain* becomes a metaphor for contemporary spaces of longing, where secular individuals enact rituals of transformation without recourse to explicit theology.

“Berghain” may be seen as a secular ritual: the orchestra as liturgical procession, the body as a site of symbolic death and rebirth. One critic observes that Rosalía “enters symbolic death to be reborn, to rise again like Jesus Christ”.⁸

The narrative movement resembles a rite of passage, the multilingual lyrics reinforce this hybridity: German invocation, Spanish dissolution, English plea – a polyglot spirituality. The reference to the club Berghain gestures toward a community of the ecstatic and marginalised. Techno culture often casts the dance floor as a site of transcendence; by translating this experience into orchestral ritual, Rosalía merges sacred and secular. One reviewer notes that the piece “turns that image of hedonism into something almost sacred – a spiritual awakening wrapped in high art”.⁹ The video's imagery –

7 Gräb 2006.

8 Pujadas 2025.

9 Pareño 2025.



Fig. 2: Music video still, BERGHAIN (Rosálía et al. / Columbia Record / Sony 2025), 00:02:44.

Björk as bird-prophet, wandering animals, metamorphosis – underscores a mythic reading: the artist as pilgrim and vessel.

Several motifs amplify the register towards passion: the heart pendant; the Marian echoes; the image of the Sacred Heart in the apartment (00:01:59); the ECG line that briefly goes flat (00:02:00). The robin is especially significant (fig. 2). In Christian folklore, it is said to have tried to pluck a thorn from Christ's crown or to comfort his wounds, staining its breast with blood. Its red plumage thus becomes a sign of compassion and sacrificial love. The video adopts this symbolism when the robin delivers Björk's prophetic line about the need for divine intervention in life. Grief functions as a metaphorical heartache – perhaps even a form of spiritual pathology – its weight intensified by the religious imagery that surrounds it. The source of this grief remains undefined, gesturing toward romantic loss, emotional rupture, or a shared vulnerability – as hinted at in “Seine Angst ist meine Angst.”

“Berghain” exemplifies how global pop refracts the sacred through the languages of performance and sound. By merging orchestral form, multilingual lyricism, and the club signifier, Rosálía constructs a sonic and visual liturgy of transformation – symbolic death and rebirth and emergence into new selfhood. While not devotional in a traditional sense, the work performs a pop-cultural anthropology of vulnerability and yearning for transcendence.

A central feature of the piece is its collage-like structure: multiple languages, musical styles, and symbolic registers – religious, mystical, alchemical in their gestures towards change. This fragmentation can be read as a meaningful synthesis mirroring the complexity of spirituality in a postmodern world, or as aesthetic layering without inner cohesion. The constant

shifting between codes and traditions raises the question: does the work articulate a coherent logic, or does it rely on atmosphere?

This ambiguity – moving between sacred earnestness and aesthetic play – is central to the video’s effect. Gräß’s life-world hermeneutics proves illuminating precisely because it does not assume religious authenticity: it enables us to see how Rosalía deploys Christian symbols as aesthetic resources within a secular horizon of meaning. Instead of measuring the work against doctrinal standards, this perspective shows how religious imagery produces affective depth, existential resonance, and a sense of symbolic gravity.

The sheer abundance of Christian motifs suggests that this symbolic reservoir is still presumed capable of pointing to a higher reality. At the same time, it opens a critical insight: the sacred vocabulary may serve less a genuine quest for transcendence than an artistically crafted aura of significance and self-mythologisation. The tension remains between aesthetic grandeur and conceptual openness: everything seems possible, nothing is finally affirmed.

And in this very openness, the work becomes less radical than its hype suggests. It can be read as religious or non-religious; as critique of religion, feminist manifesto, Marian gesture, even as a form of female Christology; as pop-Catholic revival, metaphor of orgasmic transcendence, or the aftermath of a self-consuming relationship. Faced with this overflow of musical styles, textual fragments, and proliferating symbols, one may marvel and descend into the rabbit hole of possible meanings – yet its very indeterminacy can just as well leave a faint sense of emptiness.

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Discography

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