

John Everett Milais'
Cinderella (1881).
On vinyl.



Zezenia Remastered¹

Record Store Day

Special Release

Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario

original releases

“The Cat Cinderella”, Giambattista Basile 1634

“Finette Cendron”, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy 1697

“Cinderella; or, the Glass Slipper”, Charles Perrault 1697

“Cinderella”, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm 1812/1857

Do you remember Zezenia? All sharp wits and cracking notes. Her songs are still in your head, aren’t they? They drop gold and platinum.

She was born in the ash of Mount Vesuvius, daughter to a crooked Prince. Her mother died in mysterious circumstances. Her father remarried a viper with a tail that cruelly lashed our heroine. She fought back.

Zezenia quickly learned to embroider lies with the keen point of a needle. They say she conspired with her sewing teacher, Carmina, to murder her stepmum. She was decapitated in what the police called a household accident. They released pictures of Zezenia’s cherubic face splattered with blood and suddenly Zezenia was the freak in a media circus. Was she guilty? Was she a gull? That poor little girl starved of affection could have been hanging from a rope if not for bribery and corruption. Carmina grabbed the distraught Prince in wedlock, moving on him like a bomb, and Zezenia conveniently disappeared, never facing trial.

Was she dead, sunk at the bottom of a lake? Was she serving meatballs at a squalid trattoria on the wrong side of town? Was she performing Monteverdi in the European courts under a thick layer of paint and the name Adriana?

I know the truth. Zezenia told it to me. Carmina locked her away. She could sing like a canary, but no one could hear her deep in the bowels of the palace. Absence convicted her and stripped away her fame and fortune. The prince didn’t even remember her. He had six new daughters clamouring to live the lush life.

He went on business to Sardinia and Zezenia took the opportunity to send for help from the fairies. “I just wanted to get out now and then. Have a good time. I was stuck in the kitchen, sitting by the hearth with my cats. I wanted to wear something fabulous and party,” she said. She wanted to be back on the scene. First she needed a good producer.

The fairies sent her hairdressers, jewellery, dresses, shoes, stylists, beauty technicians, make-up, manicurists and more. When Zezenia wanted to sneak out, they pimped her properly. She hit the Feast Days. She was a fierce vision of diamonds and gold, striding above

¹ Pressing on ash and polyvinyl chloride composite.

the crowds in her platform shoes, tossing her curls and smiling so wide, all her teeth showed, shining like pearls. She caught the eye of The King. He liked all kinds of sparkly things. He could make her a star. But Zezolla wasn't a novelty, a one-hit wonder. She stayed in persona. Cinderella Cat. The King sent his people to chase her down, expose her name, trespass on her property. She threw gold and pearls in their way. She was the hottest thing in town. She didn't need The King. She could dance and sing without him.

This is the era of 'the cat' catalogue. Zezolla knew how to purr before she knew how to growl. Her songs were the working songs of girls who mended the stockings, pinned the furbelows, rattled the saucepans and ground the spices. She borrowed the beats of kitchens and workrooms, and took them from the streets to the courts.

"Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been?" asked her six stepsisters as Zezolla sat in her dirty rags, rolling the gnocci dough. A song formed under her breath to the beat of her hands as they worked. At the festival, she belted out the experience.

“Let me go out in the rain.’
“Pussycats don’t like rain.
Stay inside, pussycat.
Remain in the kitchen habitat.
We’re off to join the gravy train,
But if you purr like a proper pussy,
We’ll save you titbits of ricotta, ochi di lupo,
Neapolitan and cannellini.”

Zezolla hissed and arched her back. In her memory, the six stepsisters run away. In the moment, the crowd cheered, drank her health, toasted her talent. Her six stepsisters were applauding too. They thought that they invented jeering and catcalling before the Cinderella Cat made them all the rage. They preened themselves upon it and did not recognise Zezolla's lyrics.

But all the time, Zezolla waited for the other shoe to fall. One can only be unknown and famous for so long. The paradox could not hold. The cat would have to become a Queen Bee.

The King needed a Queen. He idolised the mezzo soprano who stood more than a handspan above him in her cork soles. When she fled her adoring fans, his people chased her wheels. She tumbled headfirst into the back seat, and one of her shoes flew off, clattering down the cobbles. It was the iconic moment. The King delivered his rap upon her shoe – it was the stool beneath the lovely cauldron in which his lust roiled and boiled. His subjects shouted and danced. His tenor was renowned throughout Europe. He had defeated three rival kings for his throne. But Zezolla wasn't slowing down. She disappeared into a puff of smoke and ash. Back by the hearth. Back to her rags. Back with her glaring of cats.

She really loved those shoes though. They were an audacious red.

The King held her shoe hostage. He wanted to collaborate, to write a duet, to feature her on his solo album. Zezolla grabbed the spotlight. She stalked onto the festival stage upon bare feet, swinging her one red shoe from her hand. The King couldn't hold on to the other one – it flew from his hand to her foot. Zezolla paused to put both shoes on and

then continued to strut. She grabbed the microphone. This was her album, her solo. It is the album you have in your hand. Remastered from the original tapes to capture every crackle, every growl, in her original performance, this is the album that defines the fairy tale. It is the album where Cinderella Cat becomes Queen and her voice is mighty. Everyone, living or dead, has heard it.

Decades later, Fine-Oreille picks up Zezolla's beat. She covers her with candy syrup cunning. She is the first of the yé-yé Cinderellas.

Her parents were a king and queen too incompetent to rule. They bankrupted their domains, let roads paved with gold crumble into dust. Their subjects revolted, marched through the streets, Molotov cocktail fireworks in the night, wildcat strikes, barricades of worn-out office furniture. The queen surveyed the situation. She quickly sold everything for a fishing line and a life of quiet obscurity.

Fine-Oreille was the youngest princess, the sweetest, the prettiest. Blonde, a hot pink bow in her hair, she took Zezolla's growl and sugar-coated it. But the coating was brittle. Under the innocence, she was worldly-wise. Her wholesome notes strained, the vocals fried.

She was more savvy than the Puss in Boots. She led her sisters out of their oblivion. She clicked her fingers, rattled her tambourine. They formed a girl group in the suburban wilderness. But the older sisters rifled her wardrobe, concocted costumes of gold and silk for themselves. They were sham divas, yelping in a mocking harmony.

Bosses at Château Records were ogres, monstrous and bloodthirsty, and the studio system would have eaten them up but for Fine-Oreille. She cut through her sister's bubble-gum vacuity. She charmed the ogres and then she slayed them. She owned the studio. But the sisters beat her into submission, loaded her with contracts, meetings, and accounts. She couldn't get out from under the mountain of paperwork and the sisters took themselves off to the spotlight. They partied the whole night through with rock stars, actors, and artists. They were drunk on flattery. High on celebrity.

Fine-Oreille would have to go solo. She found the key to fame in studio boardrooms. She gave it a good turn. She rose up in the cross-hairs of the Super Troupers, dangling red slippers upon her feet. Perfect cat eye. Golden hair messy and big, a sex kitten's mane. Finette Cendron, she called herself. Finette Cendron, the wonder of the world, the people answered. Her sisters didn't even know her. Her parents didn't know her. Poets in the Parisian cafes wrote reams of verse to her, the philosophers in black turtlenecks mused upon her eyes. Finette Cendron was everywhere, her voice playing on every radio, every turntable, every juke box. She had been fractured into a million records.

The Prince wasn't aware she existed, even as she set his kingdom ablaze. He didn't listen to music. He was a moron. A rich moron with a title. And one day he found her lost slipper. Small and perfect. A delightful concoction cobbled from velvet and pearls. He put it in his pocket, whistled as he walked home by the rising barricades.

He loved that shoe. But his parents wanted him to love a woman. They wanted to prod his lust, fire his passion. They needed a royal wedding. Just the thing to stop the unrest spilling into their kingdom from foreign lands. If they could just stoke his libido, they'd be all right.

"Find the woman that fits the shoe," he said. "That's what it'll take!"

It was all over the news.

Finette Cendron had been looking everywhere for that shoe. High, low, up, down, in my lady's chamber. When she saw he had it, she came to the palace. She had the gall. She

was hardy. She was the bard of the girls of the playgrounds and nightclubs and parties. Paparazzi, groupies flocked behind her, scattering flashes and publicity shots in her wake. All pretenders were exterminated. Her sisters realised their folly, but too late. They were splashed in newspaper ink, drowned in public opinion.

How could he resist turning her into his Queen? How could she resist being a member of the ruling class again? She put on her shoe.

“Prince Weds Yé-yé Girl!”

She sang Zezolla’s number right up the aisle, a cloud of white silk and lace, long may she reign.

There was a copycat waiting in the wings. Cendrillon. This one stole her name from Zezolla’s best-selling song. She was not Becky, she said. No one knew who she was. She burned her past in the kitchen fire, painted her eye line with the ashes.

A plastic doll in clear slippers, she stepped out of a pumpkin carriage. She knew she had a sell-by date right from the start. Midnight and it would all be gone, poof! She was a one-album wonder, but oh what a wonder! Zezolla’s songs polished into pure pop perfection. With a catchy refrain she sold the people on a novelty. She married the prince. That’s it. Happy ending.

Cendrillon’s pop moment defined the album. Fine-Oreille and Zezolla were only for devotees. For the rest, Cendrillon’s pop purr is the thing. She was unrepentant, even then. She knew it was just a fairy tale.

But a hundred years later or more, it got surprisingly grim. There in the dirt of her mother’s resting place, a melancholy little Aschenputtel turned up the volume, but her tempo was grave. She slowed Zezolla’s beat, performing teary ballads of woe. Thick mascara and kohl ran from her eyes, black streaks of ash down her cheeks, a black dress torn and patched with pins upon her bones, fair hair belligerently straight, dyed with ink.

“Shake and wobble little tree
Despair and gloom rain down on me.”

She heaped abuse, revenge and death into the melody. Was she too nice for hate? They say she was. She sought out the smoke, strobes and lasers, but she hid in her own shadows. She ran away in her own fairy tale. The prince put pitch on the stage and all he got for it was her soul. He chased her down, but it’s her stepsisters who went death metal. They didn’t mind a little gore in the name of fame. They tried to fill Aschenputtel’s shoes, but they filled them with blood, deep growling through the blast beats as they tried to steal her prince.

So Aschenputtel washed her face, washed out her blonde hair; and reclaimed the bloody slipper. She put it on and transformed into a wounded pop princess. At her wedding, the stepsisters plucked out their eyes, blasting out their atonal screams. Aschenputtel only winced.

More and more artists now cover the original album. Pop, rock, hip-hop, R&B, they pluck the chords of the Cinderella Cat’s tale. But can any really match her majesty, her original belting sass? Of course not. Zezolla is still the original and the best. I know.

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Mama Goosie, by the Hearth, once upon a time