

Kung Fu Kitty: A Lauri Bortz Film

[Marianne Nowotny](#)

by Ned Raggett



[Marianne Nowotny](#)'s career has been, if nothing else, one that touches on any number of different approaches just because -- after all -- they are there. (And what more justification do you need?) So it's perhaps not at all surprising that the creator of an EP interpreting classical Chinese opera and poetry would go right ahead and work up something like the soundtrack to [Kung Fu Kitty](#), at once a fairy tale, a goofy kid's story, and an hell of an excuse to play around with everything from gongs and cymbals to fragile tones. If *Kung Fu Panda* was the big-budget American entertainment riff in a tradition and series of stories that have become part of the American *lingua franca* over time then [Kung Fu Kitty](#) is a no less enthusiastic riff in that tradition, only with mewing cats amid the clash of musical signifiers. (There's even a concluding, ready-for-MTV/airplay track of sorts, the title track, the one song featuring [Nowotny](#)'s vocals that sums up the story and album pretty neatly.) There's a perfect mock grandeur on display throughout, with song titles like "The Terrible War That Started It All" and "Back at the Fortress" pulling out all the stops. The laser shots in "Smoking Banana Peel" make the ideas behind that song even nuttier than it might be otherwise, while "Catland Forever" and its synth horn fanfare (using the ABC rhyme for at least part of its melody!) make for a lovely near-conclusion that's both giddy and duly epic. Meanwhile, while [Nowotny](#) uses general signifiers as noted, it's just as often the case she's drawing on wider traditions too: the gentle sparkles that start and run through "Visitor from Another Realm" could almost be part of a classic Disney soundtrack, while the space rock-tinged keyboard parts that appear are a good reminder as to who is doing the work in the first place. For all the play, there's a lot of sweet serenity as well: bird sounds, flutes, running water, and more, along with the music, conjure up the sense of a classic never-never location where mists cling to the hills, temples sit on hilltops, and the Shaolin monks are teaching their pupils practices from centuries past, even if both monks and students are four-footed, have tails, and purr.