

**CD Review: Jonas Kaufmann —**  
*Du bist die Welt für mich*

by Monica Hunter-Hart, *Guest Contributor*



Who among us can recall, through personal memory, the Weimar Republic's cultural renaissance from 1924-1929, considered the German Golden Era? Such a person would have to be around a hundred years old. German tenor Jonas Kaufmann probably won't find many centenarians among his audience—but Sony Classical's September 2014 release *Du bist die Welt für mich* ("You Mean the World to Me") is sure to make listeners yearn for a time they never knew.

Kaufmann's project was to render anew classic tunes from the Golden Era's operettas and films—the album is full of favorites from this period, like "You Are My Heart's Delight" and the title song. In another historical tribute, the CD was recorded in the Nalepastraße radio station, which broadcasted East Germany's official radio programs after the Second World War.

Kaufmann enjoys an international career. He is perhaps best known in America for his starring roles at New York's Metropolitan Opera, and has even had the rare privilege of performing a solo recital there. On this CD he alternates between singing in German, English, and even French. The album booklet helpfully includes English translations, but listeners without a physical copy will feel no strong impediment, since he conveys emotions so rawly that the basic narrative of every song is clear.

And the narratives are rollercoasters. A rich spectrum of emotions associated with love—tenderness, furious passion, mournful longing—does not merely span the CD, but appears across almost every song (sometimes several times in one verse). Kaufmann captures and

even adds to these emotional fluctuations. Though the music is regularly punctuated by repeated lines, he bestows distinct flavors upon them.

His phrasing is impressive for its naturalness: Kaufmann hides the challenge of wordy lyrics through remarkably economical breath management. Another of his notable techniques he saves for lyrically tender moments: he strongly emphasizes the beginnings of notes and syllables and then drops off, creating the impression that his emotions overwhelm him.

Kaufmann gets to utilize this method a lot, for the stories depicted in these pieces are all sentimental. Seven of the seventeen songs specifically reference dreaming, and the rest are dreamy in mood. Kaufmann passes up the opportunity to communicate the intentional silliness in the over-the-top prose, but his amorous sincerity glamorizes even the most depressing of narrative premises, like the painful farewells in “Give Me Your Hands Again in Parting” and “Don’t Ask Me Why.” The album is an escape: through it we can forget ourselves and live through snapshots of starry-eyed romantics, basking in the simplicity of the sentiments they express.

Soprano Julia Kleiter joins Kaufmann for three engrossing duets, most notably “O Happiness That Was Left to Me.” Either these two singers share a mental wormhole, or their rehearsals were beyond thorough: the flawlessness with which they match their vowels is almost implausible, and their consonants are so in sync that they seem to be emoting by one voice.

The Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jochen Rieder, captures the playfulness in many of these pieces while maintaining orchestral polish at each moment. In “Somewhere in the World,” every note arrives perfectly in its rhythmic place through impeccable delivery. This glossiness is appropriate for an album of nostalgia: it adds to the sense that the grass in the past was indeed greener.

*Du bist die Welt für mich* is born of memory, celebrating what history remembers as the beautiful Golden Era. This is perhaps most perfectly embodied in the song “Say Hello to My Vienna,” which acts not only as a character’s recollection of the city he loves, but as Kaufmann’s gesture of nostalgia to the Germanic region of this time period. Through passionate execution, he commemorates this Vienna as the place where “the loveliest songs are sung.”

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