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# Album Review: Kontrast – Second Hand Wonderland

February 21, 2014



Describing the Austrian metal band's Kontrast is definitely harder than it may seem at first. Wikipedia tries to make do by saying it's a "crossover" of new wave, hard rock, nu metal and alternative rock. I will try to be more visual: picture Daenerys Targaryen and Khal Drogo singing a mixture of dance, metal, reggae and ska with a few lines of yodelling, and you'll be closer to the truth. And let me tell you, it's absolute genius.

This band, which started on the 2001,

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released their first EP, Teamspirit 55, that very same year, and have not stopped creating the most original and addictive kind of music ever since. Their songs are characteristic because of the fact that there is not one singer, but two —the breathtaking Agata Jarosz and the infinitely versatile Stefan Lichtenberger —who intertwine their voices in every single song to create a really personal style. And that is a style you want to find at a party—their fast but melodic rhythms are perfect for dancing, headbanging, and even doing some air guitar. No matter what your style is, you will find something to like in this group.

What I want to analyse today is their third studio album, *Second Hand Wonderland*. It opens up on a very strong note, with the instant hit “Sock ‘n Doll”, which is a perfect summary of what their style is all about. It prepares you to the mixture of dance and metal that is about to come, and it sets a rush of adrenaline that you’ll have to dance out. It can, however, be a little bit of a shock to new listeners, as it is very characteristic Kontrust material. But believe me, by the second or third time you play this tune, you will be jumping nonstop.

There are, then, some more “traditional” pieces, that, while being a crossover, are more easily likable: the best examples are “Falling”, which I strongly recommend to people who haven’t ever heard of the band before, and “The Butterfly Defect”, both of them really beautiful yet innovative pieces.

There are, then, some “thematic” pieces, that rely heavily on traditional music: the best example of this is “Hocus Pocus”, which recreates the feeling of being at a circus, of wondering at the magic tricks of the performers, and which definitely captures the essence of the name of the CD —this is, after all, a “Second Hand Wonderland”, a piece that should make you

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look with wonder at the world around you. Another thematic piece worth mentioning is “Rasputin”, which recreates the story of the Russian monk in a very personal rendition of this country’s traditional music.

Kontrust takes a lot of pride on their music being suitable for parties, and this shows on pieces such as “U Say What” and “Hey DJ!,” which would be perfect either for a huge metal concert or for the dance floor of your local club—not to speak, of course, about “Adrenaline”, whose name is a clear declaration of intentions as to what its purpose may be.

This is a band that is not readily accessible for everyone, I must admit—at least, not for anyone who’s not willing to come at it with an open mind and take the time to listen to some of these songs more than once. But if you do, I assure you, listening to Kontrust can be a very rewarding experience, and you’ll find yourself putting the album on loop.

***-Miguel Bernardo Olmedo Morell***

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