

Richard Forst and His Orchestra, “Hast Du schon Berlin bei Nacht gesehen” (1932)

Abstract

This upbeat 1932 foxtrot, “Have you seen Berlin by night yet,” extolled the city’s amusements as it described an imaginary night on the town, from cabarets to dance clubs. As the refrain declared, “Tonight we’re not going to bed.” Recorded at the peak of the economic depression, as the unemployment rate in Germany climbed to 30%, the lyrics also promised, “come, my friend, this evening is my treat,” inviting cash-strapped listeners into an escapist fantasy. Songs like this had enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the Weimar Republic, whether played at home on phonographs or performed by dance orchestras in venues across the country. Richard Forst and his orchestra performed regularly in the early 1930s, specializing in jazzy arrangements that drew inspiration from American musical culture, particularly the foxtrot, whose syncopation and dance-ability (slow-quick-quick or slow-slow-quick-quick) had sparked a craze in Europe after the war. The studio singer Paul Dorn, meanwhile, recorded hundreds of tunes with a number of different orchestras and record labels, working essentially as a voice-for-hire and making him one of the most-recorded interpreters of popular songs in the late Weimar Republic. Dorn continued to record in Germany throughout the 1930s, but Forst’s Jewish background compelled him to emigrate to the Netherlands after the Nazis came to power in 1933. There, Forst continued to perform for Dutch audiences until at least 1937.

Source

Source: Richard Forst und sein Orchester, “Hast du schon Berlin bei Nacht gesehen.” Music and lyrics by Alfred Jack, vocals by Paul Dorn. Brilliant records 1932.

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