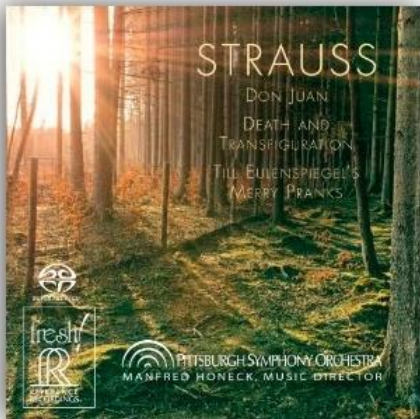


Richard Strauss: Don Juan; Death and Transfiguration; Till Eulenspiegel — Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra conducted by Manfred Honeck

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*James Norris/* Strauss commented to a friend on his deathbed that dying was just as he imagined it when he wrote Death and Transfiguration. His idea was of a noble death in the spirit of 19th Century literature, with the dying man reliving his life's achievements as he lay waiting for the final call.

What we get from Manfred Honeck and his Pittsburgh players is a rather more 21st Century death (he mentions that the trombones are depicting cardiac arrhythmia in the liner notes). To achieve this he stretches the orchestral texture and highlights the orchestration to paint a picture that Strauss has already mapped out for us and makes the work seem disjointed and over fussy in the detail.

There is no doubt that the orchestral playing is very fine but the overall picture that emerges loses the final flourish of victory over death.

The other works receive much more successful performances with Don Juan having a sweep and sense of virility that is infectious and Till Eulenspiegel portrayed very successfully as

a lusty lad out to do no harm but paying the ultimate price for his jokes. The orchestra's soloists are exemplary here (horns, Eb clarinet and concertmaster, in particular). As an ensemble, the Pittsburgh Symphony provides an indulgent forward sweep which suits the passionate emotions of the works very well.

There are finer performances of Death and Transfiguration available (Karajan/Vienna on Decca and Karajan/Berlin on DGG) but if you want to showcase your audio equipment then the audiophile quality sound one expects from this source is impressive on all accounts. This release the first in a series of multi-channel hybrid SACD recordings from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on Reference Recordings' FRESH! label.

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