

Richard Strauss: Don Juan, Op 20; Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op 28; Tod und Verklärung, Op 24

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings FR-707SACD *****

This is quite a disc. Manfred Honeck's live performances from June 2012 bring so much to admire, not least a thrilling electricity, heaps of chutzpah, revelatory detail and sparky temperament – and even a handful of 'naughty but nice' tweaks to the text! As Honeck points out in his insightful booklet-note, Till Eulenspiegel is not just a lovable rogue; we get to see his nasty side too. In Don Juan he teases out the the love music to exquisitely pliable, daringly expansive effect, while the faster music has all the edge-of seat thrust and reckless abandon one could desire. Death and Transfiguration likewise receives scrupulously dedicated, pungently characterful advocacy – just sit back and marvel at the PSO's breathtaking sheen, swaggering virtuosity and remarkable composure (fabulous horns throughout). What's more, Reference Recordings' spectacularly lustrous sound combines stunning range with genuine 'take you there' impact. In short, an exceptionally stimulating and hugely charismatic Strauss anthology. Do try and hear it for yourselves!

–Andrew Achenbach

Classical Ear
January 21, 2014