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Label: [Reference Recordings](#) - <http://www.referencerecordings.com/>

Serial: FR-707SACD

Title: Strauss: Don Juan, Tod und Verklarung, Till Eulenspiegel - Honeck

Richard Strauss: Don Juan, Tod und Verklarung, Till Eulenspiegel

Description: Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
Manfred Honeck

Track listing:

Genre: Classical - Orchestral


Content: Stereo/Multichannel

Media: Hybrid

Recording type: DSD

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This is the first release in what is planned to be a new series of multi-channel hybrid SACD recordings on Reference Recordings 'Fresh!'. It represents a most welcome new departure for this audiophile label which in the past has been fairly reluctant to embrace fully SACD encoding. The performances on this disc were recorded live in Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh in June 2010 and several more have already been completed for future release (including Bruckner's 4th Symphony – scheduled for Spring 2014).

For this initial release Reference Recordings has gone for a pretty safe programme of three of Richard Strauss's most popular Tone Poems conducted by Manfred Honeck, the orchestra's Music Director. Honeck is already well known as an extremely fine Strauss conductor, but also one with very definite ideas on how these pieces should be interpreted. In the liner notes accompanying the disc he convincingly explains some of the nuances that he adopts in his readings of these familiar scores. However, the conductor's interventionist approach might not suit the tastes of all listeners, but his admiration for these works is self-evident from the incandescent playing that he elicits from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

'Don Juan' is given a generally broad performance, but within the overall timing of 18'33" Honeck adopts an extremely wide range of tempi and dynamics. The work's slow sections possess a dreamy sensuousness that emphasises the lustrous quality of the Pittsburgh Symphony's playing though with perhaps some loss of forward momentum. This broadness of approach extends to the delivery of the famous horn passage (from 10'29") and even more to the huge ritardando made at its re-appearance towards the end of the work – a thrilling effect though one that will undoubtedly raise a few eyebrows. The fast passages are cleanly articulated, but the timpani solo ten seconds into the piece (marked 'mit Holzschägel' in the score) sounds like a single note rather than four distinct ones.

Honeck extends his expansive approach to 'Death and Transfiguration' bringing to it a welcome nobility. The sound is gloriously rich and Honeck's deeply considered reading even manages to make Strauss's banal ending sound convincing. Finally, 'Till Eulenspiegel' is given a performance full of affectionate wit and sly humour. Honeck never miss a trick in vividly bringing to life the various episodes in Till's adventures thanks to the characterful playing of his musicians.

The engineering for this recording and future releases in this series has been entrusted to the reliable team of Soundmirror, Boston (Dirk Sobotka, Mark Donahue and John Newton) and Ray Clover for the Pittsburgh Symphony, who achieve a convincing concert perspective with plenty of details audible thanks not least to Honeck's seating of the orchestra with antiphonally placed violins. The 5.1 channel recording was made and post-produced in 64fs DSD and the disc also includes HDCD encoding. Though these are live performances there is no extraneous audience noise or applause, only the occasional exhortations of the conductor to his players are picked up by the microphones.

This is without doubt an impressive start to what promises to be an exciting showcase for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

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Works: 3

[Richard Strauss](#) - [Don Juan, TrV 156 Op. 20](#)

[Richard Strauss](#) - [Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche \(Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks\), TrV 171 Op. 28](#)

[Richard Strauss](#) - [Tod und Verklärung \(Death and Transfiguration\), TrV 158 Op. 24](#)

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