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[Dvořák — Symphony No. 8; Janáček – Symphonic Suite from Jenůfa](#) [62:04]

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Honeck
Reference Recordings FR-710SACD (2014)

I enjoyed the first Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Reference Recordings CD (Strauss). Our James Norris really [liked](#) it. The virtuosity of the orchestra and its improvement under music director Manfred Honeck is undeniable, yet, the interpretations left me somewhat cold. Here, under a warm Bohemian sun, the Pittsburghers and their man have scored a home run.

Antonín Dvořák's Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 and an orchestral arrangement from Leoš Janáček's opera Jenůfa would not seem to have much in common other than that special Czech rhythmic feeling. However different musically, they were written only six years apart and make a good pairing. And, though the opera Jenůfa is about child loss and redemption, conductor Honeck's 'conceptualization' of the opera's themes into a 'Suite' makes for very enjoyable listening. The pathos is there but with such wonderful and infectious rhythms, it's hard to feel down.

Which brings us to the gloriously upbeat G Major Symphony of Dvořák (it always catches me off guard that he begins his happy symphony in G Minor). Taken from live performances, the orchestra has been scrupulously prepared by Honeck. And it would seem that he's been hiring well for his orchestra. The new first flute, who has such an important role to play throughout, is magnificent (Lorna McGhee has guested with all the world's great orchestras) as is the string leadership of Noah Bendix-Blagley, recently left to lead the Berliner Philharmoniker. Yes, the Pittsburgh Symphony is filled with players that good.

It is said that with Dvořák's markings, this symphony can play itself. But, Honeck adds many musical touches and the orchestral balances are well nigh perfect. Only in the last movement do the tempos get a little extreme — when Honeck has an orchestra this good, it's only natural that he wants to show off their virtuosity.

The full SACD recording is superb. Dynamic and very detailed. My only wish was there to be a little more 'house' sound (Heinz Hall). A small nit in an otherwise magnificent production. AK