

Bruckner: Symphony No 4 in E flat major (Romantic)
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck
Reference Recordings FR-713SACD (SACD) ****(*)

Manfred Honeck distils a truly awesome hush and mystery at the outset of this bracingly alive and exceedingly stimulating account of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony ('The Romantic'), the stunningly eloquent horn solo serving notice that his superb Pittsburgh band can boast players of the highest international calibre. What follows is a reading rich in arresting drama, recreative spark, red-blooded temperament and interpretative incident. True, the Austrian maestro is not exactly shy about 'improving' the text of the advertised Nowak Edition from 1878-80, but the frequently daring flexibility of his approach (above all in the difficult-to-hold-together finale) recalls old-school masters of this repertoire like Bruno Walter and Eugen Jochum, and in the booklet he has lots to say about the influence of landscape and folk-music in what he considers to be his countryman's most secular, worldly symphony. The actual orchestral playing, I should reiterate, is simply breathtaking (what a fabulous viola section – words fail me!), while the gloriously ample and richly detailed recording exploits a toweringly (at times intimidatingly) wide dynamic range. If you love Bruckner's Romantic Symphony, you need to hear this.
–Andrew Achenbach Classical Ear, 18 June 2015)