

CLASSICAL RECORD OF THE YEAR / HONECK - אופוס

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Manfred Honeck. Credit: Felix Broede

Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony top this year's "Record of the Year" with an outstanding Beethoven achievement

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What could one possibly reinvent in two of the most popular symphonies in the repertoire? Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra achieved the impossible in their new recording of Beethoven's fifth and seventh symphonies for "Reference Recordings".

The famous first four notes of the Fifth, draw you in instantly with a sense of a one-time occurrence. It appears that these notes, the "fate" motif, have never sounded so resolute, firm, true and accurate in their rhythm, so as multiple details throughout the second theme and the development. Even the oboe cadenza did not sound labored as one might expect in a generic recording of the fifth - but unusually crisp, as if it was played for the first time. This feeling endures throughout the entire symphony. Most notable are the blasts of the horn section in the third movement and the powerful transition to the finale.

Words of praise are not to be said only about the Fifth, but also the Seventh. There was not a dull moment in this interpretation. It is clear that Honeck had waited for the right time to record this symphony. In the [booklet](#), Mr. Honeck mentions that he had played this symphony many times as a violinist under the baton of Karajan, Muti, Abbado and Carlos Kleiber. Some would argue Kleiber's influence can be recognized in this recording. Mr. Honeck does use Carlos Kleiber's pizzicati at the end of the Allegretto, but in a more sensible way, in my opinion.

Most enticing was the enthusiasm and the perfect Beethovenian sound Honeck produced from the orchestra. What is "perfect Beethovenian sound"? - listen to the last episode, which has never sounded any bolder. In fact, at one point towards the climax of the fourth movement, the passages played by the first and second violins are suddenly performed twice as fast, and yet it somehow molds organically into the climax, without changing the actual tempo of the finale.

How did he achieve that? A mystery.

The [fine cooperation](#) between Honeck and the PSO to the boutique recording brand has entered the pantheon of the most significant recordings to both symphonies.

