

Star-conductor Honeck: „I do already know what I will be doing in 2019“

Question: What can the people expect from your Europe Tour, what is so special about the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra?

Answer: It has an energy, I hardly know any other orchestra able to access in such a way, able to play as energetic and sound, with a rhythmic precision. And then there is the interpretation in addition – and I am someone who likes to surprise the people.

Question: Are you with all your experience still nervous before performances like these?

Answer: No. I did have many, many premieres in my life and there is one thing, that was given to me: When I go on stage, I am not nervous at all. Thank God.

Question: Do you have any rituals during preparation?

Answer: I pray before performances. Then musicians came to me and asked, if they might pray with me. Meanwhile it is so common, I am quite amazed that often more than 50 people come into my Maestro-Suite before performances. Some Jewish, Moslem – just joining me in my prayer. I really like it, because I didn't force or stage it, but the people saw it and approached me by themselves.

Question: How are the audience's reactions in the US and Europe different?

Answer: The people live very differently. They maintain their traditions differently. Temperature plays a decisive role – if one is in Scandinavia or in the countries in the south makes a big difference, in temperament and way of playing. In America, one probably grasps a bit tighter, the dishes are also quite bigger here. Whenever I order a cake, I am shocked: in Vienna the cakes are sensationally good, but there are also a little bit smaller. Here in the US one sometimes reaches musically even deeper into the pockets, they love to experience music in such a passionate way – unbelievable! The people in America are unbelievably emotional, they react in such a beautiful way, they can be enthusiastic, I sense that again and again in my concerts.

Question: Your style of conducting seems calm and considerate, or is the appearance deceptive?

Answer: Of course I do take hold on the music, if it's appropriate. But it makes no sense dancing around like a clown. It's about the content, not about Mr Honeck, the Maestro.

Question: How much does the conductor contribute?

Answer: A super-orchestra will always play quite beautifully, but it's the conductor's task, to get the most out of the musicians, to make the people sound.

Question: Do you as an expert hear the styles of different conductors?

Answer: Actually yes. But it gets more and more difficult, because a certain globalization is happening, as well in sound as in ways of playing where you can't distinguish anymore soon. I don't hate anything as much as the average without a message. Political correctness has no business in the music, but it is becoming a trend. Merely hurting anybody, merely all that Forte and Fortissimo.

Question: Conductors are said to be loners – is that true?

Answer: There are some friendships. But naturally we meet quite rarely. I think, we make ourselves too important. A myth was built here, a Maestro is not necessary after all. It is naturalized, I accustomed to it myself. Of course it is important, that a conductor is a leading personality giving the direction and leading the people. But we must always be clear about this: Without Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler and Bruckner we would be nothing. They are the heroes! And sometimes it is alarming seeing the conductor's name on the album cover in extra big letters and probably a portrait and next to it Mozart very small. I think that is wrong.

Question: You live in Austria, you are principal conductor in Boston, you have performances all over the world and six children – how do you organize such a life?

Answer: For these matters, a conductor has a manager and that is necessary. I already know, what I will be doing in 2019. Just yesterday, I spoke to my manager about 2020. That's our life.

About the person: Born 1958 in Nenzing, West-Austria, as one of nine children, Manfred Honeck is counted among the best conductors in the world. After his studies in Vienna he worked inter alia with orchestras in Zurich, Oslo, Leipzig and Stockholm. Between 2007 and 2011 Honeck was music director of the Staatsoper Stuttgart. Since 2008, he is musical director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra committed until 2020, as well as guest conductor at many well-known orchestras. The repeatedly awarded Honeck is married and father to six children.