

PSO's new Tchaikovsky album shows great emotional intensity

<http://triblive.com/aande/music/10428686-74/honeck-pathetique-concertmaster>



Performances of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 ("Pathetique") and the "Rusalka Fantasy," created by Manfred Honeck and Tomas Ille from Antonin Dvorak's opera "Rusalka," were recorded live at Pittsburgh symphony Orchestra concerts April 17 to 19 at Heinz Hall, Downtown.

BY MARK KANNY | Sunday, May 15, 2016, 9:00 p.m.

The new recording by Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (<http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org/>), released May 13, is worth acquiring for many reasons including individual and compelling performances of both familiar and novel repertoire and stunning quality of recorded sound.

The performances of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 ("Pathetique") and the "Rusalka Fantasy," created by Honeck and Tomas Ille from Antonin Dvorak's opera "Rusalka," were recorded live at April 17 to 19 concerts at Heinz Hall (http://pso.culturaldistrict.org/pso_home/), Downtown.

Honeck sets the context for and explains many details of his interpretation of "Pathetique" in his exceptionally detailed program notes for the release. He quotes the comment of his predecessor, Mariss Jansons, that "It is not necessary to add sugar to honey."

For all the intensity of the new recording of "Pathetique," Honeck's interpretation brings an impressive dignity to the music's emotional world and respect for the musical elements of what is one of the great symphonies of the Romantic era.

The score of "Pathetique" calls for the widest dynamic range, which is captured with remarkable fidelity. In setting the volume when playing this disc, be aware that there are a couple of seconds of very soft string basses, virtually a subliminal sound, before the solo bassoon begins to play.

Honeck's scrupulous approach to dynamics is important for his lyricism, which touches the listeners more through expressive nuances than by big changes in volume. The first violins are especially impressive in this way, but this recording documents how well the entire orchestra is playing these days.

The single-most impressive aspect of Honeck's "Pathetique" is the way he makes the form and details of this masterpiece come alive. This is most challenging in the long first movement, but the way he shapes each movement also serves the long view of this piece. The third movement is lively and extremely well detailed but not extremely fast and manic. Honeck never loses sight of the fact that the slow and lamenting finale is the climax of "Pathetique," and he presents it with great emotional intensity without ever becoming hysterical.

The new CD gains greatly in value from inclusion of the "Rusalka Fantasy." The opera is virtually unknown in America, which makes this 20-minute orchestral piece especially welcomed. Former concertmaster Noah Bendix-Balgley plays the opera's best known moments, the aria "Song to the Moon," with the mastery that won him the post as first concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic.

The new CD from Reference Recordings is wonderfully transparent and detailed, as well as warm and full-bodied. Given Honeck's approach to orchestral textures, there are sure to be details you've not noticed before.

The April concerts also included another brilliant and deeply moving performance that deserves to be issued on a CD — Benjamin Britten's Violin Concerto played by Rainer Honeck, the concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the brother of the symphony's music director.

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