

## **Daniil Trifonov is a beast at the piano**

It was the third time in just a few weeks that the pianist Daniil Trifonov had performed in the packed Philharmonie and it was the third time he came to perform Rachmaninoff. After the less well known First Sonata and the famous Third Piano Concerto, he now attacked the even more famous Second Piano Concerto. And he did so quite literally: Trifonov attacked it. He battled against the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, which stood up to him fiercely in the first movement.

Even though Trifonov was only able to score points with his technical brilliance in these moments, it has to be said this Rachmaninoff is an experience. Principal conductor Manfred Honeck takes this composition as seriously as Beethoven's Coriolanus Overture, which could be heard previously in similarly uncompromising abrasiveness. There is nothing of the drawing room left in Rachmaninoff's work. Instead, there are all the more exciting confrontations between the pianist and the orchestra. From the slow second movement the balance changes in favour of Trifonov.

The American musicians now give him the space for poetic intimacies. They become more pliant and trusting. Trifonov's evocations meanwhile expand: from delicate to rousingly passionate, from coolly calculating to heatedly intuitive. With predator-like reflexes and equally predator-like physical gestures, he is triumphant in the finale. However, those who thought that this was the best Trifonov could deliver were immediately corrected. It was only with Liszt's Paganini Étude no. 2 as an encore that the audience fully sensed what many have felt when listening to this brilliant virtuoso: that he penetrates the music like someone omniscient, while at the same time conjuring it into the hall with inexhaustible skill – as if he were in cahoots with a higher power.

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on the other hand stayed firmly on the ground this evening. Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, which it also has in its programme as part of its current European tour, is given a sound that ties in with the ferocity of the first half of the concert. The Austrian conductor and viola player Manfred Honeck, the musical director of Pittsburgh since 2008, encouraged the brass players somewhat too much. This resulted in deafening volumes in the execution of the first movement. The brass players ruthlessly attacked the strings. Honeck was in quite a rush during the central movements. After the ever-accelerating third movement shouts of 'bravo' could be heard in the hall. There are conductors who get irritated by such audience reactions, since another, particularly emotive, slow movement is to follow. But Honeck enjoys audience euphoria. He never planned to perform the final adagio in a particularly gentle manner anyway. He stuck with the principle he applied to the earlier Tchaikovsky movements; to be psychological for a moment: Honeck cares more about effect than affect.