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[Reference Recordings](#) FR-720

Stereo/Multichannel Hybrid

Classical - Orchestral

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6

Dvorak: Rusalka Fantasy (arr. Honeck/Ille)

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Manfred Honeck (conductor)

Review by Graham Williams

It is fair to say that Manfred Honeck's series of live recordings with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra of music by Richard Strauss, Dvorak, Bruckner and Beethoven on the Reference Recordings Fresh! label have been revelatory, even to those listeners who are very familiar with the works featured on them that are, by and large, cornerstones of the orchestral repertoire.

The main work on this latest release is Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 in B minor and in an engrossing twelve page essay in the liner notes Honeck first discusses the genesis of the Symphony and speculates on its probable secret programme. He then goes on to analyse the score with impressive forensic thoroughness before detailing some specific interpretative points in his performance of the work. These notes are almost worth the price of the disc!

From the first bars it is clear that this is to be a pretty special account of the Symphony. The opening is weighty and measured with wonderful tonal depth from the PSO strings and Tchaikovsky's dynamic markings, so often treated in a cavalier manner by conductors, are for the most part scrupulously observed, though Honeck does sometimes take minor liberties if he feels they enhance his conception of the piece. When the lovely second subject melody of the first movement is reached it is played with great tenderness, but avoids any cloying sweetness while the electrifying attack at the start of the development characterises the incisive playing of the PSO throughout this performance. Honeck takes a relaxed and balletic view of the second movement – 'Allegro con grazia' – but, unlike many conductors, he stresses the darker nature of the trio section. The Scherzo/March is thrillingly played, its power underlined by terrific impact from the bass drum and cymbals, but the searing intensity, and almost Mahlerian anguish, with which the 'Adagio Lamentoso' finale is delivered puts the seal on a performance that should be at or near the top of any short list for this much recorded work.

Manfred Honeck's version of Dvorak's 8th Symphony from 2014 [Dvorak: Symphony No. 8, Janacek: Jenufa \(suite\) - Honeck](#) also included a brilliantly conceived orchestral suite from Janáček's opera 'Jenufa'. This was the work of the conductor and the young Czech composer Tomáš Ille. Here they have again collaborated and constructed a 20 minute suite from Dvorak's opera 'Rusalka' that they describe as a 'Rusalka Fantasy'.

'Rusalka' is the only one of Dvorak's ten operas to have maintained a permanent place in the repertoire and is packed with entrancing and colourful music. Many would argue that it is the rich orchestral score that is the prime reason for its success, as only the heroine's aria 'Song to the Moon' thrives outside the opera. 'Rusalka' is a late work and by the time it appeared Dvorak had not only completed his nine

symphonies but also the five magnificently orchestrated Symphonic Poems that include 'The Golden Spinning Wheel' and 'The Water Goblin'. It is no surprise then to find that the 'Rusalka Fantasy' is almost like a newly minted Dvorak orchestral masterpiece. The PSO's scintillating performance of the suite makes it a most welcome and imaginative addition to the catalogue.

The skilled recording team (Soundmirror, Boston) have ensured that these recordings, made and post produced in DSD256, are in every way worthy of the performances enshrined on this SACD.

There is no doubt that the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra are fortunate to have such a perceptive Music Director with a meticulous care for detail and the ability to deliver performances of such consistently high quality. But Manfred Honeck is equally blessed with a supremely accomplished virtuoso orchestra who can fulfil his wishes to the letter. Long may this partnership continue and, hopefully, yield many more such involving, and often spine-tingling, recordings as these.

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Performance:



Sonics (Multichannel):

