

## The Potential of an Exceptional Pianist

Bremen. We will know in a few years' time whether Daniil Trifonov will be worthy of the reputation of being the most exceptional pianist of our generation. At the 'Meisterkonzert' in the Glocke it was definitely clear that the piano star has what it takes: a world class virtuoso who makes the grand piano sing. The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra was a shrewd partner, driving the audience to thunderous applause with Tchaikovsky's opulently performed *Pathétique*.

It only happens every few years in the Glocke that an orchestra has such a strong cast and delivers such a luxurious sound as the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra did during the Meisterkonzert. The strings have a foundation of nine double basses – five to seven is the standard number – that allow the orchestra to play very quietly while still producing a full, sonorous sound. We are used to a different Beethoven style with more build and less vibrato from our orchestras in Bremen, but the *Coriolanus Overture* (Beethoven) was an audible pleasure, a concert opening that bundled all energies.

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) does not have such a big name as orchestras from Chicago and Boston, but it is traditionally run by outstanding conductors, most recently by Previn, Maazel and Jansons. Manfred Honeck has been conducting the PSO since 2008, and he is also here for the current 14-day European tour.

He and his orchestra gave the audience in the Glocke a musical gift with Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony* (*Pathétique*). Mostly consummate skills, coupled with a highly energetic approach to making music and a sense for the details in the score shaped the interpretation. For the darker, resigning moments the sound of the instruments – for example the oppressively beautiful, tender sound of the solo clarinet and the sonorous expression of the violas – was the perfect foundation for the sensational march in the third movement featuring the tremendous sound of the brass players. In the symphony's virtuoso passages Manfred Honeck drove his orchestra to the limits of the cleanly playable – and sometimes slightly beyond. To sum up: musical technique and sound as the basis for expressiveness and sound-painting.

In Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*, the PSO attentively listened to Daniil Trifonov, who now enjoys almost cultish veneration, and skilfully breathed with him, without pushing its way into the foreground. The pianist was therefore able to immerse himself completely into the world of music and translate his inner self into sound. The audience at least believed it felt how Trifonov, who accepted the ovations in a likeable and modest fashion, completely opened up in the music and experienced it while playing.

Daniil Trifonov elicited a cantabile sound from the piano that was neither excessively sentimental nor emotionally overloaded – which can happen with Rachmaninoff. Instead, it was a sound that could be interpreted as an expression

of soul. Gentle, but determined he conjured his hands through the many, many small notes – during which he differentiated so skilfully that it sometimes sounded as if three or four hands were playing.

He even turned the technically simple, unaccompanied melodies into veritable artworks, during which time seemed to stand still. He mastered the virtuoso passages with a surprising ease; in the aggressive chord sequences he proved to be a lion at the keys. At times he took the tempo to the max – a little less would make the rhythmic details even clearer – just to use the piano to sing Rachmaninoff's melodies in an artfully simple manner. Fascinatingly good – to be continued in August at the Musikfest.