

Driven into the Unrelenting

Elation, turbulence and brilliance: Daniil Trifonov and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra perform in the Philharmonie

Arpeggios, trills, all those outstanding numbers performed by the piano virtuosos – with Daniil Trifonov this is no surface turbulence, but a bubbling primordial base, the quaking of the soul. His delicate legato constantly grows energetically more intense and electrifies Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. The clear-sighted performance delivered by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra is such a symbiotic complement that listeners could begin to believe the gangly young man at the Steinway, immersed in himself, was evoking the orchestral sound with his fingers.

Trifonov embeds his piano contribution incredibly organically, from the first movement on. A meditative stream of consciousness that culminates in a trill of almost painful intensity. No idea where the Russian, who is only 25 but long celebrated as a master, finds the unconditionality, the emotional depth. He knows nothing of posing, of kitsch or complaisance, regardless of how close at hand they would be with Rachmaninoff.

Lashes in the Philharmonie

As with Igor Levit, who is also from Nizhny Novgorod, technical mastery and intensity of expression are one and the same for Trifonov too. Introspection and ecstasy: sometimes he cowers on his stool like a goblin, wholly becoming the sound, just to tense every muscle the next moment and almost to leap: music as an act of physical concentration. The precision with which the Pittsburgh musicians and Trifonov drive the finale *Resoluto* into the sphere of the unrelenting leads into razor-sharp homogeneous final chords: they whip through the Philharmonie like lashes.

With regard to the homogeneity of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under principal conductor Manfred Honeck in general: they present a fearsomely steely brilliance right from the heroic, masterful opening of Beethoven's *Coriolanus Overture*. With Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, the Americans prove that they have more to offer than just efficiency and effect. The orchestra's piano culture is quite special, the trancelike solos, particularly by the clarinet, the sometimes deathly pale, sometimes gently glowing, sometimes spooky pianissimos of the strings. The final movement aims at the disappearance into nothingness after all – what a shame that a rushed applause cuts off the final trembling notes of the double bass.

Even the Berlin Air can be heard

Elation and turbulence at the end: the concert is streamed live into the Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh. Honeck waves at the audience at home with a yellow towel, the terrible towel of the Pittsburgh Steelers, the local football team. The last piece of the evening is the *Galopp* from Khachaturian's *Masquerade*, supplemented by free medley cadences that even include the Berlin Air. Incidentally, Daniil

Trifonov had chosen Liszt's capricious Paganini Étude no. 2 as his encore, but his delivery was somewhat over-mannered.