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TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 "Pathétique. DVORÁK: *Rusalka Fantasy* (arr. Honeck)
Pittsburgh Symphony Orch/ Manfred Honeck, cond.
REFERENCE RECORDINGS SACD FR 720 PT: 67:03

BRUCKNER: Symphony No. 4 in E flat "Romantic."
Pittsburgh Symphony Orch/Manfred Honeck, cond.
REFERENCE RECORDINGS FR 713 TT: 66:07

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op 67. Symphony No. 7 in A, Op. 92
Pittsburgh Symphony Orch/Manfred Honeck, cond.
REFERENCE RECORDINGS SACD FR 718 TT: 71:27

Austrian conductor Manfred Honeck (b. 1958) is one of today's most respected conductors. In his youth he studied viola and violin and played in the Vienna Philharmonic. He also worked with Claudio Abbado and the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra. Honeck has led countless opera productions, particularly in Zurich, and appears often with major orchestras. He first appeared with the Pittsburgh Symphony in 2006; the following year was appointed Music Director. The Pittsburgh orchestra has an impressive history. Previous conductors associated with the orchestra include Fritz Reiner, William Steinberg, André Previn, Lorin Maazel, and Sir Andrew Davis. Since Honeck's appointment, the Pittsburgh Symphony joins the elite group of top American orchestras. Under Honeck's direction they have recorded four Mahler symphonies (1, 3, 4, 5) for the **Exton** label. There also is a recording of Strauss's *Ein Heldenben*, a work the orchestra took on tour two years ago and performed in Berlin's Philharmonie—you can see this remarkable performance on the internet. In it, the interplay between concertmaster Noah Bendix-Balgley and the rest of the orchestra is amazing. After this performance, the 29-year old violinist was named concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic—Pittsburgh's loss, Berlin's gain.

For **Reference Recordings**, there are SACDs of Strauss symphonic poems, and Dvorák's Symphony No. 8 coupled with a suite from Janacek's opera *Jenufa*. Now we have three more SACDS of live recordings all made in the fine acoustics of Pittsburgh's Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts. All of these are superlative, virtuoso performances. The Beethoven symphonies are high energy throughout, with a rather frantic but exciting pace for the final two movements of Symphony No 7. The Bruckner symphony also is impressive, challenging the finest other versions, with a *scherzo* of unusual power. Competition is keener for the Tchaikovsky symphony. A plus is the mightily impressive huge gong preceding the final pages of the symphony. Whatever the specifications of the instrument, it produces a soft but massive lasting sound that doubtless is what the composer had in mind. The suite from *Rusalka*, arranged by the conductor, is intriguing filler, and of course it includes the famous *Song to the Moon*, exquisitely played by the Pittsburgh strings. All of these impress and are

important additions to the catalog.

R.E.B. (May 2016)

(Robert E. Benson)