

Pianist Daniil Trifonov
A magician at the keys, not of this world

When his hands find the keys, time stands still: the piano virtuoso Daniil Trifonov moves the audience to raging applause at the Pro Arte concert in Frankfurt's Alte Oper.

Caption: The pianist Daniil Trifonov, a virtuoso with depth

Wow – what a pianist! Doubled over, he hunches over the keys, immersed with the utmost concentration in the music, already achieving as much depth with the first powerful chords of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto as some pianists do not manage all night! Daniil Trifonov, this 25-year-old Russian wunderkind, who now fashions a beard, with his hair brushed forwards into his face, is quite literally an exceptional artist, a fascinating, hardly tangible being. At times he appeared so removed, he seemed to be not of this world.

For him Virtuosity is not a means for self-representation; celebrity airs are completely alien to him. Trifonov blossoms completely in the music. Every note feels as if sounded with a plumbline. And even the most adventurous runs in Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto show no sign of being a mere shiny illusion in this performance.

The poet speaks

At times it seems as if Trifonov the person completely disappears. All that is left is the music itself – Trifonov is the medium. The poet speaks, as Schumann would put it. This phenomenon becomes clearest in the slow 'adagio sostenuto' movement. Trifonov unfolds the entire poetry of the Russian soul, delicately entangled with the sounds woven by the orchestra, enveloped in a veil of melancholy.

The quickness in the racing finale feels ghost-like. This is where the accompanying Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Manfred Honeck, finds the right dynamic balance – in the first movement Honeck still laid it on too thick, almost suffocating the piano with opulence, even though Trifonov coaxed an orchestral depth out of his instrument. Rachmaninoff's heavyweight and the Scriabin encore, the C-flat minor Prelude for the Left Hand seem to have exhausted the piano genius. He had to cancel the signing session scheduled at the CD stand during the interval. Trifonov is not in the best of health, we were told.

You could tell from the opening Coriolanus overture by Beethoven that the Honeck, an Austrian and former viola player with the Vienna Philharmonic, and principal conductor with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra since 2008, likes dramatic contrasts.

Booming chords

The huge instrumentation of the US orchestra from the former steelmaking city unpacks the full big-screen sound, the chords boom, the musicians tackle the performance with great energy: Beethoven's theatrical gesture morphs into a

Hollywood format. However, the strings are allowed to go to town in the lyrical passages. Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* then is big cinema. Honeck, all showman, eggs on his pressing orchestra, throwing his hands up in the air, forcing the musicians into an expressive and dynamic excess. The Americans seem to love Tchaikovsky's Sixth and final symphony, this warhorse of the concert literature; they give their all, yet despite all the intensity the interpretation remains too close to the surface.

The second movement is not just a sweet-sounding, smooth waltz. Its restless five-four bar announces the decline of a feudal society. And the third movement is ambiguous with its snappy march drill – but Honeck did not demonstrate this. The two encores do not feel right after this requiem. The audience cheered, of course.

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