

Daniil Trifonov in Stuttgart Free but lonely

By Susanne Benda 4 June 2016

25 years old and with a beard these days: Daniil Trifonov *Photo: Universal*

Daniil Trifonov did not get really happy with Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, accompanied by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck. He is miles better on his own.

[Stuttgart](#) – Those who say no have to be sure of themselves. Grigory Sokolov is one such individual who says no. Sony has just released a recording of Chopin's First Piano Concerto with him – from 1978. These days Sokolov only gives solo performances: free, but lonely. His colleague Daniil Trifonov is naturally not that far yet. The introverted 25-year-old Russian has been touted as a star since he won the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow in 2011, and his recitals are always something like the birth of big music from a big, feeling spirit. The way in which Trifonov presents opposing voices in a crystal clear manner, enriching them with exactly the right dose of emotion: the audience was able to marvel at just that during his encore, the Fugue in G minor from Liszt's adaptation of Bach's Great Fantasia for Organ, BWV 542 – and subsequently note with surprise how a smile spreads over the previously so serious face.

For Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto on the other hand the introverted young star seemed like a little bird in a golden cage. Trifonov mastered the solo section of this virtuoso warhorse well, laying out the solo start to the first movement in a very contoured, downright angular manner, and subsequently bullying the instrument with delicate hands that dart across the keys as softly as a cat's paws. Even in the slow movement, in which the audience can glimpse the rich spectrum of nuances with which the pianist can strike the keys, no note is wasted, all dreaming has substance.

And yet: there is a good reason for why the spark really comes across in the cadences. This is where Trifonov too is lonely but free. He is de-shackled: that is one of the qualities for which the audience loves him – and why the Beethovensaal with its many seats was sold out on Thursday night. Permitting such a freedom from shackles is not, however, the primary concern of the man on the rostrum – he loves and lives total control. At the rostrum of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgart's former musical director general, Manfred Honeck, tries to blend American brilliance with what he likes to call 'German sound' because it comes across as dark and soft. During Beethoven's Coriolanus Overture Honeck manages perfectly to maintain the tension throughout precise general pauses; and he accompanies Rachmaninoff's Concerto with fine colours. Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, though, the Pathétique is styled through and through rather than deep; in the second movement Honeck even tries to export the quick Viennese waltz across the Russian border. And yet he serves the whole thing up with such an awareness of its effect that the audience once again cannot help wanting to cheer at Tchaikovsky's pre-emptive, in this case very controlled, resounding end to this feast of sound after just the third movement.

**Stuttgarter Nachrichten
4 June 2016**