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**PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY - Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique" - Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra - Manfred Honeck (Conductor) - HDCD / SACD - 030911272029 - Released: May 2016 - Reference FR-720SACD**

I believe most of you would agree that not many composers quite match Tchaikovsky when it comes to conjuring up a sense of "drama" in music. And especially the way he applies some of the most beautiful melodies to emotionally passionate moments is quite gripping. Include his preponderance for extensive tension escalation and perfectly timed release, and you have the perfect recipe for electrifying music. He certainly knew how to create vivid images in music.

Add to this the nervous energy of a live concert as we have here, and you're in for an emotional roller coaster. For example, there's an enormous amount of passionate energy released at the 13:00 mark of the first movement that is exceptionally well captured by Manfred Honeck and exceptionally well projected by the Pittsburgh players, and then followed by an overwhelming sense of calm at the end with a long, sustained chord perfectly pitched by the brass section. And even more cheers and bravos to the brass players for their tour de force acrobatics during the *Allegro Molto Vivace* third movement, a moment in music that feels like a march onward to victory on an epic scale. Best of all is the profound sense of pathos radiating from every strand of the final *Adagio Lamentoso* movement in which the Pittsburgh string section gets to shine. In the final two minutes alone, with its pseudo failing heartbeat rhythmic pulse, the lower strings are darkness shrouded in darkness, the epitome of intense gravity, and this account leaves a profound impression.

If I have one little gripe about this recording, it's with the extra filler piece, the *Rusalka Fantasy* by Antonin Dvorak, actually arranged as a suite from the opera by Manfred Honeck himself. Not with the work itself, but rather with its placement. It should have been the first track on the CD rather than the last. Its upbeat and buoyant opening pages completely break the spell cast on you by the final moments of the Tchaikovsky symphony. Such a powerful effect of music should be allowed to linger on the mind.

This new recording will not displace legendary accounts like the Mravinsky/Leningrad for example, but if you're looking for an up-to-date, live, full-spectrum SACD recording, you can't do much better than this.

**Jean-Yves Duperron - June 2016**