

CD Review: Honeck and the PSO Perform Tchaikovsky and Dvořák

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Manfred Honeck and the PSO's latest CD from Reference Recordings

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Reference Recordings are on a mission: to record some of the world's greatest symphonic works under the unique direction of its music director Manfred Honeck.

The latest offering is a recording of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74, "Pathétique." And just as with the previous recordings by Honeck and the PSO, Honeck takes the listener on a musical journey with the Tchaikovsky. Not content to just play compositions as they were written, Honeck studies them from multiple perspectives: musical, historical and psychological. He then creates a vision that combines all of these elements into an interpretation that is fresh and provocative. The Tchaikovsky is a perfect example.

Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, like Beethoven's 5th and 7th symphonies, which Honeck and the PSO recorded last year (<http://culturespotla.com/2015/12/cd-review-honeck-and-the-pso-perform-beethoven/>), is one of the most recorded classical works. That makes it difficult to come up with something new. But, as with their other interpretations, Honeck and the PSO don't disappoint. Honeck also sweats the details, even to the point of asking the violas at one point in the opening movement to play their part on the D rather than the A string to create "a softer and slightly darker sound."

The 6th symphony is really a perfect vehicle for Honeck, and he must have felt right at home with its unusual dynamic and tempo markings. That does not mean, however, that Honeck does not impose his own sense of musicality on the piece. As with every piece he conducts, he crafted his recording of the 6th symphony for maximum musical effect, sometimes changing dynamic or tempo markings. Even if one is a literalist, one can forgive his meddling because the result is a dramatic rendering that would have brought joy and tears even to Tchaikovsky.

Also on the disc is the *Rusalka Fantasy*, from Dvořák's opera of the same name. The arrangement by Honeck and the Czech composer Tomáš Ille is melodic, interesting and unmistakably Dvořák, but it is difficult to follow Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 with anything. Perhaps the *Fantasy* should have been the first track on the CD. But that is a small quibble about an otherwise excellent recording by Honeck and the PSO.

—Henry Schlinger, Culture Spot LA

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