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Some items to consider

REVIEW

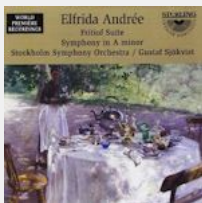
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**Richard STRAUSS (1864-1949)**  
*Elektra*, Op. 58, Suite from the opera (1909) [33.39]  
 (version conceptualised by Manfred Honeck, realised by Tomáš Ille)  
*Der Rosenkavalier* Op. 59, Suite from the opera (1910)  
 (version arranged by Artur Rodzinski) [24.41]  
 Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/Manfred Honeck  
 rec. live 13/15 May 2016, Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts,  
 Pittsburgh, PA, USA  
**REFERENCE RECORDINGS FR-722 SACD** [58.33]



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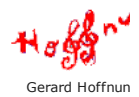
On Reference Recordings, the 'Pittsburgh Live!' series from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck goes from strength to strength. There were two releases in 2014, firstly the album of Richard Strauss tone poems *Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration* and *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* ([review](#)). This was closely followed by Dvořák's Symphony No. 8 and the Symphonic Suite from *Jenůfa*, given a Grammy nomination in 2015 ([review](#)). Honeck's interpretation of Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 was much acclaimed and received a Grammy nomination in 2016 ([review](#)). I found the album of Symphonies No's 5 and 7 to be magnificently performed and made it my 2015 Record of the Year ([review](#)).

Returning to both the music of Richard Strauss and the theme of symphonic suites from operas for his latest album, Honeck has recorded suites from *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Elektra*. Honeck conceptualised the *Elektra* suite, which was realised by Tomáš Ille and is given its world première recording here.

Dating from 1909 and drawing on classical Greek tragedy, *Elektra* was the first Strauss opera with a libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. It was based on the Vienna writer's version of the Sophocles drama. This remarkable work, with its opulent romantic writing, is high on chilling psychological drama and its searing dissonance still has the ability to shock in the opera house today. After *Elektra* Strauss desired a change of approach and reportedly said, "Now I shall write a Mozart opera." The result was his greatest success, *Der Rosenkavalier*, another collaboration with Hofmannsthal which Strauss completed in 1910. This 'comedy for music' inhabited the elegant Viennese world mirrored in many of Mozart's works.

Thanks to Strauss' distinctive sound world, this was the first time in many years that any music had both disturbed and excited me to such a remarkable degree. Both *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier* work marvellously in this symphonic suite form. Especially striking in its new guise is *Elektra*, a work which startles and unsettles with murder, obsession and thirst for revenge pushing harmony and tonality to the edge and sheer barbarity of sound to levels that are scarcely bearable. In the bittersweet world of *Der Rosenkavalier*, is the blend of swirling waltzes and boundless flow of melting melodies is ever-intoxicating. On an album where the highlights come thick and fast, the world class Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck is on magnificent form. Playing with astonishing virtuosity this opulent performance of *Elektra*, full and expressive, is brilliantly executed. Its climaxes are stunningly powerful, generating a tension which feels overwhelming. Conversely the *Rosenkavalier* waltzes have a poignant bittersweet quality that is entirely captivating.

Honeck has written absorbing and helpful booklet notes which match notable sections of both works to actual timings on the disc. Produced by the Soundmirror team of Boston for Reference Recordings, this hybrid SACD was recorded live in May 2016 at concerts in the impressive acoustic of the Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh. On my standard player, the reasonably close sound quality on this SACD is remarkable, as good as any recording in my collection. There is virtually no extraneous noise and the audience applause is absent.



Gerard Hoffn...

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New Release

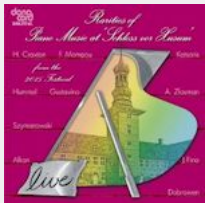




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Manfred Honeck and his Pittsburgh players combine for a stunning album which should be an essential purchase for Strauss devotees.

**Michael Cookson**

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