

## **Grafenegg: Two brothers in Nenzing's Heaven**

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### **The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra with Manfred and Rainer Honeck**

Grafenegg – Once upon a time there were two brothers who grew up in the village of Nenzing in Vorarlberg. The mother died early, the father, a postal worker, moved with them and their seven siblings to Vienna so as to give the musically gifted children a good education. The education was accomplished beautifully due to the talent and eagerness of the brothers: one of them became concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (all of 25 years ago) and the other one – via a detour as a violist with the Philharmonic Orchestra - became an internationally sought-after conductor.

Now, Rainer Honeck, the violinist, and Manfred Honeck, the conductor, performed together at the Grafenegg Festival. Since 2008, the latter has controlled the musical fate of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra as Music Director and, together with his orchestra, is a frequent and welcome guest at Rudolf Buchbinder's music festival amidst the greenery. After a rather disappointing opening piece - John Adams's erstwhile birthday present for Simon Rattle, Lollapalooza, was played loudly and listlessly at the same time -, Mozart's Violin Concerto G major K 216 was performed in fraternal unity and heavenly harmony. Delicate and flexible the orchestral introduction of the first movement, refreshing the dialogue between soloist and orchestra in the development part. Rainer Honeck repeatedly scaled back his intense, vibrato-rich tone to a wonderful simplicity; touching, for example, the cadenza in the middle movement. In the Rondeau movement, rustic vitality alternated with courtly elegance.

Mahler's first symphony then became the evening's great feat. Manfred Honeck's equally relaxed, detailed and intensive portrayal of Mahler's cosmos was stretched between filigree delicacy and colossal splendour, including a brief flash of glaring demonic possession. The beginning of the work was hardly more than a flickering hunch – marred by the coughing audience. Straddle-legged and robust, bursting with force the beginning of the scherzo-like second movement. The parodistic sprinkles of folk music elements in the third movement caught the mood appropriately, the linden tree episode seemingly from another world, of spherical luminosity. Overwhelming the turmoil at the beginning of the final movement, the climaxes building up magnificently up to the choral hymn. The strings of the Pittsburgh Symphony display a remarkable lyrical delicacy, the brass impresses with this American physical directness and force. At the same time, the suppleness and elasticity with which the musicians follow Honeck's hints, make the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra arguably the most Viennese of the otherwise rather stiff US orchestras. Chapeau.

The audience in the auditorium was in raptures and earned two encores with their applause: the gently whirring Dragonfly by Josef Strauss and the energetic Furioso Polka by Johann Strauss II, bursting with energy.