

**„We realise that we have a lot to do.“**



Manfred Honeck on Tuesday on the patio of the Festspielhaus Salzburg.

APA/Franz Neumayr

## **Interview. A conversation with conductor Manfred Honeck, chief of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, living in Altsch.**

Manfred Honeck is on the road a lot: The Vorarlberg conductor is currently touring Europe with his Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO), but the 58-year-old has plenty to do otherwise. Before his performance with the PSO at the Salzburg Festival (see right), the APA spoke to Honeck about future plans, the merging of classical and pop music, and his self-image as an artist.

Mr. Honeck, you come from a large family of musicians. How did this influence you?

Manfred Honeck: You always realise later what really left a mark on you. I can give you an answer: it was this simplicity. We were nine children and had to experience many hardships. Life in nature, in the mountains - these are the kind of keywords that were important to me. The love for nature already grew back then as if to the manner born. This is of course also reflected in the musicality.

You were originally a viola player with the Vienna Philharmonic before switching sides. What induced you to do that?

Honeck: Strictly speaking, it was a longer phase. It is this burning fire and the notion: actually, I would like to conduct. I'm simply fascinated by that. It's not just the standing in front and waving about. Maybe this was a bit of an issue back then, but I soon realised that this is not my chief concern. I was actually wanting to interpret. I wanted to be able to convey what I felt. And for that, conducting is something wonderful, because the orchestra's colours are so immense and offer a wealth of facets.

How would you define your role as a conductor?

Honeck: You always reflect about what conducting means. This is implied by 'conducere': guiding, leading. Like the CEO of a company. A lot is about organisation, but ultimately it is about developing a musical concept and following the composer's will. What was the composer's intention with the piece? When did he write it, which circumstances drove him,

what was the common style of playing? You learn a lot, not only about the work itself, but also about the context. It has always been fascinating to get to know different interpretations. It is also important that we do not exalt ourselves. We're essentially servants. Without Beethoven, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, our profession would probably not exist. They have created something very special. Of course, we also interpret. But the real hero is the composer.

You have been in Pittsburgh since 2008 and your contract runs until 2020. What comes afterwards, do you have any plans? Will you fulfil the contract?

Honeck: It's not an easy decision to make - do I stay in America, do I concentrate more on Europe? It's a fundamental decision, I will turn 60 next year. When I take over a chief conductor position, I will of course work with the utmost enthusiasm and energy. I will consider whether I will stay in Pittsburgh or take up another position - or be free, that is an alternative also worth considering. I have not yet made the decision, but in the course of the next six months I will probably have managed to make up my mind about which direction to take.

A lot is happening in Vienna: Bogdan Roscic takes over the Vienna State Opera in 2020, brings in Philippe Jordan as music director. Would you have been tempted by this position, or else, are the [Wiener] Symphoniker an issue for you?

Honeck: Vienna is a very important city for me, it is my musical home. What Vienna has to offer is unique - in every respect. What happens there is really great, and we can be proud. Of course, there are always changes, it is in the nature of things. I enjoy conducting the Symphoniker very much. Certain things will present themselves naturally, but I do not know what will happen eventually. I also have a lot of other possibilities I will exploit.

This year, your orchestra has mixed Tchaikovsky's music with that of the rapper Drake. A necessary attempt to reach younger audiences?

Honeck: We have to fight a lot, even in Europe. And we try a lot of things. With Drake and Tchaikovsky, one has to say: a musician's heart bleeds when in the middle of a Tchaikovsky symphony, there is a sudden switch to pop music. I, personally, can't do this. But yes, the orchestra also plays pop music. We realise that there is a lot to do for us. However, the root of this problem lies in the schools, the knowledge of classical music, and in the families. How can I expect people to come who have never heard this kind of music before? If I don't feel a longing and love for classical music, I probably won't buy a ticket either. We and politics must make more of an effort to bring classical music closer to the people.

Christoph Griessner/apa

**Neue Vorarlberger Zeitung**  
**31 August 2017**