

Salzburg Festival: Triumph for Honeck and the Pittsburghers

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Yesterday's visit of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra at the Salzburg Festival turned out to be equally challenging and rewarding. Conductor Manfred Honeck let his orchestra, over which he has presided as Music Director since 2008, glide through highly diverse worlds. Together with Anne-Sophie Mutter, this journey turned into an exuberant triumph.

To some extent it was also due to the German violinist that a lot of work was initially required at the Großes Festspielhaus - for the protagonists on stage as well as the curious audience in front of it. After all, Witold Lutoslawski's three coherent pieces "Partita", "Interlude" and "Chain 2" are ultimately very closely connected with Mutter, as she premiered the latter, and the Polish composer subsequently reworked the opening number especially for her and wrote the connecting piece.

Mutter's performances were correspondingly intense and characterised by enormous assurance. Above all, the soloist and the splendidly disposed orchestra under Honeck worked out the contrarities of the works with much verve. Force and fragility faced each other on a par, whereby even large arcs of suspense could generate highly intimate moments.

If the transition is gingerly making connections, it was ultimately up to "Chain 2" to lead this contemporary feat to its climax. A daring dialogue developed between Mutter and the piano, whilst the various orchestral parts were piling up on top, layer by layer.

Likewise rich in variety the second part of the evening: Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony, which premiered in St. Petersburg a few days before his death, is virtually predestined to bring forth the merits of orchestral work. Already in the sweeping first movement, Honeck, who visibly enjoyed delving into the sound sequences, was able to mate the dark mood of the work with a lightness that made the lyrical passages shine all the more radiant. Even a cell phone ringing at the beginning could not unhinge the artist on the rostrum, he only forced a smug smile.

Anyway, there was no stopping after that. Details were meticulously worked out, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra made the intensification of the tempo seem like a trivial matter and washed around the audience with the most lush colours. After the third movement, the latter got carried away and applauded in-between, before the highly melancholic ending, sliding into nothingness, was received with great euphoria.

Honeck and his orchestra gave thanks with two sparkling encores before a general satisfaction released [everyone] into the night. And so it was almost like a home fixture for the Vorarlbergian Honeck - eagerly awaited, followed in suspense and enthusiastically cheered.

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