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On Passion and Precision

by Veronika Fehle



Manfred Honeck and Anne-Sophie Mutter delighted. Photo: Salzburger Festspiele /Marco Borrelli

At the end of the festival, Manfred Honeck and Anne-Sophie Mutter made us sit up and take notice.

Salzburg. If all grand finales were like this concert of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Vorarlberg conductor Manfred Honeck, it would become a habit to put the cart before the horse. In other words: the Salzburg Festival remained exciting until the end.

It was a little jewel of a concert that was to be heard at the Großes Festspielhaus. And it was special. Not only because Manfred Honeck could be heard here conducting his regular orchestra, but also because with Anne-Sophie Mutter, a true virtuoso was to be experienced. With his "Partita for Violin and Orchestra", the "Interlude for Orchestra" and "Chain 2", the Pole Witold Lutoslawski presents a musical triptych. Each musical idea stands for itself and yet they join together to form a closely connected scenery. It is fascinating how the pale colours run like a thread through the work, which lives from discourse and contradiction between violin and orchestra.

In his "Interlude", he eventually weaves sound forms and patterns delicately and tenderly into each other in a transparent and translucent fashion. Lutoslawski has noted down an appealing

piece of music in his intermezzo, before, with "Chain 2", a sequel commences which is also a counterpart to the "Partita".

Thunderous applause

For his "Chain 2", Lutoslawski explicitly wanted Anne-Sophie Mutter as a soloist. She was, so she says, shocked for a moment. That music was so entirely different. Yet there were, according to Mutter, also "these two bars in the second movement that simply bowled me over". It is a true experience to follow her through the measures, watching her playing and her precision, whilst her mastery asserts itself more and more.

The interplay between solo violin and orchestra is particularly exciting in those passages in which Lutoslawski no longer sets a metre and the music completes itself. The title "Chain" is also based on these sequences. One musical element merges into another, thus creating a chain reaction. Thunderous applause was granted to all performers. A change of mood, which could not have been more powerful, followed with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, B minor, op 74. It was perceptible that conductor and orchestra have found each other here, that a trust prevails that creates wonderful music. The brass is much more dominant, the strings are much more restrained, compared to what we are accustomed to hear over here, but definitely no less worth listening to.

It's wonderful how Honeck changes from gentle, sumptuous passages to clamour, until the music slowly fades away in quiet tones, almost devoutly. The musicians and Manfred Honeck bid farewell to their audience only after two encores, vociferously demanded by the audience.



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