

Salzburger Nachrichten

Salzburg Festival: An end does not need to remain bitter

With cheers for a real and for a false finale the concert roundelay of the Salzburg festival summer ended.

By Clemens Panagl / 31.08.2017 -
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Manfred Honeck

IMAGE: SN/SF/BORELLI

The feint that Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky incorporated into his 6th symphony works pretty much always. When the orchestra steers towards the climax in the third movement with all its might, it is difficult to expect anything but a triumphant conclusion. On Tuesday evening, it reliably made an appearance at the Großes Festspielhaus: the premature applause for the "false" finale, so resolutely and excessively feinted by the musicians of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) and their boss Manfred Honeck.

However, in the "Pathétique", the bitter end follows only afterwards, in the Adagio lamentoso, sighing out its entire soul: and in his interpretation, the Austrian conductor much rather prefers digging deeper into the darker facets of the work, that can be perceived as a Requiem as its composer died nine days after the premiere, than into the luxuriant passages.

The melodramatic colours of the work (not for nothing the "Pathétique" is often used as a soundtrack for corresponding film scenes) were considered in a different, precisely differentiating light by Honeck and his orchestra. The contrasts between light and shady passages, audible in the finest pianissimo of the clarinet in the first movement or in the softly shaded string sound on the one hand and in the rugged (sometimes rather sharp) power of the brass on the other, were brought to the fore.

In his essay for the PSO recording released in 2016, Honeck cites exaggeration, excess and impatience as the greatest dangers in climbing the "Pathétique". Yet even if the above-mentioned temptation at the end of the third movement is hard to resist, constantly steadfast balance and creative patience up to the real, final silence, relished for a long time here, always provided for tense suspense.

This last concert of the Salzburg festival summer was at the same time a debut for the orchestra and its conductor, who are currently on a tour of Europe: for the first time, the PSO and its chief, who has been in office since 2008, appeared at the Salzburg Festival together.

A guest performance might also have been suitable for this year's Shostakovich focus: the PSO's latest CD with Shostakovich's 5th Symphony has just been released. Nevertheless, the first part of the concert was not dedicated to a Russian composer, but to a Polish protagonist of the 20th century - and his preferred violin virtuoso.

Witold Lutosławski wrote his work "Chain 2" in 1986 for Anne-Sophie Mutter. And he dedicated the orchestral version of his "Partita" to her. The fact that both pieces are inseparably connected with the violinist's name and sound could be heard at the Großes Festspielhaus with impressive clarity.

In both pieces, virtuosity is not only required in an athletic sense: the solo voice changes time and again between delicate miniature motifs, lamenting glissandi and temperamental outbursts. From the friction between the solo instrument and the complexly interlinked orchestral voices, from the slow buildup and sudden discharge of tensions, "Chain 2" at times even draws a threateningly tense aura (again, not for nothing can Lutosławski's music be repeatedly found as a soundtrack in corresponding film scenes). "Partita" and "Chain 2" were connected by a delicately glittering "Interlude" to a cohesive first half of the concert: an ideal and likewise eagerly received contrast to the large portion of Tchaikovsky romanticism that waited in the second half of the concert. At the end there was cheering for the (real) finale, and two encores.

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