

Abendzeitung München, 5 November 2019

### **Searching for the Borderline Experience**

Lang Lang and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck with Mozart and Bruckner at the Gasteig

By Michael Bastian Weiß

Even for a Lang Lang, who loves the superficial effect, it is a little extreme to suddenly halve the tempo in a classical piece of music, when Manfred Honeck conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra has already chosen a pleasantly restrained tempo for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Concerto No 24 in C minor. Lang Lang, however, brings the motion almost to a standstill with his solo entry and also turns the Allegro into an Andante time and again in the further course – if not into a Larghetto. Moreover, he often plays so softly in the Philharmonie as if he wanted to hide from the agitated orchestra.

### **Impulses that will be remembered for longer**

One has to be able to afford such intrusions. Lang Lang can do that. In fact, the sound of the piano begins to shimmer magically and even accompanying figures are being charged with meaning. This results in a wealth of enchanting situations, for instance, when the Chinese pianist allows a final note to fade away in beautiful loneliness, now and then takes the events into his own hands, freshly encouraged, and even brings out the reminiscences of baroque counterpoint in the Finale.

In Manfred Honeck, Lang has an understanding accompanist who not only follows him attentively in his escapades, but also contributes autonomous images with the splendidly rehearsed Pittsburghers. Most colleagues will skip over the waltzing passages, for example, yet with the former viola player of the Vienna Philharmonic, they are in the best of hands. All in all, this is an interpretation that pleasantly sets itself apart from the common mechanical style of playing of Mozart's piano concertos. Lang Lang obviously used the compulsory break - he could not perform for over a year due to a hand ailment - to reflect about this composer.

In Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 9, Manfred Honeck is searching for the existential human borderline experience. He literally bathes in individual passages, which results in the desintegration of the large form into individual episodes, particularly in the Adagio. What remains is an impressive orchestral performance.

With the wayward Pittsburgh wind players, Honeck creates an extremely high-contrast split sound which has less of Richard Wagner's mild, blended colours than of Gustav Mahler's garish exuberance. Even if many a thing may ultimately seem arbitrary or exaggerated: in this concert, impulses are given that shall be remembered for longer.