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### Anne-Sophie Mutter and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in Musikfest Berlin's opening night

Saturday  
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08:00pm

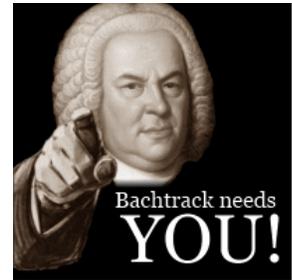
**Map** **Philharmonie: Großer Saal, Berlin**  
Berliner Festspiele: Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

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**Janáček**, Suite for strings  
**Lutoslawski**, Chain II  
**Strauss R.**, A Hero's Life (Ein Heldenleben), symphonic poem, Op.40  
**Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra**  
**Manfred Honeck**, Conductor  
**Anne-Sophie Mutter**, Violin

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An excellent orchestra and a rather grab-bag program officially opened the 2013 Musikfest Berlin last night. The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and its music director, Manfred Honeck, are currently on a European tour, and the audience at the Philharmonie rewarded their long trek with abundant applause, necessitating two encores. I hope the orchestral *Zugaben* continue through the rest of the festival, since these ensembles are rightly at the center of attention; unlike at home, in their own halls, the audiences at the Philharmonie have bought tickets as much to see the orchestras as to hear the works they've programmed.



This is a good thing: I am sure that many made the trek this slightly drizzly night just to hear Anne-Sophie Mutter play Lutoslawski's *Chain II*, which she premiered a quarter-century earlier. The Janáček *Suite for String Orchestra*, a work I was wholly unfamiliar with, was a rich surprise. But I have no idea why Richard Strauss' utterly overplayed *Ein Heldenleben* constituted the entire second half of the program. I am trying to imagine someone leafing through a season brochure, seeing that entry on some night's listings, clapping a palm to their heads, and exclaiming, "I must buy tickets at once!" Are Germans more devoted or drawn to this work than I can understand?

The totally banal inclusion of this piece on the concert program is outstanding only because the programming for the rest of the festival is so inventive. *Chain II*, for instance, is a great choice for an opening night. Anne-Sophie Mutter, of course, always draws a crowd, and this night she demonstrated the violin-playing which caused such a profusion of delight in the composer when he first heard her play this work. It is all in the little effects, the tremolos that dissipate at the very horizon of audibility, the touches alternately shimmering, sarcastic, questioning, distant. This work requires re-listening, and perhaps required re-rehearsing, too, for the PSO was least together during this performance, Honeck valiantly but often



unsuccessfully trying to keep the orchestral punctuations together.

Not so for the pieces for which rehearsal time would not have been an issue. The night's hero, for me, is the PSO's string section, which is astonishing, especially in the low range. The entries and tuning were so in harmony, the sound so rich and deep and full of character. Honeck exploited the capabilities of his strings alongside the unbelievable acoustics of the hall by unearthing, in the *dal niente* decrescendi, layer after layer of quietnesses that lay before silence. As this was my first time hearing this orchestra and this hall in person, I can't yet say where the balance of credit lies. But it is certain that Honeck and the PSO deserved every moment of applause they received for the singlemindedness and focus of the sound in the Janáček *Suite* and for their trust in this hall to carry the quietest and most subtle of moments.

Submitted by **Dan Wang** on 2nd September 2013

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