

A Question of Style

Symphonic: The major orchestras are said to be suffering from uniformity. Four concerts this weekend will prove the contrary.

Classical - Christian Merlin

The line is a common one: globalization may have beat out classical music; orchestras are all alike. It makes one wonder whether the people who are promoting these clichés even go out at night. The experience that we've just have in listening to four symphonic concerts in three days is inspiring.

Friday night at the Salle Pleyel. Here is the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra that, while not being one of the "Big Five," remains one of the best in the United States. At the head is talented conductor Manfred Honeck, an Austrian and a former viola player for the Vienna Philharmonic. In Richard Strauss's *A Hero's Life*, we could say that he seeks to give his orchestra a lesson in Viennese style. The work begins with the cellos and the horns in unison. A German orchestra would have you hear a round and warm sound in the lower strings, of which the horns would simply be an extension. Here, we hear a fanfare! Later on, it's the trumpets on steroids. This interlocking of the brass that announces the charge of the cavalerie smashes the strings: the fundamental characteristics of the American orchestra are all there!

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