

Slatkin Conducts Program Of 20th-Century Works

By FRANK PETERS
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Leonard Slatkin led the St. Louis Symphony in a well-played concert Friday afternoon in Powell Hall. It was a mostly-20th-century program with a rakish Slatkin touch: Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, the Stravinsky Concerto for Piano and Winds with Etsuko Tazaki the soloist, and some of Bizet's "Carmen" music arranged as a ballet suite by Rodion Shchedrin, the contemporary Soviet composer.

Tazaki played the Stravinsky Piano Concerto brilliantly. It needs a big technique and a very alert rhythmic sense; Tazaki responded with electric accuracy and force to the demands. The wind ensemble was not quite so precise but on the whole gave Tazaki firm support.

The performance may be said to have done justice to the spirit of the concerto and to most of its letters. Even so, it is not a composition that generates much warmth; there is a rhetorical, contrived quality to the piece that brilliant performance cannot dispel.

The Bartok Concerto gives a virtuoso

orchestra a prolonged occasion to shine. Slatkin took it carefully, a shade slowly, with scrupulous regard for dynamics; the soft sounds of the work have never been treated with such delicacy in previous Powell Hall performances.

And the St. Louis Symphony did shine. The purity of the cello and string-bass sound at the beginning foretold how well the players would apply themselves. At the end they applauded their conductor.

There were still scattered instances of attacks not entirely in line — the timpani entering slightly ahead of the brass, the brass slightly ahead of the strings. These rough attacks seem to come in places where the orchestra must get the beat by sight of the conductor; when a pulse is established there is no problem.

The Shchedrin ballet suite may be taken as an amusing pop novelty, which is apparently the way Slatkin took it, or as a piece of meretricious junk. The fact that Bizet's own "Carmen" orchestration is a very good one, not needing marimba and cowbell underlining to make its points, inclines me to believe the worst things reported of vulgarity in Soviet artistic production.