

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Pianist Brings Clarity To Difficult Passages

By James Wierzbicki
Post-Dispatch Music Critic

ETSKO TAZAKI, a pianist on the faculty of Washington University during the late 1970s, returned to St. Louis Tuesday evening to play a recital in the St. Louis Conservatory of Music's Great Artist Series.

It's easy to see why Tazaki is so fondly remembered here by people who had heard her play.

She's a consummate musician, a no-nonsense performer who brings to her work a combination of maximum technical skill and penetrating interpretive insight. Her main objective, it seems, is clarity. When she addresses a virtuoso passage the results are typically dazzling; but no matter how brilliant her pyrotechnics, they pale when bathed in the light she sheds on the music itself.

Her opening selection was an almost seamless pairing of Mozart's delicate Fantasy in D Minor, K. 397, and equally delicate Rondo in D Major, K. 485. Her single encore was the transparent "Traeumerei" from Schumann's "Scenes from

Childhood."

But everything else was of the potentially opaque sort that needs illumination if it's to have an effect: After the Mozart set came the 18 character pieces that make up Schumann's "Davidsbündlertänze," and the program's second half consisted of Berg's 1908 Sonata, Chopin's Polonaise in A-flat Major and the "Funerailles" from Liszt's "Harmonies poetiques et religieuses."

These are thickly scored works whose sheer mass often prevents pianists from doing full justice to their very important rhythmic elements.

Yet their difficulty seemed not to faze Tazaki. She made the turbulent, irregular Berg sonata sound lucid by giving unequivocal shape to each and every gesture; she turned the meditative and usually amorphous Liszt into a lyrical, gently propelled song. Most impressive, she cut through the myriad of notes and allowed the Schumann and Chopin to come across, ultimately, as simple dance pieces.