

MUSIC REVIEW

Slatkin, young artists are a good fit

Concerts generate speculation that he may be CSO's next maestro

By Michael Cameron

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Leonard Slatkin's concerts with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra this week have generated some buzz, muted though it may be, that he is one of a handful of contenders to replace Daniel Barenboim as CSO maestro.

Slatkin is known for his advocacy of American music and of music education in public schools. His presence on the podium for the Midwest Young Artist's Sunday evening concert at the Harris Theater for Dvorak's Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," was therefore especially apropos.

The centenary of the composer's death has brought countless performances of this, his most enduring work. Slatkin led a performance that stressed forward momentum above all else, with little of the idiosyncratic push and pull of Barenboim's reading of the same work with the CSO a couple of years back.

The conductor's emphasis on rhythmic integrity is based on an impeccable baton technique, one that leaves no doubt as to his intentions, and one that is especially helpful to young players who lack veterans' experience with standard repertoire.

Throughout the symphony, transitions in tempo were handled smoothly, giving the work a

persuasive structural soundness. The fine young players were up to the challenge and seemed genuinely inspired by the unruffled presence of the esteemed maestro.

Slatkin's pacing in the second movement was relaxed but never sluggish. Rachel Steinhorn's haunting English horn solo was a stirring highlight.

The finale showed both ensemble and conductor at their best. The strings dug in with palpable intensity, and clarinetist Lars Heemskerck soared effortlessly above the orchestra. The brass had a few shaky moments earlier in the work but came through splendidly in the final declamation of the famous

tune.

The first half of the concert was a showcase for several of MYA's many ensembles. The school has produced more medal winners in the prestigious Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition than any other similar institution. The Rattan Percussion Trio strutted its gold medal-winning stuff with a knockout performance of Mark Ford's "Stubernic." Zachary Robertson, Stefani Weiss and Molly Yeh transformed a single vibraphone into an entire percussion orchestra.

Pianist Samuel Cormier-Iijima, violinist Shawn Moore and cellist Chris Trigg are far too young to have visited smoky