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NATIONAL
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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MS. WERNER: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press
Club for our speaker luncheon featuring Leonard Slatkin. My name is
Theresa Werner of AP Broadcast and a member of the National Press Club
Board of Governors. I'd like to welcome club members and their guests
in the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN.

We're looking forward to today's speech. And afterwards, I will
ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold
your applause during the speech, so that we have time for as many
questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear
applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public
who attend our luncheons, and not necessarily from the working press.
I would now like to introduce our head table guests, and ask them to
stand briefly when their names are called.

From your right, Jerome Barry, baritone, director and founder of
the Embassy Series. Constance Ikokwu, Washington Bureau chief of This
Day newspaper in Nigeria, and a new member of the National Press Club.

Doris Margolis, president of Editorial Associates. Bob Madigan,
WTOP's man about town. Angela Greiling Keane, Bloomberg News and

chair of the NPC Speakers Committee.

I'm going to skip our speaker for a moment. Marilou Donahue, producer/editor of Artistically Speaking and the NPC member who organized today's event.

Austin Kiplinger, chairman of Kiplinger Editors, Incorporated, and an NPC golden owl. Deb Price, Washington correspondent, The Detroit News. (Name inaudible) -- freelance editor.

(Applause.)

Now I'll introduce our guest. Leonard Slatkin, musical director and conductor, is internationally recognized not only as a great conductor but as a champion for American music and musicians.

He and the orchestra have been celebrated by the White House for their devotion to American music.

Mr. Slatkin has been given numerous awards and honors, including the National Medal of Arts, the American Symphony Orchestra League's Gold Baton for service to American music.

But that does not mean he has neglected the classics. Absolutely not. Just turn on any classical musical program on the radio and you will hear Maestro Slatkin leading such prestigious orchestras as the New York and Berlin Philharmonics, the Chicago Symphony and other leading orchestras around the world.

And let's not forget his opera performances at the Metropolitan, Vienna State and our own Washington National Opera. He is the principal guest conductor of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

He is ending 12 years as musical director of the National Symphony Orchestra to become the music director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He is also conductor-laureate of the St. Louis Symphony. He has an extensive discography of more than 600 recordings which has earned him nine Grammy Awards and more than 60 Grammy nominations.

You don't wake up one day and decide you want to be a conductor. No, it takes a lot of study and experience. So Mr. Slatkin is the founder and director of the National Conducting Institute, a groundbreaking program established in 2000 to prepare gifted conductors for work with major orchestras.

His wonderful career continues, and he will be missed here in Washington. Ladies and Gentlemen, Leonard Slatkin. (Applause.)

MR. SLATKIN: Thank you very much.

May I start, first of all, by wishing the National Press Club a very happy 100th birthday? I would have brought the orchestra to play, but I think the room is full.

As it turns out, I spoke here a little over eight years ago. And even though I'm supposed to be speaking about reflections and beyond, I thought part of the reflections might be about what I said eight years ago and how much of it has come to pass and how much of it I was wrong.

At the end of the session, I was asked a question. "We would like your best advice on how to approach Mr. Selig for a team in Washington." (Laughter.) Here is what I said over eight years ago: "The music director of this orchestra needs a national league team somewhere in the area. Those people in Montreal, they don't need a baseball team." (Laughter.) I was right.

Eight years ago, I said, "At the Kennedy Center, there will be changes. In February, Michael Kaiser, who's been the director of Covent Garden Opera in London will join us. He'll bring another set of perspectives." There was the understatement of life. (Laughter.)

It has been an incredible 12 years. Most people don't really know how I came to be here in the first place. I was in St. Louis for a total of 17 years as music director. Before that, 10 years in various subsidiary positions -- associate, principal guest, associate principal guest -- and finally had to give that up because they ran out of titles. For two years, I was music director of the orchestra in New Orleans. This is sometimes referred to as "Slatkin: The Lost Years." (Laughter.)

And then I went back to St. Louis as its music director for what turned out to be a very successful tenure. We were able to do a great deal for American music. And we took this regional orchestra and put them on the international musical map. So after 17 years there, I thought, well, I think I don't need to do this anymore.

I don't need to be a music director.

A call came from the then-president of the Kennedy Center, Jim Wolfensohn. Would I come and conduct the National Symphony, with an eye to perhaps considering taking a position here? And at first I said no, I don't really want to do that, and then I was encouraged at least to give it a try. I hadn't conducted here in almost 10 years.

So a concert was organized. It was okay; I can't say it was great or anything like that, but it was good enough. What made it interesting, though, was at intermission Mr. Wolfensohn came back with a guest. The guest had been over at the Opera House watching a performance of "Annie" with his wife and daughter. Yeah, President Clinton did make an impression that night. (Laughter.) And so I took the job.

Over the course of 12 years, we've accomplished a great deal, but a lot still remains to be done. If I had to look back at things that I'm truly proud of, they mostly have to do with areas of education. The Conducting Institute that you heard in the introduction was something that I was very keen on, and it stemmed, really, from something that happened to me when I was beginning my career.

And my family were all musicians, very strict, so I understood what being a professional musician was all about. But it's one thing to conduct in front of the university orchestra or an amateur group or a group of young people, and a whole other matter to stand in front of a hundred people who know the music much better than you do. So the first time I conducted orchestras in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, I was intimidated. And I wondered if there was a way to avoid this transition as being a difficult part of the conductorial life.

And so the institute started with that in mind, with understanding what the differences are between what you have been doing and what you will be doing. All of a sudden, you're not telling an orchestra, "Here, I'm going to be in four" -- no, you're talking about things like what kind of sticks does the timpani need to play with, what are the bowings going to be like for the strings, how are the balances. And so the institute started off very much as that.

It's evolved quite remarkably to include an indoctrination of the conductors into understanding the work ethic of the orchestra, how the management and the administration operates in an American system, the mentoring by members of the orchestra to the conductors. By the time they finish the three weeks, they really are prepared to go comfortably into the professional world.

I'm very happy to say that most of the people who come through the institute have wound up getting jobs in this country. I even got a message from one of our young women today who was appointed to a position just yesterday. It's very encouraging.

Another reason I came to Washington was because I've always had a passion for the music of this country. Well, it makes sense. We're called the National Symphony Orchestra. So what better thing for me to do than to continue the pursuit of the music of our own land?

And it is broad. We forget that maybe of all of the countries in the world, at least for the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st, we've produced an astonishing variety and array of great, great music, perhaps exemplified by what the NSO has done over the last six or seven days. Last Sunday night at the orchestra's gala -- actually, the Kennedy Center's gala -- the orchestra was under the direction of John Williams.

Just before I spoke to the Press Club the eight years ago, at the turn of the century, I got a call from Time magazine -- I was in Paris at the time -- and they were doing a feature about, well, people and events that we considered to be defining for the 20th century. And I was asked who did I think was the most influential composer of the 20th century, and I said, "John Williams." And they said, "No, no. We don't mean that. We mean like Stravinsky or Schoenberg." And I said, "John Williams." And they said, "Well, how can you really say that?" I said, "Well, you used the word 'influential.' You didn't really qualify it by saying who is influenced by it. But what better composer who's reached more people than John?"

I thought about it, because I had to give the introduction for John at the performance. But it's a gala audience. You have to be a little careful of what you say. So I had a couple of, I thought, decent lines.

The one I didn't say was this: that in the early '60s John Lennon had declared that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. But it's certainly easy to think that John Williams is more popular than the Beatles. So what does that really tell us?

So John was here, and I mean, who has written more memorable music for many people? Defining American composer.

And then last night we did a defining work by an American composer of a quite different nature. If any of you are free either tonight or tomorrow, and can get a ticket -- normally I don't really try to force people to come, but this is a little different. We played a piece that I'd wanted to do here for quite a while, a piece that was written in 1975, called "Final Alice," based on the last two

chapters of "Alice in Wonderland." You have to understand that in the mid-70s music in this country was quite divisive. It fell into mostly academic and rigid formal structures. Audiences didn't want to hear anything new because of that.

And I was at the premiere of this work in Chicago, and all of a sudden we heard a piece that had grand melodies repeated over and over and over; and gargantuan Mahler/Strauss-sized orchestra; a folk group with two saxophones, mandolin, a banjo and an accordion. Even the old 1950s science-fiction sound of the theremin is in the piece. Seventy minutes long. It is an incredible workout for everyone on the stage, not the least of which is the person who serves as the narrator and the soprano. It's just extraordinary.

You'll never hear a voice like this again, that I can think of. I'd never heard anybody like it.

So to have John on Sunday and then to do David's piece really, in many ways, sums up what I think I can be very proud of, having this variety of musics, presenting music by people like John Corigliano and Christopher Rouse and John Adams and Joan Tower and Jennifer Higdon.

These names may not be familiar to all of you, but within musical circles they are the giants of our time, because one of the questions I was asked eight years ago was, "Where are the new Beethovens?" Well, there may not be a new Beethoven, but we don't need a new Beethoven. We need these voices, these people whose music is individual, that speaks to us in a very direct way. And we know who wrote it within the first minute of its conception. And there's no country that's better at this than the United States. We produce the most original and artistic voices in composition anywhere in the world.

The interesting thing for me is that I've seen in my lifetime the antipathy towards music in our time change to an embracing of it. People are not frightened anymore about the new music. They're

curious and they're interested because the composers themselves, due to Mr. Del Tredici's "Final Alice", open the door for them to simply express what they felt and what they thought.

I said back then in response to a question about Broadway, an area I don't know so much about, "The nature of Broadway theater has given itself more to spectacle than it has to musical content. And it would be nice if the musicals themselves could contain a great deal more substance within the music." That's still true.

But it's a broader issue now, because it extends into opera very easily. We are at a time now when the productions of opera have become more important than the works themselves. All you have to do is pick up pretty much any review of an operatic evening and most of the attention is focused on how it looks. The musical quality is usually addressed second.

I would accept that if we didn't always refer to the operas first by the person who composed them, the musical part. And I suppose I would accept it if a lot of the people who produce and direct them would at least try to observe what it is that the composer had in mind.

One year, in Hamburg, I did a production of "Tosca." I'm not by nature an opera conductor. I'm firmly implanted in the world of orchestra and chamber music, so for me opera is always a little bit of an adventure, and usually I wind up not wanting to have that adventure again. (Laughter.)

Because in Hamburg, prior to the first rehearsals I met with the director, who said, "Everybody knows `Tosca.'" Everybody knows the first act is in the church, so we're not going to have a church. Everybody knows that there is supposed to be a portrait of Tosca being painted by Cavaradossi. Well, we're going to have a seven-foot easel, but it will be blank because we all know what she's supposed to look like." And he went on and on like that. "We all know that she's supposed to jump off the top of the castle and kill herself, so she's not going to jump anywhere. (Laughter.) She's going to point offstage and say, `We will meet before God,' and the curtain will come down."

I said, "Well, you know, it's a very interesting concept. Everybody knows it begins with that pedal E-natural and then there are the three chords, so why don't we just start in the fifth bar?" (Laughter.)

"You don't do that!"

I said, "Why not? You're changing it; why can't I?" I said, "In fact, that big clarinet solo in the third act, let's change it to the bassoon." (Laughter.)

"No," he said. "No, you can't alter what the composer wrote."

I said, "You can. Why can't I?"

Didn't really have a response to that. Didn't really realize I

was being sarcastic. (Laughter.)

But the gulf between what the composer's intentions were and what you see on the stage in so many instances just makes it difficult for me personally to deal with the opera world. I deal more in the abstract. This is what the composer has written; this is what it says to me; I try to convey it to people in the best way possible.

It is interesting in our time that two things have happened that have made opera once again a little bit more popular. Certainly,

leaving aside the Three Tenors, we can say that having the titles up there have made a big difference. But there's a good news and bad news situation here, isn't there? The good news is, now you know what the singers are singing about. And the bad news is, now you know what the singers are singing about. (Laughter.)

Some of those stories, I don't know, my conducting teacher used to say -- he was French -- he said that there were three things in the world he didn't understand. He did not understand the rules of baseball, he couldn't figure out the air suspension on a Citroen, and he really couldn't figure out the plot of "Trovatore." (Laughter.) Aside from that, he knew everything else there was to know.

The other thing that has been intriguing is to see the development of operatic productions in movie theaters. And I think it's great that it's reaching a new audience, but along the way, something is a little bit unusual, isn't it. And that's that it's not intended as a movie. A stage director has a vision of how it's going to be on the stage. It is designed for people in the hall to encompass the entire stage or whatever else as an audience member you want to see. The close-ups are not what you have when you're sitting in the audience. So you're really seeing the vision of the film director, his take on the stage director's production.

The ideal, of course, is to actually have opera productions that are done specifically for film and for the theater, but that's very expensive. And I also wonder if over the long run, since there are not that many operas that we consider to be standard, if we really will need to see "Boheme" every year. But we'll see. It's been a fascinating journey to see opera take these bold leaps that it's much more difficult for orchestras themselves to do.

I was asked could I describe an embarrassing moment in my career. At that time I said, yes, there was one time when I came from London and got off the plane, was whisked down to the base of the Arch of St. Louis to conduct the Fourth of July program, was told that "We do the National Anthem first," and I couldn't remember how the anthem went -- (laughter) -- because I'd just been in London and had done "God Save the Queen." And our anthem starts with an upbeat, and theirs doesn't. And I just gave a gesture, and it was like, uh-oh. (Laughter.) But it didn't matter; they played it anyway. (Laughter.)

But I did say back then, I've never walked onstage with my fly unzipped. That happened in 2008. Hopefully nobody remembers that.

Back in 2000, I talked about music education. That situation has

not changed all that much. When I was in public school for most of my life, my high school had three choruses, two bands, an orchestra and a composer-in-residence -- public school.

There are wonderful music programs in our area here, both in Virginia and in Maryland. And as we travel around the country with the NSO residency programs, we've discovered some fine, fine examples of music education. But we've also discovered places that have no music programs whatsoever.

Arts education needs to be mandatory. It needs to be part of the curriculum, not something you do before or after school starts. Leaving aside the statistics that get cited all the time, about SAT scores and how music improves that, it's simply a part of history.

What better example for a young person, when describing the Napoleonic era, than citing Beethoven, in the Third Symphony, who dedicates this work to Napoleon, hears that Napoleon declares himself emperor of Europe and, in a fury, takes the inscription and scratches it out of the music?

You can actually see the score where that happens. And then you hear those first two chords. (Sings.) It's as if he's angry. It brings that to life.

And there's not one great piece of music that, in some way, doesn't reflect part of history, be it from Copland to Mahler to Strauss to Schubert, Haydn. Music helps bring all that to life.

I suggested back then, I was surprised to see that, I was thinking back then, that as a stopgap measure, because of economics, that perhaps history teachers should be brought up to also incorporate the history of the arts as part of teaching history itself. So it hasn't happened yet but it's still possible there.

I said, you think when you go to work with an orchestra, it's just all about walking on the stage, making music, going home.

Not (an average ?) job exactly, but as a job, it's wonderful. You never think about the longer-range implications of what you do.

That changed on 9/11. It changed for two reasons. I was not in the States on that day. I was in London, disconnected from friends and family, getting ready to conduct something called "The Last Night of the Prom." It was in London, a traditional, very nationalistic, some say jingoistic event. When I finally got to a television, after seeing the horrific images what stuck with me was what the Congress did. They went on the steps, and they didn't speak. They sang. They used music to convey the feeling of this country.

It reminded me of the power that music has. And that evening, three nights later in the Albert Hall, to hear 6,000 people singing our National Anthem, perhaps with more passion than I've ever heard it sung before in our own country, was one of the most moving experiences. I'll never forget that night.

If any of you are so inclined, you can go to YouTube and you will

see under me, under the videos, the "Barber Adagio for Strings," which we played that evening, replete with imagery of people in the parks who were watching our telecast. A couple who wrapped themselves up in an American flag, weeping. Pictures of military, police and firemen dumbstruck, shocked, while this astonishing piece of music passes. You really don't think about what it means until it has meaning.

"How is digital technology changing your world of music?" I was asked eight years ago. I said, "It's worse." Boy, was I wrong. Digital technology is actually turning out to be the saving grace for so many institutions. You hear about the decline of classical music on radio, but the reverse is true. If you own cable or a satellite, you have access to more channels of classical music than you've ever had at one time. The same is true for the competing satellites, XM and Sirius.

Even AOL has six channels of their radio programming devoted to classical music, including one of contemporary music. There's never been a better time for the experience of musics of all kind.

The problem is that it's never been a worse time for the experience of music at the local level. The one thing none of these technologies can provide is the ability to know what's going on within your own community. And it is vital that we continue to support local classical music programming, if nothing else but just to inform the public of what is happening in our own area.

Let me wrap this up before questions by saying that I fully intended after leaving here not to do anything other than guest conduct for about seven months of the year, take time off; I'm writing a book.

Another project that actually came up in the education one was that my son, who's going to be 14 next week, had asked me earlier in the year if I could encourage his middle school teacher to have him play piano at the holiday concert. And I wasn't about to get involved in the politics of middle school, but I said, "What happens if I write you an arrangement for piano with your string ensemble?" realizing the teacher's probably not going to turn that down, if I really do it. (Laughter.) So anyway, I did, and then I wrote a second one. They turned out not to be too bad. And in July I will actually be now a published arranger with a collection of 12 holiday versions for piano and strings for the middle school level.

What turns out to be interesting is that if you play a string instrument or if you sing or you play a wind instrument or hand bells you have a chance to participate in education in your school with other kids. When you play the piano, you're alone. This is, as it turns out, the very first time anybody's ever thought to combine the piano with other instruments in the schools. And so the publishing company, Hal Leonard, has taken this on and they're going to distribute it to 25,000 music teachers in the United States.

So I think two things are important here: One is that I've been able to provide a new avenue for music education for this age group and the second is I'm going to make some money off my son. (Laughter.)

Anyway, I fully expected to just have more time to do projects like this. And then last June, simply as a guest conducting date, I was in Detroit. And we had a terrific week. I wasn't looking for a job. I'd forgotten even they were looking for a music director. I had no idea. And we quickly organized a second week, just to make sure that we were really all on the same page. And so lo and behold, I have a job that I really didn't expect.

And people have asked me, "Well, why would you go to Detroit after Washington?" And the reason is because it's a very different kind of job. I would never want to go and do something the same way twice.

Detroit has the most troubled economy in the United States, so what are we going to do there? We're going to make sure that the arts agenda is separated and available for more and more people.

And it starts already with various fundraising efforts we have in the area of education. On Tuesday I have to travel up there to watch ASIMO, the robot from Honda, conduct the orchestra. (Scattered laughter.) Yeah, we know what that is. We know exactly what it is. But the million dollars that Honda is giving, plus more to come after that, goes towards providing instruments for young people and music lessons. We will survive ASIMO doing "The Impossible Dream" that night. (Laughter.)

It's a wonderful city. It's a great orchestra. It has a phenomenal hall. And if I was going to do anything after here, it needed to be in a place where I feel I could do some good and help out in a community.

But I will still write the book, and I will still continue to write the arrangements. And I look forward to other times when I'll come back and be able to visit with all of you again. (Applause.)

MS. WERNER: Just being a fine musician doesn't necessarily qualify you to become a conductor. What qualities are needed to be a good conductor?

MR. SLATKIN: You need a lot of chutzpah. You need to be very confident and assured. You do not need to play the instruments of the orchestra, but you need to know what it is that they all do. And more important, you have to know how they connect. You have to be a father, a mother, a psychiatrist, a doctor. Most of all, you have to be a human being and understand that there are 90 to 100 individuals up there who all have their own lives besides. Your job, very similar to a coach of a sports team, is to spend your rehearsal time putting all the things in motion that you're going to set aside for the game. And then when the game comes, you improvise and have a good time.

MS. WERNER: What do you see as the musical -- what do you see on the musical horizon for Washington? And what would you like to see happen here?

MR. SLATKIN: One of the things that I thought was important back in 2000 was that we would try very hard to make Washington a

destination artistically for visitors as well as our monuments and our politics. I think between the orchestra and the opera and now the Baltimore Symphony's growth, a lot of that has happened.

And I'm confident that the NSO will continue to grow in whatever direction it chooses after this. There's no question about it. It's a terrific orchestra. And we have great core support from the public.

I would hope that there would still be a commitment to the music of our own country. But that's going to be more in the hands of whoever succeeds me and whatever direction they wish to take the orchestra.

But most of all, we have to represent our country. And the best we can do is to continue to grow the orchestra, put the best possible product out there continue our strong work in education and relate in many ways to all of you and all of the public.

MS. WERNER: How has the Washington audience changed in your 12 years?

MR. SLATKIN: You hear a lot about, the audience is getting older. They aren't. They're always about the same.

People get their careers going. Their families are established. Now they have decisions to make about what to do in their leisure time.

Perhaps if anything has changed, it's that people have more choices now about what to do with that free time. And I think the decline of education, in the schools, has probably contributed somewhat to the difficulties that different institutions experience with audience numbers, people actually filling the seats.

I think a lot of the education initiatives, that we've put into place, may help grow that over time. But here's something to think about that I've been also obviously thinking about.

I think the makeup of the audience is going to be quite different 15 to 20 years from now, as we see particularly more people from China settling in the United States.

Now, why is that? Because as Lang Lang told me a few weeks ago, there are 40 million piano students in China and 25 million violin students. Many of them will come to this country, as they already are. They will study here and they will stay. But because the education system in China encourages the arts, they will already have the knowledge and they will become our concertgoers.

The New York Philharmonic last year had seven vacancies within the orchestra. Four of them were filled by Chinese musicians. And I think this attests to the importance that the Chinese have placed on the arts.

You see the same thing going on, by the way, in some Latin American countries, Venezuela. But Spain is turning out to be the hotbed in Europe. I was there a few weeks ago.

We did a concert, with the national orchestra of Spain, started at 7:30, finished at 9:30. We got out of the building. The Cincinnati Symphony came in, played a concert at 10:30 to a sold-out house.

The next night, we had our 7:30 concert. 10:30, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment showed up and played Haydn, "The Creation." Sold out.

These places are really vital. And I think in Washington, what would probably change and would be different is that the makeup of our audience will grow. But it will grow, because the population of the United States is changing.

MS. WERNER: Along those lines, you mentioned combining piano for your son's school. What do you think about combining some Chinese traditional instruments with the orchestra, in particular during Asian American Month?

MR. SLATKIN: I think anything we can do, to expose people to the variety of musics that are out there, is all for the better.

I'm not a big fan of falling into -- just because there's a holiday --
I mean, for instance, this year is Elliott Carter's 100th birthday. Now, Mr. Carter is a revered composer in our country. It's not a music that speaks to me, so I'm not doing anything, because you don't want a bad performance of Carter from me. It's up to other people to do it. And I tend not to be swayed so much by anniversaries. I think you do something because you believe in the product.

There are several wonderful Chinese composers now in the United States -- Chen Yi, and Zhou Long is here. I just did the premiere of a piano concerto of Tan Dun, the man who wrote, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," or crouching dragon, hidden -- whatever it is. (Laughter.) Something's crouching and something is hidden. (Laughter.)

And these are people who do combine areas of native music from where they come and Americanisms that they've acquired since they've been here. So I love the idea of cross-pollination of cultures because it winds up creating a whole new musical ethic.

MS. WERNER: There are many people in Washington who have never heard the NSO and would probably never consider going. How do you reach out to those people?

MR. SLATKIN: That's a sort of loaded question, because the chances are that most of you have heard the NSO in some way. You might have watched them on the Fourth of July television broadcast, you might have seen some of the players around doing chamber music somewhere. It's very difficult to avoid us. (Laughter.)

However, our constituency -- our constituency, as in most of classical music, really primarily focuses on about four and a half to 5 percent of any given population. We do not expect the people who go

regularly to hear Willie Nelson to come to hear "Bruckner's Six" the next week. And that's as it should be. Everybody gravitates to their own artistic preference.

But what we can do is at least to make ourselves available so people know what we are doing and when we are doing it. A lot of the things we're planning in Detroit are very much geared towards that. We'll have performances next season by artists as diverse as Edgar Meyer, Bela Fleck, the banjoist, Zakir Hussain, the tabla player, on and on. So we're trying to reach out there to diverse audiences, not with the idea that they're going to become permanent members of an

ongoing audience, but just to say, "Here we are. We're going to put something on that maybe will appeal to you that you haven't thought about and will introduce you a little bit to the Detroit Symphony."

We've tried to do that with the NSO as well, with our composer portrait series, with our family programs that we've been doing. And it was interesting last week, at the composer portraits.

This is something we started six years ago, where it's basically trying to fill a void of the education and where you learn the life story of the composer. We take apart a piece or two. And for those concerts we saw, one, very good houses, which is great for Copland, but we also saw a lot of new faces. And maybe it's enough to encourage them to say, "Well, that was really interesting and it's not so intimidating. Maybe we should take a chance and come more often." We'll have to see.

MS. WERNER: The National Philharmonic at Strathmore provides free admission to young people from ages 7 to 17. Should more orchestras adopt a similar approach?

MR. SLATKIN: It depends on the budget of the orchestra and if they want to stay in business or not. The music business is really about trying to lose as little as possible. It's never been about making any money. And there are certainly -- we have benefits that we give to our young people. But the National Philharmonic budget is nowhere near the epic proportions that we have here.

I think we can probably do more, as every orchestra can, about opening up things, perhaps even rehearsals, to groups. I mean we certainly have a number of young people's programs where these are free. I know the Baltimore Symphony's cutting its ticket prices. A lot of it's proportional to what your income ratio is. Our budget is very high, and we have to do the most we can to have those ends meet; otherwise, we will not be around. But I do think that anything we can do to encourage young people to come in, whether it's pricing or programming, you have to do it. You have to start getting those people in there now. But it's also based on them having some background in music, as well.

MS. WERNER: Washington audiences have the reputation of being rude. Sir Neville Marriner once said that in Washington, you don't get a standing ovation, you get a standing evacuation. (Laughter.) Have you ever experienced this phenomenon anywhere else?

MR. SLATKIN: I thought he was saying that about New York. No, New York is always called the walking ovation. Here? No. I'm surprised to hear -- I wonder when he said it, because here really the audiences do sort of stick around until it's all over. You will occasionally see people leave because they don't like what they're hearing. That's going to happen; do it in the movies, too. So I don't agree with Sir Neville.

So -- although Sir Neville has had some wonderful lines in the past. You know, there's a -- not a controversy, but there's a lot about the return to trying to play music the way it might have sounded in the time of the composer, be it Bach or Haydn or Mozart. And my line about that really is more that we can try to play it that way, but we can't listen to it that way. Your ears that have heard Stravinsky and Andrew Lloyd Webber and Rolling Stones, that influences how you listen to earlier music. Sir Neville was a little more succinct. He said, "If Bach had had a modern toilet, he would have used it." (Laughter.)

MS. WERNER: You are often a guest conductor with major orchestras. There is usually a limited amount of rehearsal time. Are there other problems you encounter besides limited rehearsal time?

MR. SLATKIN: I think you learn to adjust. You're told you have four rehearsals, three, five, whatever it happens to be. You get to know the orchestra; you make sure the program is planned in such a way that you can accomplish what you have to get done. I actually had the reverse problem with the BBC in London when I was there for four years. They had too many rehearsals. We'd have seven and eight rehearsals for a concert. So we kind of beat the pieces to death. And by the time you got to the performance, the level of spontaneity, for me, personally, disappeared.

I like to have just a little bit of edge, just enough that tells an orchestra: Okay, we know the piece, but there's still something we don't know. And I like to keep a little bit of edge that way.

So I've never found it restrictive at all.

MS. WERNER: When you need to study a new score or renew a score, do you put a certain amount of time for this?

MR. SLATKIN: I'm a late night person. Studying for me doesn't start till about 1:00 in the morning. Somehow it stays with me.

I don't set aside an amount of time. It depends on the pieces. As we get towards the summer, it's usually a little bit easier, because it's mostly pieces that I will have done several times, because summer programming is that way.

When a new piece comes, I have to look at it as soon as I can, just to get an idea of how much time I'll need to learn it. But for me as a conductor, it's really not a set time. Instrumentalists will tell you differently. They might say, "Yeah, I try to hold two to three hours" or whatever it happens to be, because they do it -- they have their own instrument. But I'm a conductor; I don't have or want the orchestra in the room where I study. I can only know how it's

going to be when I get to see them for the first time, which is usually two days before the first performance. That's just how it is for conductors. We have to do most of our work in our head and try to translate that idea to them and the other members of the orchestra as we go along.

MS. WERNER: How far in advance do you plan a season?

MR. SLATKIN: About a year and a half, maybe two years, because soloists and other conductors get booked up early. One reason next year I can only do five weeks in Detroit, in my first season, is because when the announcement was made of my appointment in November, I'd already had a full calendar, and we had to move things around.

So I already know, for instance, where I'm going to be in March and April of 2010. That's good and bad. Most people would be envious. "Oh, he actually knows he's going to have a job then." But on the other hand, it takes away a certain kind of flexibility that as I get older I'd kind of like to have.

MS. WERNER: You have played a fair amount of new music and even commissioned some music. Do you find good acceptance for new music among the audience? And how do the musicians feel about learning new music?

MR. SLATKIN: I think it's mostly to the audience to determine if they like it or not. What I can say is that for the most part, I try to commission or play new music that speaks to me, because if I can't sell it to myself, it's not possible to sell it to the audience or the orchestra.

As far as how members of the orchestra take to it, I think it depends on everybody's's personal tastes. When you play in an orchestra, you have the disadvantage of not really being able to hear the total result, as the audience hears it. You're sitting in the middle of all the other players. You don't have an idea of what everybody else is doing. You're just one part of a gigantic machine, and not necessarily knowing what everybody else does.

But I think, if the orchestra sees the commitment from the conductor, that they're willing to go along with it.

And then if they see the audience reaction, that also makes a big difference.

And again, this week is a very good example. I suspect that when we started "Final Alice," at least half the orchestra went, "Uh, there's so many notes, and it's so long, and it's so repetitive." But then by the time we got to the dress rehearsal yesterday, and everybody began to see how the shape and the architecture was going to occur, and certainly by the time we did the performance, maybe not everybody, but I think the majority understood why we were doing it and probably even bought into it as well.

MS. WERNER: How do you decide which pieces to present in a concert?

MR. SLATKIN: Actually, that's almost two questions, because as the music director it's your job to plan a whole season. So it's not just individual concerts; it's what happens over the course of a whole year.

An orchestra was sometimes negatively described as being a museum. I don't understand why that was a negative. I see nothing wrong with it. You never see a museum described as being an orchestra. So isn't it our job to take the masterpieces of the past, take a fresh look at them and present them for today's audiences? I think that's exactly what we're supposed to do. But in addition to that, it's our job to encourage the new, as well. You know, it's the pieces we might be looking at 50 to a hundred years from now that other people will be reexamining.

A pretty good example here was Leonard Bernstein. I never really knew Bernstein until five years before he died. A lot of people think I knew him since I was a kid. I didn't, only from the television shows. And so every time we were supposed to meet, something always went wrong. He either -- one night in Chicago he fell off the podium and injured himself. He was wearing a medallion underneath his shirt, and he had to be taken to the hospital. We were supposed to have dinner together; that didn't work. And other things like that had occurred.

Finally, I was in Tanglewood one summer, and I saw that he was conducting Saturday night. I had the Friday night concert and the Sunday concert. And I thought: If I program a piece of his, he's got to come, and I'll meet him. So we did a piece called "Facsimile."

It's actually an earlier work of his, not played very often, but a wonderful score, I think. And it didn't go so well, the performance. The orchestra wasn't convinced, and I was a little on edge.

And there were these stories about what Bernstein would do to you at intermission if he didn't like the way you played the piece. And I forgot what the concerto was after "Facsimile." I forgot it because all I was thinking about is, "What's he going to do to me?" (Soft laughter.) So intermission came and Mr. Bernstein came back and looked up and said, "Well, it wasn't what I intended when I wrote it." (Laughter.) Ooh. And then he said, "But I think I understand how you came to your conclusions."

And he proceeded to analyze my performance, trying to second-guess how I came to those tempo considerations and things like that. Actually he didn't get it right at all. But what happened was that he became aware that in order for his music to survive after he was gone, it would have to undergo other people's interpretations.

It's hard in this age, when you have recordings that are from the person who created the piece. After all, that's as authentic as you can get. But if you listen to a Bernstein performance, of the same piece that he might have recorded in the 1940s or '50s and then again in the late-'60s, '70s and then again in the '80s, you hear vast discrepancy in his own performances.

That tells us we're always open to being able to change our minds

and have new thoughts and ideas about the entire repertoire. So we have to assume the same would be true for a Beethoven, for a Brahms, Mozart, Mahler, whoever it is. There is no one way, and there is no right way. But there are a lot of wrong ways.

(Laughter.)

MS. WERNER: What advice would you give to upcoming, rising and eager young composers that want to be a part of and keep classical music alive today?

MR. SLATKIN: I think first, we need to define classical. And those walls -- and believe me, it's a wall -- are coming down. Classical does not mean what it used to mean. It was those stuffy programs of dead white male American and European composers usually, actually not American.

So part of it is keeping the traditions of the past alive. And part of it is finding new ways to speak to today's audience.

So if you're a young composer, the best advice I can give you is, write what you feel. Don't write what anybody tells you to. Write what's in your heart. Write what's in your mind.

It's incredible, when you think about it. It's just nothing but circles and lines, only 12 notes. That's it, for the Western culture anyway.

And from all that, for hundreds of years, this incredible variety of sounds and melodies and harmonies have come out. And composers continue to create new and original works of art.

So the young composer: You encourage people, by being yourself and perhaps writing something that nobody else has written before.

MS. WERNER: What would you recommend to someone, who knows little about classical and wants to learn much more?

MR. SLATKIN: Well, of course, this is where all these new channels of music are available to you. So most of them have something they call, you know, classical favorites. Or we used to call them pops. You can do that. And these used to be short snippets, so you get a feeling for it.

Not everybody likes everything. And in order to discover, it's better to discover it in short segments rather than big ones. In other words, if you see on our program that Mahler 7 is there. This is not what you go to for the first run at a classical music concert.

What I would suggest though here in Washington, almost anyplace, is, and I don't know if anybody ever does it. But I would actually call the person who's in charge, of the artistic planning for an orchestra, and ask their advice.

You see this person's the one who's helped prepare the programs for the music director. They're always accessible, and they can say, "Okay, well, what level of expertise do you have in the field?" And

you'll say, "Well, I really don't know very much. I didn't have something when I was kid. But I want to find out more." And that person will know where to steer you in terms of what kind of programs you might be interested in listening to.

MS. WERNER: An education question: A member heard you talk about education and schools and how you think music and math could be taught together. Can you tell us about this?

MR. SLATKIN: Music and math together? Well, music and history we've talked about. Music and math -- that's a tough one, because obviously everything in music can be boiled down to numbers. Everything we do is either in a tempo or there's a length of a note. But usually they kind of play against one another. Usually the idea that we're mathematic goes against the feeling of spontaneity in music. And numbers can only be one way, and music can be many ways.

A more interesting analogy, though, is music and medicine. A lot of people who started as musicians wound up being part of the medical profession. And I've tried to think about why that is. I don't know if you know this. In various cities there are orchestras comprised entirely of doctors, the Doctor Symphony in New York, the Doctor's Orchestra in L.A.

And I think it's actually because we do share something in common. Our job in music is to take what has already existed, for the most part, and bring it back to life. The medical professions try to sustain life. Maybe it's pulse that puts the two professions together.

MS. WERNER: We are almost out of time, but before asking the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of.

First of all, let me remind our members of our future speakers. On May 12th, Alexandra Cousteau, granddaughter of Captain Jacques Cousteau and co-founder of EarthEcho International, will discuss the importance of water conservation in the world water crisis. May 16th, Robert Mueller, director of the FBI will be here. And on May 19th, Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of the Defense will discuss war and decision.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with our centennial mug, featuring Eric Sevareid.

MR. SLATKIN: Oh. Thank you. Great. Oh, thank you.

MS. WERNER: And our last question: Which baseball team will you cheer for when you move to Detroit? (Laughter.)

MR. SLATKIN: Oh, I threw out the first pitch at a Tiger's game a few weeks ago. Nailed it. (Laughter.) Tough because three nights earlier Miss America had thrown out the pitch and really threw it well.

No, my grandfather settled in this country in 1904 in St. Louis. I was there. My father was born there. He was there for his childhood. I was there 27 years. My son was born there. The

Cardinals. And we're the first place and Detroit's not. (Laughter, applause.)

MS. WERNER: I'd like to thank you for coming today, and I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze, Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC Library for its research.

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Thank you, and we're adjourned.

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