

Severance Hall is rocked by 'Tashi' Concerto

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A musical cataclysm shook Severance Hall Wednesday night.

Charles Wuorinen's "Tashi" Concerto, which was given its world premiere by the Cleveland Orchestra and the Tashi ensemble, erupts in violent outbursts of sonic energy.

Rooted in expressionistic Schoenbergian soil, the thorny 30-minute work shoots out in jagged lines, dense textures, sharp accents and loud dynamics. Brilliantly organized within a tight rhythmic structure, the dramatic music assaults the ear drums, tenses the nerves and ties the stomach in knots.

Gripping from beginning to end, the complex composition is cast in the traditional three movements for full forces plus brief interludes for Tashi, a virtuoso ensemble consisting of pianist Peter Serkin, violinist Ida Kavafian, clarinetist Richard Stoltzman and cellist Fred Sherry.

Originally written for Tashi alone, the enlarged version employs the orchestra to expand, extend, cushion and separate materials played by the four soloists.

Less concerned with timbre than with texture and line, the music sticks mostly to conventional instrumental techniques. Throughout the work, however, intriguing instrumental doublings color the intricate musical fabric, and in the slow movement, the horns are assigned a particularly beautiful passage.

Powerfully performed under the composer's precise direction, the concerto made a strong first impression as a musical statement of intensity, substance and style.

Sharing the program, the first in the orchestra's two-concert Music for Today Series, was the world premiere of Donald Harris's "On Variations."

Timid in comparison to Wuorinen's work, the strictly organized chamber orchestra piece probably looks exquisite on paper.

Unfortunately, it sounds like "paper music," i.e., a work that was written according to a rigid set of self-imposed rules rather than a piece that sprang from an intuitive musical impulse.

Commissioned by the Musical Arts Association as part of its bicentennial observance, "On Variations" was admirably performed by members of the orchestra under the self-assured guidance of conducting assistant Kenneth Jean, who was making his Cleveland Orchestra podium debut.

Presented with the support of WMMS Radio, the informal evening was only partly devoted to performances. Filling out the program were a question-and-answer period and thought-provoking comments on new music by composers, performers and audience members.

Matthias Bamert, resident conductor-composer, served as host, and the crowd, though predictably small, was encouragingly responsive.

Charles Wuorinen's Sonata No. 2 for piano, which received its premiere performance Saturday afternoon at the Kennedy Center, should add significantly to the composer's already substantial reputation. It is music clearly contemporary in form but not modern for the sake of modernity. It is angular in its melodic lines but nonetheless emotionally expressive, ingenious in the way it uses textures, as well as the more substantial dramatic resources of piano.

The first performance made two things quite clear: This sonata requires considerable technique to achieve its proper effect, and pianist Jeffrey Swann, who played it at the Kennedy Center, has all the technique it demands.

Swann staked his claim to versatility at the beginning of the program with a graceful, fluent reading of Beethoven's Sonata in F, Opus 14, No. 1, which gave satisfaction if not a dazzling revelation. He was at his best in the program's most demanding music, Havel's "Gaspard de la Nuit," and charmingly unostentatious in two Liszt pieces, the haunting "Aux

Ruth Uebel