

CELEBRATING

SLATKIN

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA



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## Marie-Hélène Bernard

St. Louis Symphony Orchestra President & CEO

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Dear Leonard,

When you made your conducting debut with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1968, who could have imagined that we'd gather on the same stage 50 years later to celebrate a remarkable partnership – one that redefined what an American orchestra could – and continues – to be.

What you built with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra starting 50 years ago remains core to our mission. It's the solid bedrock we've been building on for the past five decades: enriching lives through the power of music.

Your years with the SLSO reshaped this orchestra, earning it the title of "America's Orchestra." You connected with our community – both here in St. Louis and on national and international stages. By taking this orchestra on the road, you introduced the SLSO and St. Louis to the world. You recorded with this orchestra more than any other SLSO music director, championing American composers and music of our time. Your passion for music education led to your founding of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, which is the premiere experience for young musicians across our region. Next year, we will mark the Youth Orchestra's golden anniversary and the thousands of lives it has impacted.

We admire you for your remarkable spirit and talent and for your amazing vision and leadership. We are thrilled you have returned home to St. Louis and look forward to many years sharing special moments together.

On behalf of the entire St. Louis Symphony Orchestra family, congratulations on the 50th anniversary of your SLSO debut. We are so grateful for what you continue to bring to this orchestra and this city.



## Slatkin Makes Debut Conducting Symphony

Leonard Slatkin, the new assistant conductor of the St. Louis Symphony, made his debut in St. Louis and his debut with a major symphony orchestra Sunday afternoon. The program was the first of the Sunday afternoon series and was made up of music by Schubert, Mahler and the three Strausses.

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**Stéphane Denève**

SLSO, Music Director Designate

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Dear Maestro Slatkin,

Cher Leonard,

The first time I ever heard the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra was thanks to one of your numerous magnificent recordings, and I know now how much this institution owes to your inspired musical directorship.

As I am about to follow your path, I would like, with the deepest respect and admiration, to congratulate you profusely for your amazing and on-going journey with our beloved orchestra. You have enriched not only its DNA but also its musical soul forever, and this is so precious! I thank you wholeheartedly for having shared already with me your passion for the entire community of St. Louis with such kindness and generosity. We are all looking forward to many many more of your concerts! De tout coeur, félicitations, bon 50ème anniversaire, et un grand bravo, cher Leonard!



# THE ORCHESTRA THAT DOES THINGS DIFFERENTLY

A ZESTY CONVERSATION WITH LEONARD SLATKIN  
by Doyle Armbrust

From the SLSO's April/May 2019 issue of *Playbill*

I've had the good fortune – and occasional breathtaking misfortune – of interviewing some of the most prominent figures in classical music. So SLSO fans, let me dish you the unvarnished, behind-the-curtain scoop on your Conductor Laureate: He's a treasure.

Conductors are often the most unpredictable beasts populating the musician phylum, coaxing a genuine response from them – one that doesn't feel pre-glazed for an eventual donut of a memoir – can be an elusive bit of business. The truth is, my first interaction with Leonard Slatkin played like one of those cherished, setting-the-world-to-rights conversations that are more at home in a pub than, say, in different time zones by way of a pair of glowing, overpriced rectangles. The maestro is disarming and easy with conversation, resolute in his convictions, and inspiringly curious. Here's the other headline: he loves St. Louis. In the interview below and even amongst the comments lost to the cutting room floor, Leonard Slatkin's admiration, gratitude, and fondness for the city is unequivocal.

**DOYLE ARMBRUST:** You strike me as someone whose sights are set in front of you, so I'm wondering how it feels when the occasion calls for looking back.

**LEONARD SLATKIN:** I tend not to look back – I guess when you've been doing this job as long as I have, you tend to focus on what you did right versus what you did wrong. Especially the years in St. Louis – it was a remarkable time – which was one reason my wife and I decided to move back to the city. It's where my career started, and it's even where my family started, when they came over from Russia in 1913. There are four generations of Slatkins that have St. Louis ties.

**DA:** I'm surprised to hear you say that, given where you are in your career, you're able to focus on what you did right. I feel that, along with my musician colleagues, all we can do after a concert is obsess about what tiny thing went wrong rather than celebrating what went right.

**LS:** But in the grand scheme of things, it winds up after all this time, those are just small blips on the radar. Of course, we always want to improve, but when people ask, "What would you do differently?," my answer is, "Not much!"

**DA:** What strikes you as unique to the St. Louis audience, specifically?

**LS:** While I was working here, I found it a very loyal audience – very devoted to the arts scene. They are aware of the history of the orchestra and what it's meant for the community. I was very fortunate that while I was here, we established ourselves as an important force around the country and the world. St. Louis strikes a balance between an urban way of living and the rural life of the Midwest. I loved being at the grocery or the ballgame, with people always coming up to greet me – it was sweet and honest.

**DA:** Were there moments during your tenure that you felt as though you were challenging or coaxing your audience toward music they hadn't yet encountered?

**LS:** I considered it all a big adventure for everybody, including myself. I tried to give the orchestra and the community more of a sense of belonging to our country. My question was, what could we do that wasn't being done by other orchestras? I didn't abandon Beethoven and Mahler, but to gain a national presence, we would perform American, Russian, and English works being ignored in other cities. It was our calling card. We were the orchestra that tried to do things differently.

**DA:** Would you consider that your legacy with the SLSO?

**LS:** One of them. If I had to identify something that I did that was meaningful – really meaningful – it was the formation of the youth orchestra. Nothing makes me prouder than the fact that it is still not only viable, but an important organization that continues to do very well. Several members of the Youth Orchestra went on to become members of the SLSO itself, and there are many in other orchestras around the country.

**DA:** It's amazing how that experience of being in a Youth Orchestra is so essential in their development as artists, whether or not they go on to be orchestral musicians.

**LS:** Not just as an artist, but a human being. These young people are learning how to communicate.

**DA:** Is there anything else you're particularly proud of?

**LS:** Back then, there was very little work being done by orchestras to

connect with their communities beyond the concert hall. In St. Louis, we started IN UNISON, and I remember distinctly going into African American Baptist churches on Sundays to experience the role that music played in the church services and to understand what music meant to their communities. Being Jewish, I didn't quite understand it before. In each of the congregations, music was truly savored, and that became a focal point for me.

**DA:** I'd imagine that outreach has changed quite a bit since your early days.

**LS:** Well, we've had 40 years of music education deteriorating in the school system. In my first year I did 83 young people's concerts. 83! This is something that we have to think about in general: How do we teach young people to value the arts in general and not just classical music?

**DA:** To jump back in time for a moment, do you remember the experience of first being offered your job in St. Louis?

**LS:** I was a student from 1964 to 1968, at Juilliard during the school year and at Aspen in the summer. In my third year, I became the assistant to Aspen's music director, Walter Susskind, and it was announced that he'd be going to St. Louis for the 1968/1969 season. That summer I led a performance and after I finished, Susskind and the executive director of the SLSO came up to congratulate me and to offer me the position of assistant conductor in St. Louis. It happened literally right after I performed. I made a grand total of \$8,000 that first year...[laughs]... I was living in luxury!



**DA:** I love these did-the-work meets right-place-right-time success stories.

**LS:** I was overwhelmed and didn't expect to have a job at 22. I figured that I'd be going on to some graduate degree. But for musicians, if you get the opportunity, the opportunity outweighs the piece of paper with a degree on it.

**DA:** Tell me about the two programs you're bringing to St. Louis for your 50th anniversary celebration with the SLSO.

**LS:** Every piece has a connection between myself, the orchestra, and the city. The Tchaikovsky refers back to our championing under-performed (at the time) works. The Barber was a major tour piece for us, and the album we recorded is an absolute highlight from my tenure here. The Rachmaninoff features pianist Olga Kern, who is one of the soloists I helped introduce to audiences. Then there's the Bernstein, who is a composer we were playing and recording at a time when only Bernstein himself was doing it. Believe it or not, the first commercial recording he made of his music was with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra! There's a recent commission by Loren Loiacono, a former student of Joan Tower who was once a composer-in-residence at the SLSO. And finally, we have a new song cycle from my good friend Jeff Beal who wrote the theme music for [the popular Netflix series] *House of Cards*, and who is an outstanding concert composer, as well. I could make three seasons' worth of programs with these connections – so I squeezed everything I could into these two weeks!

Doyle Armbrust is a founding member of the Grammy-nominated Spektral Quartet, and his writing can be found in *Chicago Magazine*, *WQXR's Q2 Music*, *Crain's Chicago Business*, *Time Out Chicago*, and the *Chicago Tribune*.

### Felicia Foland

SLSO Bassoon  
(1990 - present)

“One feature of Leonard's legacy with the SLSO that has become a beacon for area regional young musicians is, of course, the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, which Leonard founded in 1970. The Youth Orchestra feeds orchestras far beyond our city with its alumni, while nourishing young minds with the satisfaction of learning to make music and play an instrument. I cannot think of a better way for a young person to spend their time, nor a better investment in our future generations.”

### Sarah Hogan Kaiser

SLSO Double Bass  
(2004 - present)

“My first experience with Leonard Slatkin was when I was in the Youth Orchestra. He conducted us one week and I remember being in awe that he was on the podium in front of me, instead of me being in the audience as I had been for so many of his concerts. He founded the YO and now we were sharing the same stage. My experience in the YO gave me the dream to be a symphony musician. And my first rehearsal as an SLSO musician was led by Leonard. It was quite an experience.”

# Youth Symphony Impressive in Debut at Powell

By K. G. SCHULLER

An atmosphere of excitement and happy anticipation prevailed at the debut performance of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra which took place at Powell Hall Friday evening.

The ensemble of 126 young high school and college musicians ranging in age from 12 to 20 were selected from 550 applicants by the orchestra's conductor, Leonard Slatkin. They had been rehearsing under his direction every Saturday morning since the first week in October.





**A CASE OF WRITER'S CRAMP** being happily endured by Conductor Leonard Slatkin as he signed autographs after last night's debut concert of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra in Powell Hall. Highlights of the concert will be broadcast from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. tomorrow on KSD-TV, Channel 5. (Post-Dispatch Photo by W. Thomas)



Leonard leads the Youth Orchestra in April, 2019



**Joseph Schwantner**  
SLSO Composer-in-Residence  
(1982 - 1985)

“For as long as I can remember, music has been an all-consuming passion, evoking a sense of wonder of its many mysteries that enlivens and invigorates my imagination. As the orchestra’s first composer-in-residence, Leonard provided the opportunity for me to further explore those sonic worlds with his extraordinary skill and artistry along with the gifted musicians of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. It was a pleasure to be an advocate for his vision to enrich the orchestral repertoire with a broad spectrum of new music for our time. The legacy of Leonard’s splendid musical achievements in St. Louis will be long remembered, nourishing and enriching our country’s vibrant musical heritage. Personally, I remain grateful for his friendship and the deep insight and understanding he brought to the performances of my music.”

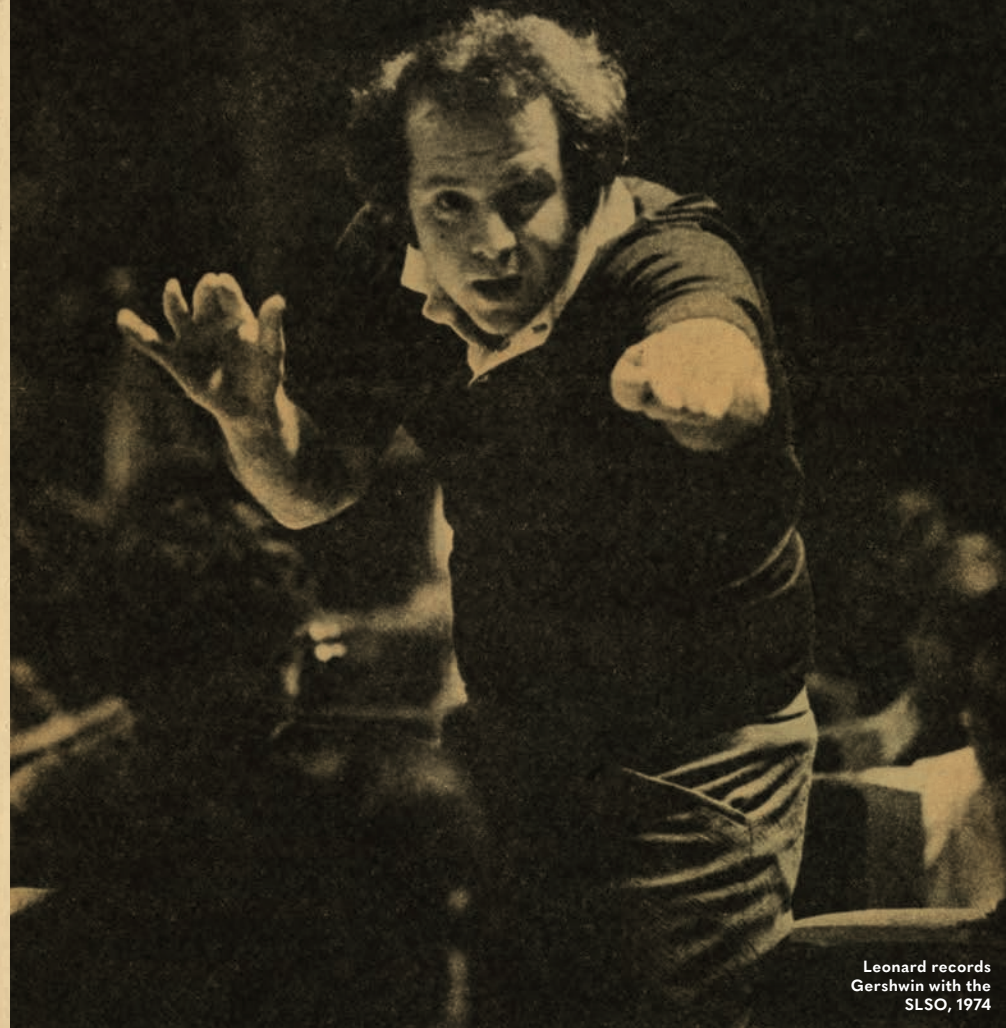
**Claude Baker**  
SLSO Composer-in-Residence  
(1991 - 1999)

“As the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra celebrates the 50th anniversary of Leonard Slatkin’s debut with the SLSO, there will be many tributes written praising his unquestionable brilliance as a conductor, his unswerving support of music by living composers, his efforts to create close ties between the orchestras he has led and the communities in which they are based – as well as his penchant for droll anecdotes and his passion for fine cuisine. Certainly, he is known by avid concert-goers to be all these things: consummate musician, ardent proponent of new music, tireless educator, talented raconteur, and discerning gastronome. It is unlikely, however, that the general public is aware of one of his greatest personal attributes – his fierce loyalty to those closest to him. William Penn wrote, ‘A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably.’ Penn’s words describe perfectly Leonard’s relationship with those whom he trusts – and who in turn trust him. I am fortunate indeed that Leonard Slatkin has championed my music with such zeal over the years I have known him; but I am more fortunate still that I can call him my friend.”

# Gershwin On Record

## Symphony Tapes Album

### Of His Concert Works



Leonard records  
Gershwin with the  
SLSO, 1974





Musicians crowd into the Green Room at a break to hear a playback of what they have just taped. Slatkin is at right, Joanna Nickrenz at left.

# Slatkin Leads Symphony in Gershwin Works

By K. G. SCHULLER

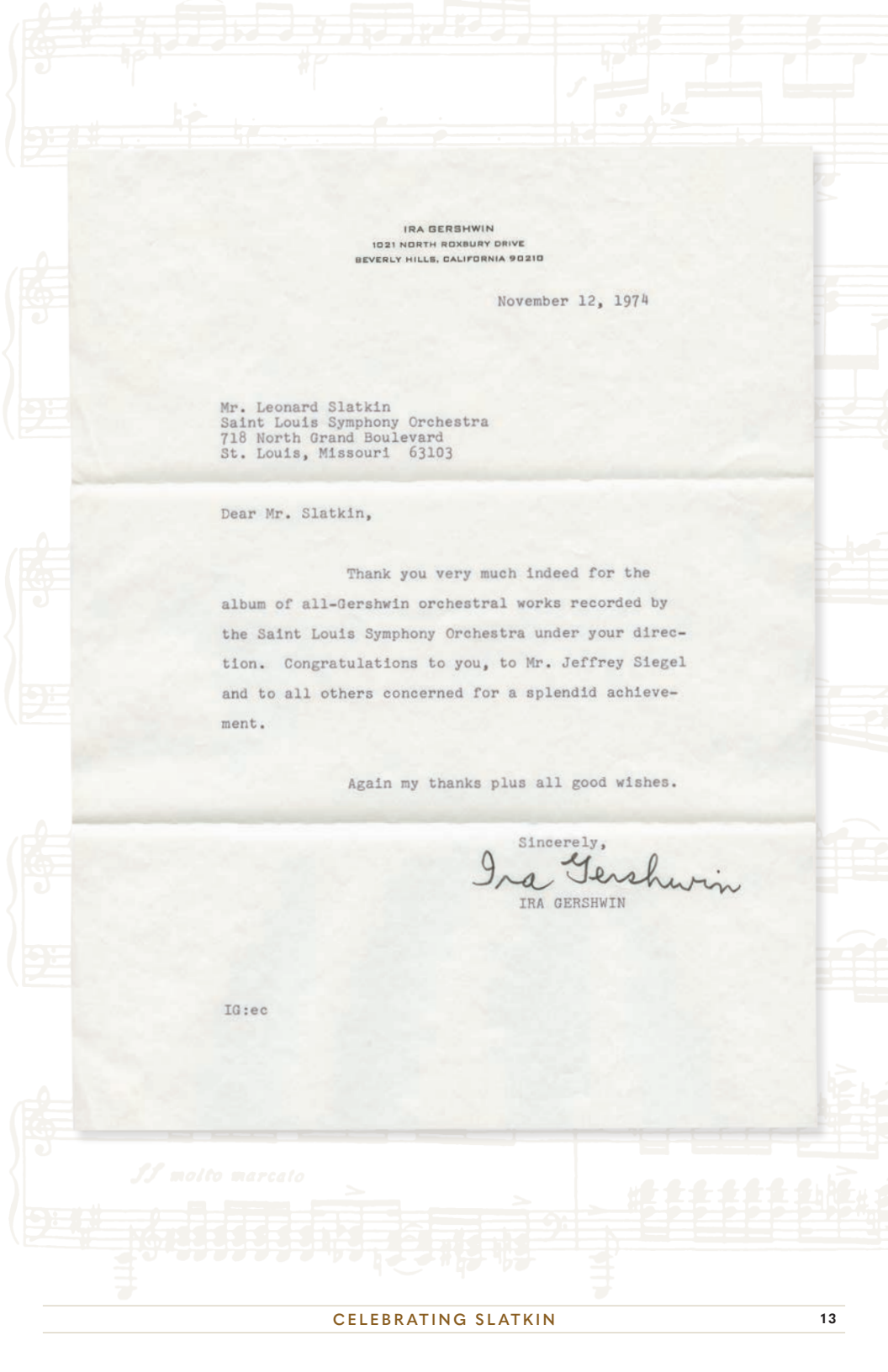
The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Leonard Slatkin, presented the ninth concert in its Sunday Festival series at Powell Hall Sunday afternoon. The program, devoted entirely to the music of George Gershwin, featured the American pianist Jeffrey Siegel in performances of Gershwin's Concerto in F and Rhapsody in Blue.

The attractive program, which drew a large and enthusiastic audience, opened with "An American in Paris." Slatkin kept the effervescent music bubbling, and the orchestra happily entered into the spirit of buoyant good humor and fun expressed by Gershwin's piece.

Jeffrey Siegel, an exceptionally gifted pianist with a generous tone and compulsive rhythmic drive, gave an exciting performance of the Concerto in F. In particular, the second movement — an expressive "blues" — was beautifully played both by the soloist and by several of the orchestra's first-chair players. Special mention must be made of Chandler Goetting's exquisite playing of the nostalgic trumpet solo. The last movement had the necessary brittle sound and strong accents which make the finale so effective.

Siegel was equally successful with the Rhapsody in Blue, a piece which maintains its youthful vigor in spite of its forty-five years of service.

The program closed with a symphonic synthesis of music from Gershwin's folk opera "Porgy and Bess" arranged by Robert Russell Bennett, which Slatkin treated with special affection.



IRA GERSHWIN  
1021 NORTH ROXBURY DRIVE  
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA 90210

November 12, 1974

Mr. Leonard Slatkin  
Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra  
718 North Grand Boulevard  
St. Louis, Missouri 63103

Dear Mr. Slatkin,

Thank you very much indeed for the album of all-Gershwin orchestral works recorded by the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra under your direction. Congratulations to you, to Mr. Jeffrey Siegel and to all others concerned for a splendid achievement.

Again my thanks plus all good wishes.

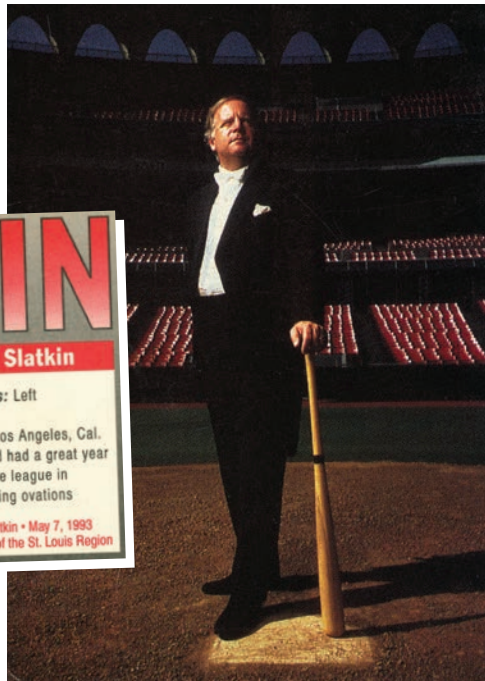
Sincerely,

Ira Gershwin  
IRA GERSHWIN

IG:ec

*ff molto marcato*





**Adam Crane**

SLSO Senior Vice President of External Affairs and Strategic Initiatives (2008 - 2017)

“I have so many fond memories of Leonard Slatkin. Growing up in St. Louis during the height of the Slatkin era in the '80s, I was fortunate to attend concerts regularly when he was on the podium. I remember coming to Powell Hall in second grade and watching Leonard conduct *Carnival of the Animals*. That experience led to a lifelong love of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, my decision to study cello, and ultimately my career in the music business. Leonard was always someone I admired greatly from the audience but really got to know him on a personal level when, in 2005, he was appointed the Principal Guest Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

I was working as the Director of Public Relations for the LA Phil at the time. In addition to our love of the SLSO, Leonard and I both share an extreme passion and love of St. Louis Cardinals baseball. Our regular routine during concerts when Leonard would conduct at the Hollywood Bowl included applause, bows, Leonard running backstage over to me for a Cardinals score update, then returning to the stage for more bows. We've remained in close touch since then and still discuss, debate, vent, cry, and celebrate all things Cardinals baseball. I'm thankful for his friendship and continually inspired by his remarkable accomplishments during his 50-year association with the SLSO.”



Jerry Naunheim/Post-Dispatch

**True Pitch**

**St. Louis Symphony conductor Leonard Slatkin winds up to toss out the first ball at the Cardinals-Cincinnati Reds game Friday night at Busch Stadium. The formally attired maestro then doffed his baseball cap and was whisked by chauffeured Rolls-Royce to Webster Groves to conduct the Opera Theatre of St. Louis.**



## Slatkin, St. Louis Symphony clearly are in first rank



Leonard Slatkin conducted the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra at Orchestra Hall Wednesday night.

### CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Robert C. Marsh

**C**hicago does not normally think of Leonard Slatkin as an orchestra builder, although his work with the Grant Park Symphony in the 1970s would justify such a reputation.

His problem is that he is presently regarded primarily as a guest conductor of the Chicago Symphony, which was, admittedly, in prime condition when he first came to it and thus in no need of reshaping from his hands.

It was therefore highly instructive to hear him at long last with the St. Louis Symphony, which he has led for 10 years. He brought the ensemble to Orchestra Hall Wednesday night and established in the course of two hours of music that the St. Louis orchestra must be considered in the very highest group of American symphonic organizations. This is his work, and he should view it with the greatest pride and satisfaction.

St. Louis claims to be the second-oldest symphony orchestra in the country—right after the New York Philharmonic—although some scholars dispute this. In my mind it may well be a finer orchestra than the Philharmonic is these days, which makes the issue of age somewhat irrelevant.

In sound and style, the St. Louis is distinctively an American orchestra. It has a bright, clear sound. It plays with precision and well-developed dynamics over a firm rhythmic beat. This American style was not, in fact, developed by American conductors. Arturo Toscanini and Artur Rodzinski were two of its principal architects, but American conductors accepted it and made it part of their musical viewpoint.

St. Louis Symphony, Leonard Slatkin conducting, at Orchestra Hall Wednesday, Symphony No. 85, "The Queen," Haydn: "Pupol Vuh," Ginastera; Symphony No. 3, Copland.

Slatkin is a fine Haydn conductor because he has a firm grasp of the proper Haydn sound and texture, a splendid intuitive sense of the classic forms in which the works are cast, and a true zest for the inner vitality of this music. He has no doubt that these are works of genius, and he leaves you without any uncertainty on the matter. The Paris symphonies are unusually rich in content, and No. 85, dedicated to Marie Antoinette, is filled with unusual grace.

Ginastera's "Pupol Vuh," originally commissioned by Eugene Ormandy, was left unfinished—or supposedly so—at the composer's death and, hence, left unplayed. Preparing it for its world premiere some days ago, Slatkin became convinced that it is only fractionally incomplete. (It certainly does not lack a conclusive ending.)

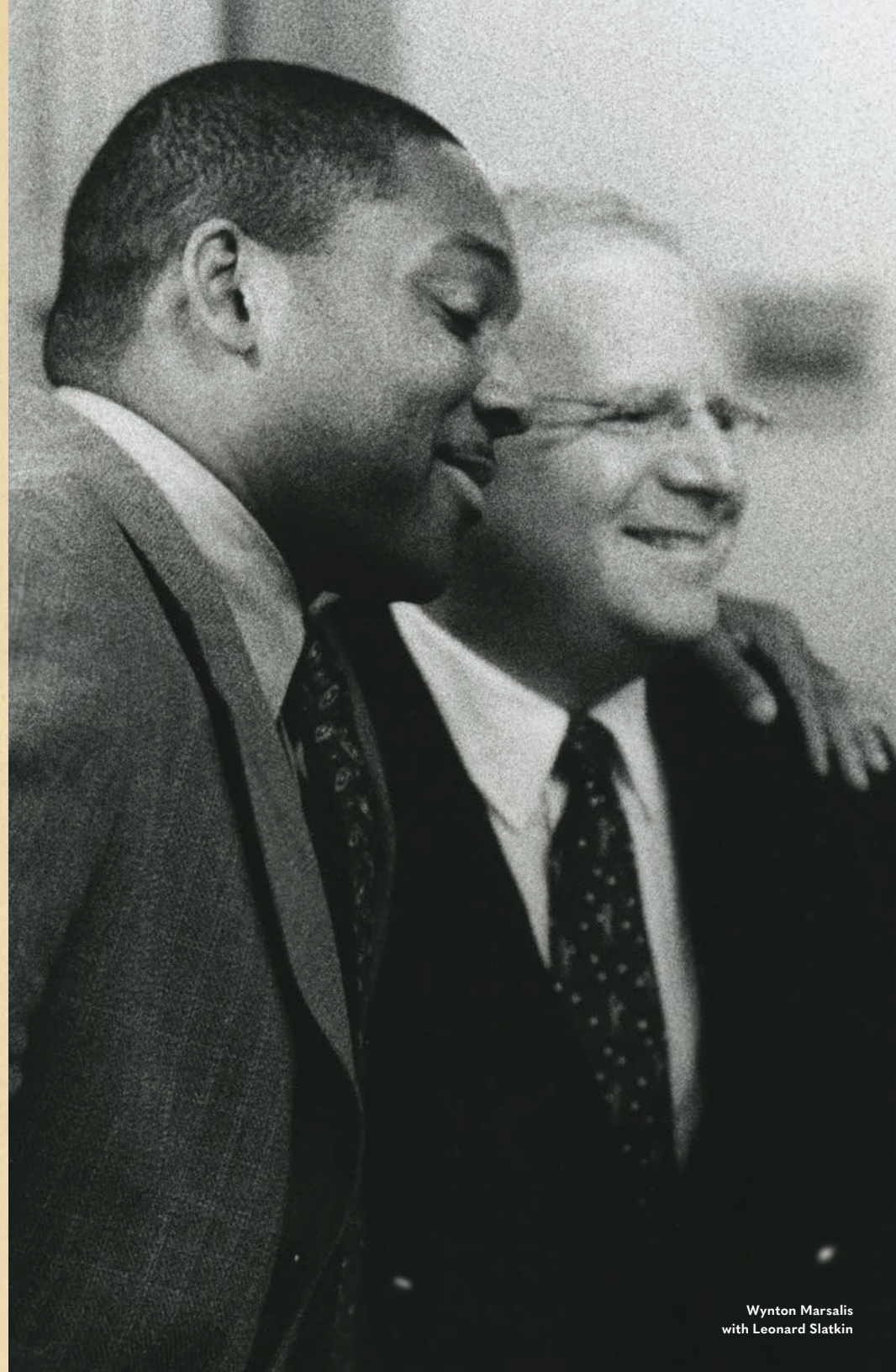
What remains is possibly the finest large-scale orchestra work by the composer, music inspired by the Mayan creation myths that is filled with drama, color and the most evocative instrumental effects. The performance was exceptionally convincing.

Copland's Third Symphony, from 1946, incorporates his earlier Fanfare for the Common Man. It is an American classic in both style and content. This was a performance that gave it the integrity of Beethoven, that reminded us on every page that this is a masterpiece to cherish as part of our national legacy.

### Thomas Drake

SLSO Associate Principal Trumpet  
(1987 - present)

“Leonard’s legacy is two-fold. First, he put the SLSO on the national and international stage with tours of the Far East, Europe, along with both coasts of the United States, weekly national radio broadcasts on NPR, and an extraordinary amount of recording. Secondly, his deep interest in ‘forgotten’ American composers led to many Grammy-nominated recordings, thereby leading to a resurgence of interest in music which might have gone unnoticed and ignored.”



Wynton Marsalis  
with Leonard Slatkin



## Symphony is superb in St. Louis premiere

By K. G. S CHULLER

Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra presented a superb all-orchestral program at Powell Hall featuring an exciting St. Louis premiere performance of Witold Lutoslawski's Concerto for Orchestra and Sibelius' popular Symphony No. 2 in D Major.

Mozart's Divertimento in F Major, K. 138, a youthful three-movement for string orchestra, was a pleasant curtain raiser for the Thursday night program.

## The Slatkin Years

by Tim Page

### St. Louisans are a proud bunch.

And justly so, considering the area's many attractions – the “mighty Mississippi” in midstream; the vast, sumptuous Forest Park; the great Arch (dubbed – by some Easterner, no doubt – the “Gateway to the West”); the extraordinary mansions in the Central West End; the seasonal heroics of the St. Louis Cardinals.

Still, it is doubtful that even the most fervent local booster could have predicted the all-but-unprecedented rise to national – and, indeed, international – prominence of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra during the 1980s. To put it another way – it would have been unlikely for any critic to have chosen the orchestra one of the country's “10-best” in 1979, the year young Leonard Slatkin was named Music Director. A decade later, such an omission would have been unthinkable; the only question would have been just how high to rank what had become a magnificent ensemble.

Leonard Slatkin knew exactly what he was doing and he made his intentions clear from the outset. Reading back over the young conductor's initial post-appointment interviews (a tip of the hat to James Wierzbicki, the indefatigable critic and reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, who covered the Slatkin beat so capably) one cannot help but be struck by how well he had everything planned out. Right from the beginning, Slatkin stressed the objective of major touring (by the mid-80s, the orchestra's visits to New York had become an eagerly awaited part of Manhattan cultural life and there were highly praised tours of Europe in 1985 and 1993 and Asia in 1986, 1990, and 1995). He spoke enthusiastically of his recording plans (by 1995, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra would have recorded more music with Slatkin than with all its other conductors combined).

He spoke of his commitment to the city of St. Louis – of his intention to be much more than merely another jet-setting visitor to the Midwest. And, most tellingly, he spoke of his ideal ensemble: “There is something

about a truly great orchestra when it walks onto the stage. You can sense that no matter what difficulties it has had through the day, it is one now, with a sense of identity. Individuals do not make an orchestra. It takes a collective pride.”

That pride can be heard on every selection contained within *The Slatkin Years*, a six-CD set of never-before-released recordings.

Throughout, there is evidence of a questioning, independent musical mind. Slatkin's tastes in American music generally ran toward a thoughtful selection from the middle of the road. I say this without disparagement, simply to note that he cared neither for the abstract, aggressive chromaticism of Elliott Carter (although he conducted a memorable performance of *A Symphony of Three Orchestras*) nor for the austere, determinedly reductive minimalism of Philip Glass (although he led works by three other leading figures in this movement – Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and John Adams). Slatkin helped rediscover a whole generation of American composers that had long been slighted by the high priests of musical modernism. He conducted works by William Schuman, Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, and the neglected concert music of Leonard Bernstein. (Sadly, all five of these men died during Slatkin's tenure.)

He helped make it clear, once and for all, that there was much more to our “serious” musical past than the sole, idiosyncratic figure of Charles Ives.

There are several traps that can befall a critic attempting to sum up the Slatkin years. The first is to minimize the qualities of the orchestra before his arrival. The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra was already a fine group, no doubt about it; recordings dating back to the days of Vladimir Golschmann attest to that. Yet it is fair to say that Slatkin improved the ensemble enormously, that he took it from a respectable niche in the second tier of American orchestras to the pinnacle of prestige. Critics used to speak of the “Big Five” American symphonies – Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cleveland. By the mid-80s it was clear that St. Louis deserved a place in their roster. This was due in part to Slatkin's ear, in part to the clarity of his conducting, in part to some crucial





appointments he made during his tenure. But it was also due to his energy and boundless enthusiasm for the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. He came along at a time when the orchestra was in considerable turmoil (there was a musicians' strike at the beginning of the season); he presented a working vision of the future and then followed it through to fruition.

But it will not do to dismiss Slatkin merely as an "orchestra builder." The phrase suggests an austere technocrat and Slatkin always emphasized interpretation. He was candid about his own skills and deficiencies – in 1984, he complained to me of what he called his own "misconception" of Mozartean style, his difficulties conducting opera, his lack of enthusiasm for most of Mahler. And yet, over the years, he turned into a fluent Mozartean, he made a highly-praised Metropolitan Opera debut leading Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* and he produced the idiomatic and deeply felt Mahler symphonies during the late part of his St. Louis tenure. Rather than reach a certain plateau and then rest on the laurels, Slatkin continued to grow, and this growth was one element that made his directorship so exciting.

Who could have predicted the beginning of a 27-year association when young Leonard Slatkin stepped nervously onto the stage of Powell Symphony Hall on Sunday, October 13, 1968, for what was not only his debut in St. Louis, but his debut conducting any major orchestra anywhere? Critic Richard Hirsh wrote a mixed review: *Till Eulenspiegel* was certainly the highlight of the afternoon. The orchestra played with great relish and the humor of the piece was underscored nicely," he said. "Slatkin conducts with rather fluid motions and this seems to leave the orchestra lacking a certain amount of rhythmic support."

It wasn't an especially auspicious beginning, but Slatkin quickly won over St. Louis. Indeed, he already had deep roots in the city; his father, Felix Slatkin, had been a member of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra under Golschmann before moving to Los Angeles, after having been refused a \$3 a week raise during the depths of the Depression. (Some of the older Slatkin's colleagues were still with the orchestra when his son came to conduct.) Leonard Slatkin studied with Walter Susskind at the Aspen Music Festival in 1964 and with Jean Morel at Juilliard. When Susskind took over the directorship of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1968, he brought Slatkin with him as his assistant.

Slatkin threw himself into St. Louis life. He had his own radio program on KDNA-FM, broadcast from the Old Gaslight Square area, where he played records and offered his own commentary, becoming one of our best popular "explainers" of music in the process. He helped choose programs for Susskind, conducted Sunday afternoon concerts, and occasionally appeared as a piano soloist with the orchestra. And he advanced to associate, associate principal, and principal guest conductor before assuming the position of music director in 1979, replacing Jerzy Semkow. Slatkin literally grew up with the orchestra.

It is difficult now to remember the surprise many of us felt when Peter G. Davis of *New York Magazine* chose the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra as the "finest in the land" in a 1983 article. What? St. Louis? Not even one of our precious "Big Five"? A similar poll by *Time*



Magazine ranked the orchestra in second place, just after Solti's Chicago. This was news – a radical reordering of America's orchestral hierarchy – and so, with the blessing (and expense account) of the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, I decided to visit St. Louis to investigate and sat in on a rehearsal of the Symphony No. 2 by Jean Sibelius.

"Slatkin is the antithesis of a podium glamour boy," I reported at the time. "His gestures are passionate but devoid of histrionic excess; during particularly rapturous moments, his eyes will close momentarily and on occasion he will allow himself one quick choreographed leap into the air, but he is playing for the musicians, rather than any prospective audience. His stick technique is transparently clear – the expression concisely conveyed, the beat unmistakable. Orchestra and conductor seem fellow pilgrims on a quest for the Sibelius Second.

"The orchestra responds reflexively to Slatkin's demands – the timpani right on time for a clap of Sibelian thunder, the flutes wild and Northern birds. A perfectly contoured crescendo sweeps from near inaudibility to an explosion of sound that fills the entire hall. As the last chord dies away, so clean and unanimous that it seems to have been produced by a seraphic organ, the musicians break into startled laughter. Are they really playing this well?

"They are indeed. Slatkin, red in the face and drenched with sweat, looks out at his spent forces and grins. 'O.K.,' he says, with calculated understatement. 'I think I can live with that.' And, the following evening, the audience rose to its feet immediately to give Slatkin and the orchestra a stomping, shouting, standing ovation. It was a good night – a good time – to have been in St. Louis."

What now for Leonard Slatkin? He has his work cut out for him in Washington, D.C., where many of us hope (and expect) that he will give us a National Symphony Orchestra worthy of the name. In the meantime, he has been named Conductor Laureate of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra – the latest in the long string of positions he has held with this group. The Symphony itself is in an exciting period of transition, with a new

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"It's like Duke Ellington said, there's only two kinds, good music and the other stuff. I try only to do the good stuff."

– LEONARD SLATKIN

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music director, Hans Vonk, taking over the reins at the beginning of the 1996/1997 season. Already, Vonk has deeply impressed the orchestra, its board of directors and its listeners with his performances, and Powell Hall is buzzing with anticipation.

And so this is truly the end of an era. But there is more sweetness than sorrow in this parting. To begin with, Slatkin will come back to St. Louis – and often. Secondly, we are eagerly waiting to hear what Slatkin will do with Washington and what Vonk will do with St. Louis. Thirdly, we may look back with gratitude on an extraordinary partnership that has permanently altered the story of American orchestras. And, finally we have a recorded legacy of some inspired music-making.

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Tim Page is the former chief classical music critic for *The Washington Post*, wrote this essay for the six-disc retrospective *The Slatkin Years* during his tenure as chief music critic for *Newsday*.



May 5th

Dear Leonard

On this special occasion I want to congratulate you for doing such an outstanding job and I wish you all possible success in Washington.

I thank you for leaving behind such a phenomenal ensemble.

I promise to take good care of it.

Best wishes

Hans Vonk

- HANS VONK

*About Leonard Slatkin*

Leonard Slatkin made his conducting debut with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1968. Over the past 50 years, he has held five titled positions with the SLSO – Assistant Conductor (1968-1971), Associate Conductor (1971-1976), Principal Guest Conductor (1975-1978), Music Director and Conductor (1979-1996), and Conductor Laureate (1996-Present). He also founded the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra in 1970 and served as its Music Director through 1974.

Slatkin's tenure with the SLSO was noted for its remarkable achievements: with 29 commissions, 32 world and U.S. premieres, 70 recordings, and 54 national /regional tours. He has received six Grammy awards and 33 nominations.



“They say that time flies  
when you are having fun.  
If that is true, time went  
by at supersonic speed.”

– LEONARD SLATKIN

6.19.19

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