

Bath Festival**Boulez
is hard
task
master**

By Helen Reid

IT WAS a great pity there were so many empty seats at the most enterprising of the Bath Festival programmes this year, the concert given last night in the Colston Hall, Bristol, by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under conductor Pierre Boulez.

For Boulez is the leading interpreter of modern music. Although the programme may have looked daunting, it did not sound so.

It opened with three pieces from Berg's Lyric Suite, a deeply imaginative romantic work for all its atonality, with gentle, complex lyrical outer movements and a highly original allegro, which employs every possible trick in string writing and technique.

Delicacy

Then came Webern's Five Pieces for orchestra, tiny miracles of precision and delicacy for 22 players, demanding the utmost in concentration and control to establish the complex relationship of textures and rhythms.

The soloist in Bartok's Piano Concerto No 1 was Australian Roger Woodward. While one admired his amazing technique in this fiendishly difficult work, it was hard to take such unrelenting ferocity.

Bartok uses the piano as a percussion instrument only, and this technique, used in such a limited way, makes for monotony.

But there was no lack of variety in the final work, Stravinsky's Petrushka, in which the orchestra was able to show off in every section to great advantage, almost too much so in the brass.

Boulez here, as in every work, demanded utter precision and rhythmic accuracy. For the most part he got it.