

## Concerts

### Royal Festival Hall RPO/Masur

By PETER STADLEN

THE view from within and the view from without such as music can afford both featured in a remarkable concert given by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Kurt Masur last night.

Prokofiev's Classical Symphony received a delightfully detached performance, strictly in inverted commas, wickedly pointed yet always graceful, with a genial smile contradicting the occasional frown. The ironic reassessment of classicism, made in 1916/17 well ahead of comparable ventures, is a law unto itself and, Masur assured us, will continue to survive.

It seemed barely credible that the same conductor should have at his command the powers of penetration and scrutiny that are required to show up Brahms's First Symphony for what it is—the greatest music drama since Beethoven.

Literally the sole queries that occurred to me were in the first movement, the isolated, oft-recurring three-notes motif not being made to fall away ominously, and in the finale a slightly imprecise timing that lessened the climactic effect of those breathless syncopations. Otherwise the singularly close collaboration between Masur and an orchestra in top form created an experience as nearly unbearable as it should be.

Hovering between these extremes was Rachmaninov's "Paganini" Rhapsody. Indeed, not the least merit of Roger Woodward's deliciously poker-faced reading was to keep us guessing most of the time whether or not he, and his composer, were in earnest. No such doubts, to be sure, during the grandiloquence of the large slow pseudo-Viennese section. But elsewhere I realised his drily laconic touch, burlesque interjections and last, not least, his superb pianism.