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Artur Rubinstein and the S. F. Symphony in Brilliant Concert

Musi

By ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN

The San Francisco Symphony Orchestra opened its Art Commission series last night at the Civic Auditorium with a brilliant gala concert centered about the colossal art of Artur Rubinstein, who scarcely needs to be identified as one of the very great pianists of the present day. Rubinstein did not limit himself to a single offering, but appeared twice, first playing the moderately spurious second concerto of Rachmaninoff and following this with the wholly authentic "Nights in the Gardens of Spain" by Manuel de Falla.

It has been a long time since the Rachmaninoff was presented hereabouts by a world authority like last night's interpreter. Few concertos are more elegantly constructed than this, and few are better calculated for the display of whatever a pianist has to give in the way of power, and keyboard generalship, and thoughtful tenderness beside. But it is an essentially derivative affair, and fairly pale compared with the concertos of Tschaikowsky that came before it and those of Prokofieff that followed.

In his performance Rubinstein was more than a general. He was a generalissimo, a commander of commanders, and he gave a performance that would raise the hair on the head of a marble bust. One might dwell for long on its thousand felicities—its infinite delicacy, its poetic perception, its virtuoso thunders. But what counts is the superb and surpassing sense of the whole, a whole that created one of the high ovations of the current season. One must not forget, however, that every soloist with the San Francisco Symphony benefits from the collaboration of the world's foremost accompanist among conductors, Mr. Monteux.

In "The Nights in the Gardens of Spain" what counts above the soloist and the orchestra is Manuel de Falla, for this is true music, and probably the greatest symphonic work so far produced by a Spanish composer. It embodies a fantastic amount of learning and lore about the music of the country, from its most ancient Arabic and African origins to its contemporary Gypsy mongrelizing, and all of that is curiously and marvelously combined with the hot, sulphuric temperament that is Falla's own and the relaxed, cool, languid impressionism he learned from Claude Debussy. Amazingly, the whole thing coalesces into an incomparably beautiful and evocative tone picture of the sensuous, exotic Spain of the travel books. For further details on the glories and wonders of Spain, consult the front page.

The performance, by both pianist and orchestra, was vivid and powerful and sharp in contour, but some of its pungent subtleties quire more extensive rehea than was apparently available f last nights concert.

The program opened with Bach C minor passacaglia and fugue in the orchestration of Respighi, which makes a good, solemn, grandiose sound, but tends to disperse the magnificent unity of Bach's conception into a somewhat confused mosaic of orchestral colors. The evening concluded with the Franck symphony, for which Mr. Monteux has a special flair and a special authority, and of which he gives one of the classic, model performances.

The Auditorium has acquired a new bib and tucker for the Art Commission concerts this year, the dingy, bedraggled fan that stood behind the orchestra in days of yore having been replaced with a smart new arrangement of blue panels on a gold ground. Now if we can light the bonfire for that ghastly tent...

(San Carlo Opera Company will sing "Lohengrin" tonight. See page 10.)