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THE SOUNDING BOARD

Gala Concert Stars Mehta, Rubinstein

BY ALBERT GOLDBERG

A combination of events lent Thursday night's concert of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra in Philharmonic Auditorium a very special glitter.

Zubin Mehta conducted for the first time since his appointment as the orchestra's seventh permanent conductor, his only appearance during the current season. The beloved Artur Rubinstein was the piano soloist, playing one of his specialties, Brahms' D Minor Concerto. And the hall was decorated with flags and bunting in honor of the annual International Night, attended by representatives of 24 nations and a sartorially resplendent audience headed for the post-concerto ball and supper.

Ageless Master

The musical honors were equally divided between Mr. Rubinstein and Mr. Mehta. The veteran pianist was greeted with salvos of applause that necessitated several bows before he could settle down to serious business. Mr. Rubinstein's playing is always serious business, but one of its charms is that it is so natural and spontaneous that no matter what he plays it never seems overburdened with excess seriousness or weightiness.

This is a particular achievement when his vehicle is Brahms' majestic D Minor Concerto, and he was in rare form on this occasion. It was an absorbing performance, laid out on a grand scale and integrated with an Olympian mastery that held it all together in a firm grip that searched out every iota of beauty and expresiveness without any relaxation of forward moving tension.

Vivid Mahler

And what vigor and joy there are in this ageless master's playing! He still has the strength and endurance of a giant. He can make the piano thunder over the orchestra, he can toss off filigrees of pearly lightness, and he can coax his instrument to sing with a tone of velvet luster. And all these qualities were at the service of the music, so that one heard Brahms of unsurpassed warmth and sweep and power, supported by Mr. Mehta's alert accompaniment — memorized, as was the rest of his program.

Even in competition with this star, the conductor could have no complaint with his cordial reception. He began with the Prelude to "Lohengrin," extracting pure ethereal harmonies from the upper strings and skilfully guiding its mounting crescendo to a full-bodied Wagnerian climax in which the brass was notable for its mellow power.

His flair for the dramatic found full scope in Mahler's grandiose First Symphony. It is youthfully impetuous music that tries to challenge the universe with defiance, sentiment and earthy lustiness, and in some respects it succeeds as well as anything the composer ever wrote.

Mr. Mehta immersed himself in it with all his talent for vivid contrasts and energetic projection. He was always in control of every situation, he mixed the instrumental colors adroitly, and most promising of all for the future was his sensitiveness in unfolding the poignant lyrical middle section of the funeral march. The orchestra played wholeheartedly for him and there were cheers at the finish.