LSO/Rubinstein
Festival Hall
Joan Chissell

The hero of last night's L.S.O. concert, given in aid of the orchestra's trust in the presence of the Queen, Prince Philip and the Prime Minister, was Artur Rubinstein. Earlier this year he came to the Brighton Festival to play Brahms's Second Concerto. For this benefit occasion he chose the same composer's First Concerto, a much earlier work, yet perhaps even more demanding in sheer physical stamina. Far from tiring as the minutes passed Mr. Rubinstein gathered strength. At the end he seemed fresh enough to play it all over again—but in fact contented himself and his large, enthusiastic audience with Chopin's A flat Polonaise.

The concerto's slow movement was the gem. Its orchestral opening was not quite soft and inward enough. But having heard the pianist's rapt statement of the main theme, and still more his beautiful ruminative pianissimo in the *dolce* triplet episode that follows, the strings soon tuned in to the same intimate key, so that the close interweaving of piano and orchestra became one of the main pleasures. There was a big, heart-warming climax from Mr. Rubinstein in the course of the main theme's reprise, and after it a finely graded return to quiet again—without untoward swellings in the cadenza. The Hungarian-inspired finale was tremendously spirited, its rhythmic control never more exact than in the pianissimo trills, with their stinging first beats. The opening movement was full of lovely details, especially in moments of relaxation, though here Mr. Rubinstein seemed less in rebellion against the mighty forces of fate than Brahms might have wished.

Elgar's *Cockaigne* overture made an excellent start to the programme. No English composer has ever known better how to hoist the national flag in music: what's more, Elgar dedicated this particular piece to his many friends in British orchestras, and made sure that everyone had a good time. André Previn pulled out every available stop. The fearless brass playing struck home most. Stravinsky's *Firebird* suite was a more subtle orchestral showpiece. The Berceuse was bewitching, particularly the magical string *pianissimo* at its end. Mr. Previn, perhaps a bit too yielding with the princesses earlier on, made much of the slowly mounting triumph of the finale.

The Times: 3·11·70