COLUMBIA, S. C., SUN

One Small Voice

By John Kieran
of "Information Please"

It was Arthur Rubinstein, the famous concert pianist, who maintained that the piano was a life preserver. We were rolling down toward Albuquerque when Maestro Rubinstein, a fellow traveler on our transcontinental train, entertained his companions in the lounge car with a dissertation on the healthful effects of running the fingers over the keyboard regularly and artistically.

"I ask you just to look at the record," said Maestro Rubinstein, running a hand through his well trimmed crop of curly hair. "Consider the age to which well known pianists survive. The violinists, they drop off. Even if they live on, they do not keep playing. But if a pianist lives to be a hundred—he will still play. And very well, too."

Still, there were not many centenarians making a living as concert pianists.

"I heard Francis Plante, the great Frenchman, play at 97," said Maestro Rubinstein. "He was magnificent. Vladimir de Pachmann was playing in his eighties. Paderewski played when he was 80. Alexander Michalowski celebrated his eightieth birthday by playing Chopin's two concertos and ten etudes."

It was suggested that Maestro Rubinstein make a note of these things and take it up with life insurance companies. They might pass out pianos to large policyholders and save money in the long run.

"Wait!" said the famous pianist, "I have just begun. Here are some other famous pianists who lived long and played happily until almost the last moments of their lives. There was Emil Sauer and Louis Diemer and Arturo Napolao, the Brilliant Brazilian. Why, Camille Saint-Saens played when he was over 80. Have you heard Moritz Rosenthal, who is over 80?"

Quite luckily, this tourist had heard that veteran master play at the Lotos club in New York. He was wonderful.

"Well, there you are," said Maestro Rubinstein. "We are lucky, we pianists. We have chosen a healthful form of art."

Of course, Maestro Rubinstein was speaking of masters of the keyboard, not the type of piano player of whom it was allegedly written in the fabled saloon of old days on the Western frontier: "Don't shoot the piano player; he is doing his best."

"Maybe they live long, too, only nobody notices it," said Maestro Rubinstein, "but these other famous fellows, they play right out in the open at 80 years of age, and everybody applauds —not because they are old, but because they still play beautifully. It pleases me very much to think of this. I will knock on wood. Where is some wood?"

There is so much metal and plastic in train furnishings these days that Maestro Rubinstein had to look sharp for genuine wood. He finally concluded that the leg of his chair was good wood and he gave it a sharp rap. Then he looked up and said with a grin:

"I had a ghastly experience with old Francis Plante in Paris about 1905. There was a big benefit for some great disaster in Italy and everybody was asked to appear—Jan Kubelik, Sarah Bernhardt —and Plante —dozens of famous artists. I was just a boy. My manager shoved me in.

"Well, I arrived at the hall and the program director pushed me right out on the platform. People were just coming in. To get it over with in a hurry, I played two small pieces from Chopin. Very mild applause. For an encore I played Chopin's 'Polonaise in A Flat.' This brought a little applause. It always does. On the way out I was told the great M'sieu Plante wished to see me. I was flattered.

"He was in his room. His socks were being warmed. He had thick gloves on his hands. He said I was a talented youngster. He had heard high praise of me. He asked me what I had just played. I named the first two bits of Chopin. Good, very good. Then I mentioned the 'Polonaise' and he shrieked! He was down on the program to play that. And I had never even seen a program! It took years to convince him that I wasn't a young scoundrel. Well, here's Albuquerque. Let us stretch our legs."