Pianist Rubinstein hates doubletalk, blasts 'horrible, hypocritical times'

By CHARLES LAZARUS

Whether pianist Arthur Rubinstein is 79 (as listed in THE MONTREAL STAR Dollar Symphony program Tuesday), or 81 (by his own admission), or 83 (as some reports would have it), he is a man who ignores few things in the good or bad life.

More importantly, at an age usually considered far beyond the normal retirement years, he is a man who can not be ignored.

This, the buoyant and bouncing maestro proved yesterday at one of his rare press conferences, given at the Ritz Carlton Hotel the morning after he triggered an impressive ovation from the audience which packed the Forum for his performance with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra conducted by Zubin Mehta.

Mr. Rubinstein, who returns Thursday, Jan. 16 to Place des Arts for a recital sponsored by Canadian Concerts and Artists, was cheerful, gregarious, and dapper in a navy blazer, light blue sweater and pearl stickpin in his cravat; he was also comfortably bilingual, moralistic and gracious — whether kissing the hand of every lady presented to him, or voicing his differences with a music critic who reviewed Tuesday night's performance.

Above all, Mr. Rubinstein revealed that at four score-plus, he has little time nor patience for double-talk whether discussing musical taste (both his own and those of the public), or blasting the

Ovation: Pianist Artur Rubenstein acknowledges a standing ovation from an audience at Forum concert.

"horrible, hypocritical times we live in . . . those gangsters in the United Nations," those nations who accommodate the lies and deceit of today's world.

"You take the Russian paper Pravda," said the maestro, his white mane shimmering in the soft lamplight of the Ritz suite, and his face reflecting a look of pain and contempt, "You take Pravda, which means truth; well now, you know there's not a word of truth in the whole thing — all lies."

Mr. Rubinstein disclosed played in Russia for some years, but he would accept an engagement "if I'm paid in American dollars — not in those rubles. You know they hate to pay, the Russians."

Mr. Rubinstein disclosed that he finally agreed to having himself filmed and interviewed for television, first in France, later by the British Broadcasting Corporation, and finally by the National Broadcasting Co., and after some 26 hours of talk and informal activity — "they had me walk across Brooklyn Bridge on a windy day, which I'd never done before."

He is also writing his memoirs despite excessive distraction and "too much disturbance," and with the satisfaction that "every publisher wants my book, they think it will be sensational. It won't!"

Artur Rubinstein's allusion to "sensational" disclosures which will not appear in his memoirs, is possibly derived from his image of a bon vivant of the old school, a master conversationalist in subjects ranging from Greek philosophy to gourmet dining, and maintaining a natural interest in a well-turned ankle.

How has he been able to maintain an isolated and romantically alienated immersion in his music despite a grim view of the world around him?

The answer is simple, said Mr. Rubinstein: "I love to live with individuals, what they do for me and I for them; they say about me I am a pianist and a demagogue, which may be true.

"When I play I transfer the listener to a kind of metaphysical environment. I am a romantic and I hope my music speaks this language. It is a world all its own."

So saying, Mr. Rubinstein referred to the thing that gave him perhaps the most enjoyable experience at concerts, the fact "that perhaps half my audience is young people. They write me, wait for me after concerts, follow me to my hotel."

At the same time, he has no hesitancy in admitting that much of the music written today by the young and for the young, was simply beyond him — "I do not understand it" — although years ago "I was criticized and even hissed for daring to play works by such as Scriabine and De Falla."

Always the showman, Mr. Rubinstein then proceeded to demonstrate what much of contemporary music meant to him, by uttering a sequence of guttural and inarticulate sounds.

Mr. Rubinstein came across at the meeting with reporters as a man of never-failing charm and courtesy.

And though he was in the midst of a long explanation why Brahms was his favorite composer, and reporting that his good friend Stravinsky wasn't exactly crazy about the piano as a musical instrument, the maestro turned to the waiter who brought him his coffee, with a gentle "Thank you — merci."