Rubinstein
Festival Hall
Joan Chissell

Anyone who started the week with Richard Baker yesterday will have heard Rubinstein's confession, in an interview, that he had found no audiences harder to win than those of London, but that once won, none were more wonderful. He should have been touched by his reception at the second of his two South Bank recitals last night, when he played only Chopin. The hall was sold out days ahead. There was applause even after individual movements of the B flat minor sonata. And as always at the end, no one would let him go.

Mr Rubinstein did not let himself down lightly. Besides the sonata he played the Polonaise-Fantaisie, the Barcarolle and the C sharp minor Scherzo as main works. Not even in the shorter pieces did he look for simplicity, as his choice of four Studies made very clear.

For perfection as a whole the A flat major study, opus 25 no 1, was surely the gem of the recital. The notes of the melody chimed like little bells, counter-melodies were most subtly woven into featherweight arpeggios, there was just the right yielding in the phrasing. The C sharp minor waltz, played as first encore, was equally memorable; as always from this pianist, its couple of minutes were the quintessence of a lifetime's bitter-sweetness.

The bigger works were played with unflagging energy. Sometimes in the first two movements of the sonata Mr. Rubinstein even drove himself harder than he needed; there were some splurges in climaxes instead of his old crystalline clarity. Sometimes, too, his contrasts were less marked than of old. In the C sharp minor Scherzo the chorale melody and the decorative waterfalls were not very different in colour. In the E minor Study (opus 25) he rather threw away the glorious, heart-easing melody in the middle by anticipating its *piano* at the end of the preceding E minor section. Other examples could be cited. But everything he played had unforgettable moments, of tone, of phrasing, in fact of exquisite tenderness