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Rubinstein and his music seem alive and well in film tribute

What an extraordinary human being was Arthur Rubinstein — and what an extraordinary film is "Rubinstein Remembered: A 100th Anniversary Tribute," this week's entry in PBS' notable "American Masters" series, at 9 tonight on Channel 9.

The great pianist was more than just an American master — he belonged to the world. But he spent a good portion of his rich and exciting life in the United States — and that is, of course, the home of his talented son, John Rubinstein, actor and composer, who adds conducting to his resume during the course of this excellent and affecting hour.

The occasion at the heart of this documentary is a memorial concert last January in Lodz, Poland, the birthplace of Arthur Rubinstein (who would have been 100 on Jan. 28, 1987). No matter how far Rubinstein roamed from Poland, his heart held a special place for the nation, its people

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and its greatest composer, Chopin; the citizens of Lodz returned that affection. For the concert, the Lodz Philharmonic was renamed The Arthur Rubinstein Orchestra and John Rubinstein conducted it in a memorial concert.

But filmmaker Peter Rosen uses the January event mainly as a springboard from which to reconstruct the life of the famous pianist. To that end, he has found a treasure trove of old photographs (when Rubinstein was a child) and marvelous movie footage of Rubinstein as a young man, and, later, a kind of elder statesman or *eminence grise* of the piano world. Delightful sequences of Rubinstein with his family alternate with too-brief clips from TV and movies of Rubinstein at the piano.

John Rubinstein narrates the underlying thread of the documentary, but great chunks of it are told by Arthur Rubinstein himself, taken from various recorded interviews within his lifetime when he talked about his life, his family and, above all, music. These scenes, the musical segments — and the fact that RCA Victor has just re-released a great many of his best recordings in the CD format — are almost enough to convince you that Arthur Rubinstein is still alive and well.

Of course, the virtue of an hour like this is that it keeps Rubinstein's spirit alive. That, after all, was the essence, the driving force of this exciting, larger-than-life musician.