Rubinstein misses banquet in his honor

By MARY CAMPBELL
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NEW YORK — An audience that packed the Waldorf-Astoria grand ballroom Monday night to honor Arthur Rubinstein heard a message telephoned earlier in the day from the pianist in Switzerland.

"Can you imagine how frustrating it feels to be boxed up in an armchair in Geneva instead of being among you to join the fun?" Rubinstein's son John quoted the 95-year-old virtuoso as saying.

Those in the Waldorf's ballroom and its two balconies had paid $500 a plate for a banquet to honor Rubinstein and benefit the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel.

Rubinstein, who had hoped to attend until his doctor ruled against the plane trip, was being honored for his support of the Weizmann Institute and his contribution to Israel's cultural life.

Sixteen minutes of a televised interview David Frost did with Rubinstein in Geneva in April was shown, followed by a touching speech by conductor Zubin Mehta.

Rubinstein last played in public in 1976. In the interview, he said about his career, "When I played, I spoke about music. Music was in me. Everything I played, I was singing inside. When I played a little piece, it came out of my heart. Then the public started to be fond of me. When I walked out on the platform, they were right away with me, you see. They were right away with me."

Asked how he would like to be remembered, Rubinstein said, "I would like if they like me or love me for what I feel I am. If they exaggerate, I can't stand it. If they try to compare me — a second Paderewski." Rubinstein, making a wry, funny face, for which he has long been famous, added, "I always thought he was a very bad pianist."

Mehta, conductor of the New York Philharmonic and Israel Philharmonic, said that in Rubinstein's last 10 years of playing, he appeared more often with the Israel Philharmonic than with any other orchestra. Mehta said, "I knew that one day I would say that I had the honor of playing with Rubinstein. I didn't realize those days would pass so quickly. There is nobody to fill that."

"There were performances where he was not satisfied with the accompaniment he got — and, boy, did I get it."

"For our making music together, breathing with him on stage, for this I am grateful. I long to call him tomorrow morning, to tell him your little chuckles at his expressions. I want to thank you for honoring him."