Rubinstein Recital At Opera House Rare Experience

BY SYLVIA LEWIS

Attending a recital by pianist Artur Rubinstein is rather like watching a bit of history and being more awed by the actual event than the legend after all.

Rubenstein, who performed at the Opera House last night in a rare Seattle appearance, is very much a legend in his own time, and in fact was one before many of us were born. As child prodigy, the friend of kings and counts, citizen of the world, and pianist for the past 75 years, he has played for innumerable music-lovers throughout the world and charmed most of them.

NO EXCEPTION

Last night's concert was no exception. One knew beforehand exactly how it would be: Rubinstein would bound onto the stage, glance briefly at the audience and immediately sit down to pour out music that seemed to come from his fingers.

Indeed, that is almost what happened. His bounds are a bit slowed by age, perhaps, but his music remains unchanged, at least in quality. Listening is a rare experience, and all the more so because during those few hours, you forget Rubinstein the legend and sit amazed by the pianist before you.

Rubinstein is one of the last heirs of Romantic pianists of the last century who felt their artistic role was one of grand gestures and majestic playing, pianists like Liszt, who hoped most of all to dazzle their audiences.

So it was especially appropriate that Rubinstein chose to play music written mostly in the 19th Century. His program included Schubert's Two Impromptus, Op. 90; Beethoven's Sonata in F minor, "Appassionata"; Debussy's Ondine and Poissons d'Or; Chopin's Ballade in G minor, Op. 23 and Four Etudes; and Liszt's Mephisto Valse.

By this time, what more can be said? He played Schubert meticulously, Beethoven passionately, Chopin lyrically, Liszt dazzlingly. True to his tradition, he flawlessly executed the grand passages, especially the coda in the last movement of the Beethoven, which won a standing ovation.

But true to only his own genius, he also rendered the more lyrical pieces with delicacy and subtlety. For this reason, his version of Chopin's Ballade was probably the high point of the concert.

Rubinstein has often claimed Chopin to be his favorite composer, and few pianists have been able to give this often poetical work such a personal touch. With his acute sense of rhythm, his feeling for rests and dynamics, Rubinstein made Chopin's Ballade a more special piece than usual.

DETAILS

Unlike many of the pianists who preceded him, Rubinstein paid attention to the details as well as the overall effects. Arpeggios and trills in Chopin's Four Etudes, individual chords in the Schubert Impromtus, runs in Liszt's Valse—nothing escaped his care, or his wit.

The work by Liszt, being lively, witty and a bit bombastic, pleased the audience especially, and at the end of it, the audience demanded encores. Rubenstein complied by playing three short, light pieces, including another Chopin.

In short, Rubinstein played superbly, and, as usual, deserves superlatives. Seattle is fortunate that he returned.