Speaking of Music...

By MARCEL GRILLI

Six Concertos in Two Memorable Evenings

At the Tokyo Metropolitan Hall last Thursday evening, Artur Rubinstein offered three piano concertos —Mozart's in D Minor (K. 466), Beethoven's Fourth, in G Major, and Saint - Saëns' Second, in G Minor—making each a memorable musical experience for the capacity audience of listeners. And as though these three concertos were not enough, Rubinstein was called back time and time again until he consented to add two encores by Chopin, the final one being nothing less than the "Heroic" Polonaise. Indefatigable — there seemed to be no limit to his energies nor to his captivating powers.

Each work was beautifully intoned and shaped by the veteran artist, firmly controlled as to rhythm and dynamics, and expertly phrased, without any false or exaggerated warmth. The Mozart was given a relaxed and intimate performance, full of gentleness and lightness, with every note clear and meaningful. The effect was not in individual passages, but in the flowing, graceful and unburdened phraseology. The music of the famous "Romance" was beautifully tender, the playing touching emotional depths. The return to the main theme, following the G Minor agitation of the movement's central section, had a perfectly lulling effect. The finale came off sparkling. The Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Hiroyuki Iwaki, was impaired well, with much delicacy, feeling, humor in that extra ounce of finesse and point which Mozart demands.

Rubinstein's contemplative playing of Beethoven's opening bars set the course of the great G Major concerto, and everything that followed was serenely clear, beauty of tone and phrasing were impeccably linked, the playing rhythmically poised and exquisitely limpid in style, and Iwaki's orchestral partnership satisfyingly vibrant and musical. The concerto of Saint-Saëns is not in the same exalted class, but Rubinstein's brilliant playing lifted this music to a place of honor. It was a performance that radiated the confidence of advocacy—not a single iota of the music's swagger and glitter was missed—and in the final flying Presto, Rubinstein's nimble dexterity provided a wonderful virtuoso delivery.

On Saturday evening, Rubinstein rose to even greater heights, with Schumann's only Concerto followed by Chopin's Second, in F Minor, and the greatest of all, Beethoven's "Emperor." The Schumann was given a wonderfully sensitive interpretation; Rubinstein's grasp of structure was so firm and so finely controlled, the playing so subtly expressive that he was able to imbue the familiar phrases of this music, its wistful melancholy as well as its moments of intense excitement, with fresh significance. Here, as in the Chopin, poetry and pianistic brilliance went hand in hand with penetrating musician-ship. Romantic ardor and virtuosity perfectly blended.

From the very opening phrases, the Beethoven came to us majestic in its sweep, with felicitous calculations of tonal grandeur and magisterial command of the work's coursing energy. There were one or two lapses along the way when the soloist and orchestra didn't quite meet on time, but these passages went almost unnoticed in the eloquently thrilling interpretation—and even more exciting and gripping was the marvelous artistic imagination and the musical perception which evoked all the light and shade in the immense work. The orchestral contribution, under Iwaki's guidance, was efficient and, on the whole, admirably conceived as to Beethoven's requirements.

Naturally there was a tremendous ovation, and again Rubinstein offered two encores from Chopin, an Etude capped by the B. Minor Scherzo, which Schumann compared to a poem by Byron — "overflowing with tenderness, boldness, love, and contempt."