SOMEbody said during the intermission at Artur Rubenstein's Auditorium concert last night: "Isn't he remarkable? I wish I could have heard him at his peak."

I thought about that, and the stirring artistry I had just heard, and I said, "You have." Rubenstein's performance after the intermission more than confirmed my initial impression. At 85, he remains at the peak of his pianistic powers. His instrumental technique is astonishing, and his musical interpretation and taste are impeccable. He is a true to the keyboard what Cleopatra was to sexual attraction: age cannot wither him nor custom stale his infinite variety.

Courtly and confident, Mr. Rubenstein opened the challenging program with two Schubert Impromptus, then performed the Beethoven Sonata in F minor with incredible ease and authority.

After intermission, he evoked the richly romantic melodies of two Debussy Preludes, tossed off a charming Charlier and Scherzo-Valse, and made the piano keep sigh and weep and thunder with Chopin's Ballade in G minor, Opus 10 Etudes, and Polonaise in A flat major. A standing ovation brought him back for three encores—The Chopin Waltz in C sharp minor, Villa-Lobos's "Punchinello" and De Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance."

Rubenstein was critical of the Steinway grand provided by sponsoring Arts Appreciation for his Memphis concert. He said it wasn't responsive, and to his touch and ear, I'm sure it wasn't. But the Memphis sell-out audience certainly was, and the incident reminded me of his debut in Vienna many years ago in Vienna.

For that performance, he ordered a Bechstein piano instead of the prevailing Boesendorfer, and 85-year-old Ludwig Boesendorfer, hurt and puzzled, went to the concert to see what kind of pianist would prefer a Bechstein to his perfect instrument. After the concert, he touched the Rubenstein's hands, saying, "These hands could make a washboard sing. Why not a Bechstein?"