Standard-Times
New Bedford, MA
August 2, 1987
S. 46,998

Earl J. Dias
A look at the arts

PBS's "American Masters" series, which I lauded last week for its first-rate study of film director William Wyler, continued to maintain its standard of excellence with its recent colorful portrait of pianist Artur Rubinstein, who would have been 100 years old in January.

Narrated by his personable son, John Rubinstein — who also proved capable of conducting the symphony orchestra in a program honoring his father in the latter's birthplace, Lodz, Poland — the program concentrated on Mr. Rubinstein as bon vivant, family man, and opulent figure with his dashing fedoras, handsome capes, expensive cigars and puckish personality.

I wish, however, that there had been more examples of Mr. Rubinstein's pianism. The documentary presented only snatches from selections by Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schumann, De Falla, Poulenc, and Strainsky. Nevertherless, even with these snippets, there was underlined the striking contrast between Mr. Rubinstein's showy, extravagant lifestyle and the simplicity and naturalness he brought to the keyboard.

An interesting portion of the program recounted Mr. Rubinstein's carelessness at the piano and his aversion to practicing in his early years. In fact, disgusted with himself he attempted suicide by hanging (the rope broke), but he emerged from this ordeal with a new vision of his career and the determination, by diligence and careful study, to make himself the genuine virtuoso that he became.

All in all, the program treated a worthy subject with skill and honesty. □