Black-and-White-Key Magic—

Audience Gives Rubinstein Ovation

By HENRY S. HUMPHREYS

There has been a lot of discussion about how to increase the size of our Friday afternoon Symphony concert audience. One solution that would certainly please Artur Rubinstein fans would be simply to have Artur Rubinstein play every Friday afternoon during the regular Symphony season. The world-famed pianist not only packs them in on a Friday matinee (or any afternoon for that matter), but he holds his listeners so securely in his thrall that they gladly miss their buses, auto rides or even supper to hear him play some encores.

The secret of Rubinstein's phenomenal drawing power is no secret at all; he plays piano in the "grand manner"—that is to say, in the Lisztian-Paderewskian manner. The half-apologetic, often somewhat precious, style that came in with the universal revival of Scarlatti and the new jocular whimsies of Poulenc, et al., tires both the ear and the brain very quickly. But when a truly great pianist steps up to the piano and plays the Schumann piano concerto the way Rubinstein played it Friday afternoon in Music Hall—well, that's the *recipe*—not the secret—for acclaim, honor and perennial audience loyalty.

RUBINSTEIN'S Schumann concerto may not be quite as dreamy, quite as other-wordly as some other interpretations I have heard, but it has one thing—the very special bardic dignity and virile drive that is needed to distinguish the Saxon composer from his Polish-Parisian colleague (Chopin) or his young North German-born disciple (Brahms). Rubinstein makes the piano sing, not whimper; and when he "states a theme," believe me, it is stated—with pianistic authority and musicianly conviction.

The cheering audience didn't want to leave without hearing the artist play some encores—and I strongly suspect that Rubinstein didn't want to leave until he had played the encores. A Brahms "Rhapsody" and a Liszt "Valse-Impromptu."

I can't tell you how much I admire a man who loves his work — like Artur Rubinstein at his Steinway. (The rumor that Steinway was considering rechristening their piano "Rubinsteinway" has no basis in fact, but it's an interesting idea, don't you agree?)

THE ORCHESTRAL portion (first half) of the concert was devoted to a bright display of risorgimento and paganistic pageantry from the pens of three French composers. The Berlioz "Benvenuto Cellini" Overture was expertly interpreted by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under Thor Johnson, and there were moments of great beauty in the Debussy "Nocturnes" — especially in the final part of the triptych, "Sirenes," where both the mood and the stage-setting were enhanced by the attractive members of the soprano and alto sections of the Cincinnati Conservatory Chorus, well-trained by Willis Beckett.

On recordings we never see these "sirens"—we only hear them. The Conservatory "sirens" are not only lovely young ladies, they also stay on pitch.

Symphony Program

Rubinstein, "master pianist," will make his fourteenth appearance with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Thor Johnson, Saturday at 8:30 p. m. at Music Hall.

The program:

Overture to the opera "Benvenuto Cellini," Opus 23 ..... Berlioz
"Nocturnes": ..... Debussy
I Nuages
II Fetes
III Sirenes
Chorus: Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.
Suite No. 2 from "Bacchus et Ariane," Opus 43 ..... Roussel
INTERMISSION
"Concerto in A Minor, Opus 54" ..... Schumann

THIS BRINGS US to Roussel's "Bacchus et Ariane" (Suite No. 2), a strange hybrid "echo" of French impressionism which made no good impression on me. In Roussel the lyrical genius of a Debussy and the sensuous tone-painting gifts of a Ravel are debased into weak half-tunes and over-orchestrated flamboyancies. The "mixed" style made me think of a tipsy faun riding the cowcatcher of "Pacific 231."

The concert will be repeated Saturday night, and if I know my Rubinstein devotees, Music Hall will be packed again.