BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

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# Rubinstein

MUSIC has produced some incedible octogenarians, but I have a feeling that Artur Rubinstein is the most incredibly resilient of all with power still surging from shoulders to fingers in a way that would do credit to a man twice his size, let alone half his age. Here as the first major offering of this year's Brighton Festival was a performance from Rubinstein of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto with Barenboim conducting the New Philharmonia Orchestra, which in exuberant energy, as well as sheer force actually outshone the magisterial reading given by Alfred Brendel only last week in London.

It was characteristic of Rubinstein that he actually seemed to thrive on the extra challenges he had loaded on himself. Not only was this performance given at the most unhelpful hall in the country, the Brighton Dome, it was preceded by another major concerto that most pianists would alone count a full evening's work, the Schumann. Yet the intensity of Rubinstein's playing seemed actually to increase as the evening progressed with an exceptionally searching account of the slow movement of the Emperor leading to nonchalant high jinks in the finale.

The old man consistently showed rare cunning in adapting his playing to the cruelly dry acoustic. He attempted few half-tones, but concentrated instead on clarity—on letting us hear the left hand detail, normally masked, the passage-work which with less conscientious players is easily smudged over. In the slow movement of the Schumann, Rubinstein kept in mind the marking "grazioso": he provided a spark of wit mingled with the romanticism, even a touch that might have come from Schumann's pupil, Sullivan.

In all this the challenge for Barenboim and the NPO was great too, when if anything the acoustic is even unkinder to the orchestra than it is to the piano. At least we had a conductor who—as he has shown with Rubinstein and others before — understood the soloist's problems from the inside. Though it would have taken an orchestra of angels to make really sweet sounds in this hall, the string playing in the Beethoven slow movement was outstandingly beautiful.

This sixth Brighton Festival now gets going in earnest with visits from the Drottningholm opera and ballet, not to mention fringe events as offbeat as a Sussex university lecture on Brighton's sewers. The local paper was last night reporting that at the opening event of the Festival on Tuesday, the playing of the massed bands of Guards nearly raised the roof of the Dome. What a pity it didn't.