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July 7, 1975

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Rubinstein:

Here, as promised, is a copy of my story as I sent it to People magazine. This is a mimeographed copy of the telex transmission, and it contains a few small errors and some unfamiliar "cablese" expressions, but in general I think it is clear. I ordinarily never bother people with copies of what I have written, but since I have a special admiration for Maestro and since People cut my text so drastically and re-wrote it so stupidly, I thought this would amuse you more than what actually appeared in the magazine.

If there's ever anything else you might want from me, please let me know.

With admiration --

Rudolph Chelminski

PAS JUNE 12, 75.

TO: WINGO, PEOPLE MAG - R U S H -

FM: CHELMINSKI, PARIS

EIGHTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO, WHEN GOD TOUCHED ARTUR RUBINSTEIN WITH INCOMPARABLE MUSICAL TALENT, HE MADE SURE THERE WAS ENOUGH TO GO AROUND FOR A LONG TIME.. EVER SINCE, THE MAESTRO HAS BEEN FULFILLING HIS SIDE OF THE BARGAIN BY GIVING IT BACK TO THE PUBLIC, WITH A JOY AND GENEROSITY THAT IGNORE THE PASSING OF TIME.

RUBINSTEIN WAS LONG AGO CERTIFIED AS ONE OF HISTORY'S GREAT MONSTRES SACRES (ACUTE ACCENT EE IN SACRES) OF THE CONCERT PIANO, BUT MUCH MORE BREATHTAKING THAN MERE VIRTUOSITY IS THE BOND OF LOVE -- THE WORLD ISN'T TOO STRONG -- THAT VIBRATES BETWEEN HIM, HIS MUSIC AND HIS AUDIENCES. RARELY, IF EVER, HAS A PERFORMER INSPIRED SUCH DEVOTION.

WHEN, LATE IN MAY, HE MADE A SENTIMENTAL RETURN JOURNEY TO HIS BIRTHPLACE, THE POLISH TEXTILE CITY OF LODZ (ED., STRICTLY SPEAKING THIS SHOULD BE WRITTEN WITH POLISH SOFT ''L'', WHICH HAS A SMALL SLANTED LINE THROUGH THE VERTICAL PART), IT WAS PREDICTABLE THAT GROWN MEN MIGHT WEEP AS HE PLAYED CHOPIN. BUT NOT EVEN RUBINSTEIN WAS PREPARED FOR THE SMALL CHILDREN WHO RAN UP TO TOUCH HIM IN THE STREET, OR THE WOMEN WHO APPLAUDED AS HE PASSED BY.

WOMEN'S APPLAUSE (EXCLAMARK) WHAT MORE SATISFYING ACCOLADE COULD THERE BE FOR ONE OF THE WORLD'S FOREMOST LOVERS OF SONG, WOMEN AND WINE, IN THAT ORDER? AND WHAT OTHER MAN CAN YOU THINK OF WHO

WOULD DESERVE TO RECEIVE IT? IT IS ENOUGH TO MAKE ROBERT REDFORD RAGE IN JEALOUSY.

''I LOVED THE TRIP,'' RUBINSTEIN TOLD ME WHEN IT WAS OVER. ''I DIDN'T THINK THEY WOULD SPOIL ME SO MUCH. IT WAS A VERY MOVING EXPERIENCE.''

RUBINSTEIN HAD NOT SET FOOT IN POLAND FOR 10 YEARS, OR IN LODZ FOR 16, IN SPITE OF FRANTIC BUT UNOFFICIAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO BRING THE COUNTRY'S MOST FAMOUS LIVING SON AT LEAST ONE MORE TIME TO NATIVE SOIL. STANDING IN THE WAY HAD BEEN THE MAESTRO'S INTRANSIGEANT PRINCIPLES: HE HAD MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT AS A POLISH NATIONALIST HE DISAPPROVED OF THE GOVERNMENT'S KNUCKLING UNDER TO SOVIET WHIP-CRACKING AND THAT AS A JEW HE COULD NOT COUNTENANCE WITH HIS PRESENCE SINCE THE OVERT ANTI-SEMITISM WHICH HAD WASHED OVER THE COUNTRY IN THE WAKE OF THE 1967 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR. BUT YEARS HAD PASSED, A NEW, FAR MORE INTELLIGENT GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN INSTALLED AND RUBINSTEIN AT LAST ACCEDED TO THE ENTREATIES OF HIS FRIENDS AND MUSICAL COLLEAGUES TO GIVE ONE CONCERT ON THE EVENING OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LODZ PHILHARMONIA. THE IRONY WAS LOST ON NO ONE THAT THE MAESTRO HAD BEEN AN OLD TROUPER OF PUBLIC APPEARANCES FOR FULLY 18 YEARS BEFORE THE PHILHARMONIA WAS FOUNDED, BACK IN 1915.

FROM THE MOMENT OF HIS ARRIVAL IN THE PLAIN, GRAY INDUSTRIAL TOWN ON THE FLATLANDS SOUTHWEST OF WARSAW THE OPERATIVE WORDS WERE LOVE -- AND FATIGUE. MOST DOCTORS WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED IT FOLLY FOR AN 88-YEAR-OLD MAN TO BE SO FREE WITH HIS TIME AND PERSON, BUT WHEN HE WAS NOT REHEARSING WITH THE PHILHARMONIA HE WAS BEING INVITED TO MEALS OR VISITING WITH DIGNITARIES OR TALKING TO POLISH RADIO OR TV. ONE NIGHT AFTER DINNER HE STAYED UP UNTIL 2 A.M., TOURING THE TOWN

AND LOCATING THE APARTMENT BUILDING WHERE HE WAS BORN, WEARING OUT THE FOLLOWING TV CREW IN THE PROCESS.

''I AM IN LOVE WITH THE COUNTRY OF MY BIRTH,'' HE TOLD ME.

''I LOVE THE POLISH PEOPLE. THEY ARE BRAVE AND VIVACIOUS AND INTELLIGENT AND FRIENDLY. I WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW THAT I AM IN LOVE WITH THIS COUNTRY AND THAT I HAVE BEEN TREATED WONDERFULLY. ET LES FEMMES SONT MERVEILLEUSES. WHAT WOULD I DO WITHOUT POLISH WOMEN (EXCLAMARK) UNFORTUNATELY YOU CAN'T COUNT ON POLISH MEN, BECAUSE THEY'RE UNRELIABLE, BUT THE WOMEN WILL NEVER LET YOU DOWN. POLISH WOMEN ARE STRONGER. THEY HAVE MORE CHARACTER THAN POLISH MEN.''

WITH THIS SUMMARRY BUT APPECTIONATE JUDGMENT ON HIMSELF, HIS INTERVIEWER AND THE GREATER PART OF THE SUPERB ORCHESTRA WHICH WAS THERE TO SERVE HIS REHEARSAL IN THE CAVERNOUS LODZ OPERA HOUSE THAT MORNING, RUBINSTEIN WALKED CAREFULLY ACROSS THE STAGE STREWN WITH RECORDING WIRES, SHIELDED HIS EYES AGAINST THE DIAMOND BRILLIANCE OF THE TTVV LIGHTS, AND SAT DOWN AT THE STEINWAY. HE WAS READY TO RUN THROUGH CHOPIN'S SECOND PIANO CONCERTO AND BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH, ''THE EMPEROR.'' WITHOUT A SINGLE SHEET OF MUSIC BEFORE HIM, NATURALLY.

''HIS MEMORY IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE,'' ROMAN JACZINSKI HAD BEEN TELLING ME. AN OLD FRIEND WHO HAD BEEN DIRECTOR OF MUSIC FOR WARSAW RADIO BEFORE HIS RETIREMENT, JACZINSKI HAD BEEN ACCOMPANYING RUBINSTEIN THROUGHOUT HIS STAY IN LODZ. ''HE JUST RECORDED THE FIVE BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTI IN PARIS. TWO OF THEM HE HADN'T PLAYED IN 15 YEARS, BUT HE JUST SAT DOWN AND PLAYED THEM FROM HIS HEAD. I HAVE NEVER MET A MAN WITH SO MANY POSSIBILITIES. WHAT IS PHENOMENAL ABOUT HIM IS THAT HE DOESN'T EVEN WORK AT THE PIANO. RICHTER OR HOROWITZ WILL PRACTICE SIX HOURS A DAY, BUT HE DOESN'T BOTHER. HE USUALLY

GETS HIS ONLY PRACTICE AT THE REHEARSAL THE DAY BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE.''

AS INCONGRUOUS AS IT SEEMED, I COULDN'T HELP BEING REMINDED OF A REMARK BY THE GREAT ARCHIE MOORE, WHEN A REPORTER WONDERED WHY HE SPENT HIS PRE-BOUT TRAINING TIME SIMPLY TRYING TO LOSE WEIGHT AND NOT DOING MORE SPARRING AND SHADOW-BOXING: ''I ALREADY KNOW HOW TO BOX,'' ARCHIE SAID.

AND RUBINSTEIN KNOWS HOW TO PLAY. BENEATH A HIDEOUS, GLITTERY MARXIST MODERN PLYWOOD CUTOUT SIGN PROCLAIMING ''SIXTY YEARS IN THE SERVICE OF NATIONAL CULTURE AND THE WORKERS OF LODZ,'' THE UNREGENERATE OLD ROMANTIC -- HE WAS ALREADY 30 WHEN SOME CLUCK NAMED LENIN WAS STIRRING UP BIG TROUBLE AMONG THE SAVAGES IN ST. PETERSBURG -- TURNED TO CONDUCTOR HENRYK CZYZ, NODDED TO SHOW HE WAS READY, THEN, WITH THE FIRST FEW NOTES OF THE ORCHESTRA, SAT STARING DREAMILY INTO SPACE AS IF HE HAD DISCOVERED A NEW PLEASURE, EXPERIENCED A NEW BEAUTY. WHEN HE STRUCK THE KEYS, THE YEARS FELL AWAY AND HE WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A YOUNG MAN AGAIN. IT WAS AN EERIE SIGHT.

''EVERY TIME I PLAY IT'S THE FIRST TIME,'' HE TOLD ME LATER, AS IF IT WERE PERFECTLY OBVIOUS. ''IT HAS TO BE.''

AS THE REHEARSAL WANT ON THE THREW HIMSELF INTO THE STREAM OF THE MUSIC WITH JOYFUL, BOYISH ENTHUSIASM, BOUNCING UP AND DOWN ON HIS BENCH, MAKING FACES, PUNCHING THE AIR WITH DOUBLED FISTS, TURNING DURING RESTS TOWARD THE ORCHESTRA TO DIRECT ALONG WITH CZYZ -- BEHIND HIS BACK, AS IT WERE -- INTERRUPTING THE FLOW OF PLAY TO CHATTER EXCITEDLY IN POLISH AND DEMONSTRATE ON THE PIANO HOW THE VIOLINS SHOULD HAVE PLAYED A PASSAGE A FEW SECONDS BEFORE, THEN ADDING HIS OWN VOICE FOR EMPHASIS : ''DA DA DA DA -- DUM (EXCLAMARK)

DUM (EXCLAMARK)''

BY THE TIME HE HAD FINISHED BOTH CONCERTI HE HELD IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND THE CLUTCH OF JADED PROFESSIONAL KIBITZERS WHO WERE HANGING AROUND THE HALL. THEY APPLAUDED LIKE SCHOOLCHILDREN WHEN HE AROSE TO GO BACKSTAGE TO HIS LOGE. RUBINSTEIN WAVED THEM AWAY WITH

A SMILING, DEPRECATORY GESTURE -- JUST US PROS HERE, FELLERS, NO NEED TO GO OVERBOARD -- BUT WALKED WITH A JAUNTY NEW STEP THAT SEEMED TO DRAW ITS VERY ENERGY FROM THEIR APPROVAL.

IN THE LOGE, CZYZ AND JACZINSKI WERE TRYING TO PROTECT HIM FROM INTRUDERS AND MAKE HIM PROMISE TO REST. HE HAD BEEN ACCEPTING TOO MANY TIRING INTRUSIONS BY THE POLISH PRESS.

''YOU KNOW, I WAS INVITED TO THE PETIT PALAIS IN PARIS FOR SOME

KIND OF HONOR LAST YEAR,'' HE SAID, WARMING TO THE SUBJECT OF HIS IMPECCABLE RELATIONS WITH ALL JOURNALISTS. ''HONORS? WHAT DO I NEED HONORS FOR, I SAID. I'VE GOT ALL THE HONORS ALREADY. I AM GRAND OFFICER OF THE LEGION D'HONNEUR. BUT I WENT TO THE PETIT PALAIS. WHEN I GOT THERE I FOUND THAT THEY WERE GIVING ME THE ORANGE OF HONOR FOR BEING COOPERATIVE WITH THE PRESS. THE OPPOSITE OF THAT IS THE LEMON, WHICH THEY GIVE TO STARLETS WHO ARE PROUD OF BEING DIFFICULT WITH EVERYONE. OF COURSE I'M COOPERATIVE WITH THE PRESS. WE'VE BEEN WORKING TOGETHER LONG ENOUGH. I LIKE YOUR PEOPLE MAGAZINE, TOO. IT DOESN'T PRINT ANY PORNOGRAPHY. ALL THE MAGAZINES ARE FULL OF PORNOGRAPHY. YOU SEE SO MANY NAKED WOMEN IN MAGAZINES NOWADAYS THAT THE ONLY WAY THEY'RE SEXY ANYMORE IS WHEN THEY'RE DRESSED.''

BETWEEN THE FRIENDS AND VISITORS IN THE DRESSING ROOM, RUBINSTEIN, WAS CALLED ON TO USE ONLY THREE OF HIS LANGUAGES, BUT HE HAD PLENTY MORE IN STORE, JUST IN CASE. BESIDES ENGLISH, FRENCH AND POLISH, HE IS FLUENT IN RUSSIAN, GERMAN, ITALIAN AND SPANISH AND,

BY HIS OWN DESCRIPTION, ''HALF FLUENT'' IN PORTUGESE.

''WE POLES CAN SPEAK ALL THE LANGUAGES WITHOUT ACCENT,'' HE OBSERVED MATTER-OF-FACTLY. ''IT COMES NATURALLY.''

NOT ENTIRELY BY INTELLECTUAL OSMOSIS, HOWEVER. A FEW DAYS LATER, THE MAESTRO ADMITTED TO ME THAT HIS LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLY ABETTED BY SUCCESSIVE LOVE AFFAIRS WITH TWO FIERY AND TALKATIVE ITALIAN LADIES WHO COMMUNICATED IN SEVERAL TONGUES AND WERE GOOD ENOUGH TO PASS THEM ON TO HIM.

AFTER 45 MINUTES OF MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSIONS, RUBINSTEIN, CZYZ AND JACZINSKI WERE READY TO HEAD BACK TOWARD THE HOTEL FOR A LATE LUNCH. THE MAESTRO CALLED FOR HIS HAIR SPRAY AND DEFTLY COVERED HIS WHITE MANE WITH A FINE, VAPOROUS MIST. HE WAS TOTALLY UNSELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT THIS BIT OF ARRANT COQUETRY.

''I'M NEVER SLEEPY,'' HE SAID WITH A WINK, ''BUT SOMETIMES MY HAIR GETS SLEEPY AND FALLS DOWN.''

WHEN HE OPENED THE DOOR A CROWD OF WOMEN WAS STILL WAITING FOR HIM IN THE HALLWAY. THEY FOLLOWED HIM DOWN THE STAIRS AND OUT TO HIS PARKED CAR, APPLAUDING EVERY FOOT OF THE WAY. MAESTRO BLEW THEM SEVERAL KISSES.

''WHEN I WAS YOUNG I USED TO HAVE SUCCESS WITH WOMEN BECAUSE I WAS YOUNG,'' HE TOLD ME. ''NOW I HAVE SUCCESS WITH THEM BECAUSE I AM OLD. IT'S ONLY THE MIDDLE AGE THAT WAS THE HARD PART.''

LATER THAT AFTERNOON, AS HE STOOD WITH ME IN THE DRAB COURTYARD OF THE APARTMENT BUILDING WHERE HE WAS BORN AND LIVED UNTIL AGE FOUR (''THE THREE GIRLS WERE ALL OVER THERE, BY THE BALCONY, AND WE FOUR BOYS SLEPT UP AT THIS END, BYT THE STAIRWAY''), I ASKED HIM A RATHER BANAL AND PREDICTABLE QUESTION ABOUT WHETHER HE HAD NOTICED ANY

DIFFERENCE IN THE PEOPLE OF LODZ SINCE HIS CHILDHOOD.

''PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS DIFFICULT,'' HE SAID, SOMEWHAT IMPATIENTLY, ''AND ALWAYS DIFFERENT. THEY CHANGE. THAT'S THE HAPPINESS OF MY LIFE. IT WOULD BE TERRIBLE IF THEY DIDN'T. IF PEOPLE DIDN'T CHANGE, LIFE WOULDN'T BE WORTH IT. I WOULD IMMEDIATELY SUICIDE MYSELF. J'AIME LE CHANGEMENT CONTINUEL''

TO DEMONSTRATE HIS PREDILECTION FOR SPONTANEITY, HE BROKE INTO A BRIEF BUT ELEGANT FANDANGO IN HONOR OF SEVILLA, THE CITY WHERE HE WOULD BE GIVING HIS NEXT CONCERT AFTER LODZ, THEN STRODE OUT INTO THE BUSY PIOTRKOWSKA STREET, TURNED RIGHT AND MARCHED BACK TO THE HOTEL, WHERE HE HAD RELATIVES, CONCERT OFFICIALS AND THE NEW YORK TIMES LYING IN AMBUSH FOR HIM. EVENTUALLY HE SAW THEM ALL, AND DID WITHOUT HIS AFTERNOON NAP.

''THERE USED TO BE A CANDY SHOP HERE,'' HE RECALLED, INDICATING A FOOD STORE TO HIS RIGHT. WHENEVER I PASSED THE LADIES USED TO SAY 'ARTUR, VIENS PRENDRE UN BONBON.' THE NAME OF THE PLACE WAS ROSKOWSKI.''

IT WAS JUST ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE AMAZING RUBINSTEIN PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY: HE HAD NOT SEEN THE SHOP IN 84 YEARS, YET HE CLEARLY REMEMBERED ITS NAME AND THE WOMEN WHO WORKED THERE. WHEN RUBINSTEIN WROTE HIS MEMOIRS, ''MY YOUNG YEARS,'' HE COMPOSED THEM WITHOUT NOTES OR DOCUMENTS, SIMPLY SWIMMING BACKWARD IN TIME WITHIN HIS HEAD TO RECALL NAMES, CONVERSATIONS, CONCERTS HE HAD PLAYED AND THE DATES AND PLACES THEY WERE HELD.

''I CAN READ A SONATA ON THE PLANE,'' HE TOLD ME, ''AND THEN PLAY IT THAT EVENING WITHOUT SEEING THE MUSIC. I CAN HEAR (UNDERLINED) IT.''

IF NO ONE DOUBTED THE EFFICIENCY OF HIS MEMORY FOR THAT EVENING'S CONCERT, THERE WERE A FEW WHO HAD APPREHENSIONS ABOUT HIS STRENGTH. AFTER ALL, HE WAS 88, AND HE HAD BEEN SPENDING HIS ENERGY WITH RECKLESS PRODIGALITY. THE MAESTRO SURPRISED THEM ALL. WHEN HE STRODE OUT FROM THE WINGS -- WIRES AND MICROPHONE STANDS HAD BEEN CLEARED AWAY NOW, SO THERE WAS NO DANGER OF STUMBLING -- IT WAS WITH THE FIRM STEP OF A MAN OF 50. BY REFLEX THE SRO AUDIENCE ROSE TO ITS FEET AND GAVE HIM A STANDING OVATION BEFORE HE HAD EVEN TOUCHED A NOTE. SUPERB, HIS SHOCK OF WHITE HAIR AND AQUILINE NOSE GIVING HIM THE APPEARANCE OF A MUSICAL JEAN COCTEAU -- CURIOUSLY, HE IS HANDSOMER NOW WITH AGE THAN WHEN YOUNGER -- RUBINSTEIN SALUTED THE AUDIENCE AND QUICKLY QUIETED THE APPLAUSE BY SEATING HIMSELF AT THE PIANO.

RUBINSTEIN PLAYING CHOPIN FOR POLES IS VERY MUCH LIKE A MASS. THE MAGIC OF HIS RIGHT HAND IN TEMPO RUBATO IS THAT HE CAN BOTH EVOKE AND TRANSCEND ALL THE PAIN AND INJUSTICE AND HUMILIATION SUFFERED BY THIS STRANGEST AND MOST SYMPATHETIC OF ''COMMUNIST'' COUNTRIES. BY THE TIME HE ATTACKED THE BEETHOVEN CONCERTO, HE OWNED THE AUDIENCE AND KNEW IT. NOW HE GAVE THEM ANOTHER PERSON. MUCH MORE SO THAN IN THE MORE DELICATE, LANGOUROUS CHOPIN PIECE, RUBINSTEIN'S STRENGTH AND VITALITY -- THAT HE DOES NOT PLAY LIKE AN OLD MAN IS THE UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE YEAR -- SURGED TO THE SURFACE.

LETTERED PAGES FOLLOW:

AS HE STRUCK THE LAST NOTES OF ''THE EMPEROR,'' THE HOUSE WAS ON ITS FEET, ROARING AND APPLAUDING, AND THE STAGE FILLED WITH HUGE BOUQUETS OF RED AND WHITE CARNATIONS TIED WITH RED AND WHITE RIBBONS -- THE WHOLE MAKING A GLARING DISPLAY OF THE POLISH NATIONAL COLORS RATHER THAN THE PLAIN COMMUNIST RED THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN DE RIGUEUR IN EAST GERMANY OR CZECHOSLOVAKIA OR THE SOVIET UNION. SMILING HUGELY, ARMS HELD IN FRONT AS IF PHYSICALLY SCOOPING INTO THE WAVES OF APPLAUSE, HE ASSENTED TO AN ENCORE, BUT JUST ONE. IT HAD TO BE A ITAL POLONAISE UNITAL AND NOTHING BUT THE STIRRING, EMOTIONAL GRAND POLONAISE, THE ONE THE SOVIETS MOST HEARTILY DISAPPROVE OF AS A REVISIONIST INCITATION TO NATIONAL PRIDE AND YEARNINGS FOR TOTRAL FREEDOM, WHICH, OF COURSE, IS EXACTLY WHY RUBINSTEIN, WHO IS NOTORIOUS FOR HIS SCORN FOR THE SOVIETS, CHOSE TO PLAY IT. HE ATTACKED THE PIANO WITH SUCH FORCE THAT HIS FACE TURNED CRIMSON, BUT WHEN HE HAD FINISHED HE HAD EFFECTIVELY DESTROYED, FOR THIS AUDIENCE AT LEAST, 20 YEARS OF SOVIET-IMPOSED MARXIST ORTHODOX THINKING.

IN THE BALCONY A GROUP OF YOUNG ADMIRERS BROKE INTO THE TRADITIONAL POLISH SONG '' STO LAT'' -- MAY HE LIVE A HUNDRED YEARS. ''WITH THE INFLATION THESE DAYS,'' RUBINSTEIN CRACKED, '' I WISH THEY'D MADE IN 150.''

LED BY CZYZ AND A FEW OF THE ACCOMPANYING MUSICIANS, HE FLED TO HIS LOGE TO HIDE FROM THE AUTOGRAPH SEEKERS AND WELL-WISHERS, BUT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO AVOID THEM ENTIRELY, AND THE LITTLE ROOM SOON RESEMBLED A CROWDED AND OVERHEATED SUBWAY CAR.

''IT'S A MIRACLE I DON'T KEEL OVER,'' HE TOLD JACZINSKI. ''THE PEOPLE JUST DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE''

''IT'S CONSIDERED A TOUR DE FORCE WHEN ANOTHER PIANIST DOES TWO CONCERTI IN A NIGHT,'' JACZINSKI TOLD ME, '' BUT FOR ARTUR IT'S NOTHING. AND THE WAY HE PLAYED EXCLAM HE NEVER PRACTICES, AND YET HE HARDLY MADE ANY MISTAKES AT ALL. IF HE PLAYS A FALSE NOTE IT'S JUST BECAUSE OF LACK OF WORK, NOT AGE. HE COULD PLAY EVEN BETTER IF HE WORKED AT IT, BUT HE LOVES LIFE SO MUCH THAT HE FINDS IT ABOMINABLE TO SIT AT THE PIANO WORKING. WHAT HE LIKES TO DO IS PLAY IT, NOT WORK AT IT.''

''I'M GLAD WHEN I MAKE MISTAKES,'' THE MAESTRO PUCKISHLY TOLD ME A FEW DAYS AFTERWARD. '' THEN I CAN SAY TO THE AUDIENCE -- AHA EXCLAM I GOT YOUR MONEY ANYWAY.''

HE SURELY GOT MONEY OUT OF LODZ, BUT HE WASN'T KEEPING ANY: HE DONATED THE ENTIRE CONCERT FEE FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE WARSAW ROYAL PALACE -- ANOTHER NATIONALISTIC, REVISIONIST SYMBOL -- AND FOR SCHOLARSHIPS AND PRIZES TO YOUNG MUSICIANS.

''I LIKE THE CASTLE BECAUSE IT IS UNNECESSARY,'' HE SAID, REPHRASING COCTEAU.

THE NIGHT AFTER THE CONCERT, RUBINSTEIN DINED AT THE ACTORS' CLUB WITH A FEW OLD FRIENDS. HOLDING COURT AT A CORNER TABLE, HE WAS MORE ACTOR THAN ANY OF THEM, AND EFFORTLESSLY DEFEATED THEM ALL AT THE ELEGANT SNOBBERY SWEEPSTAKES, A REIGNING PASSION AMONG PRESENT-DAY POLES. IT WAS ONE THING TO SMOKE MONTE CRISTO CIGARS, BUT A FAR MORE POTENT BIT OF ONE-UPMANSHIP WAS TO BE ABLE TO QUOTE CHALIAPIN ON CHOOSING A FLAWLESS CAVIAR.

''MY FAVORITE WINES ARE LATOUR 137 AND DOM PERIGNON FOR THE CHAMPAGNES. IT'S THE ONLY ONE THAT SITS ON MY STOMACH. I WOULD RATHER GO TO PRISON THAN DRINK A GLASS OF CHIANTI. IT IS PURE VINEGAR.''

A VERY BEAUTIFUL-YOUNG SLAVIC LADY SOON JOINED THE GROUP, AND NATURALLY SHE GRATIVATED TO RUBINSTEIN'S SIDE, AS IF BY MAGNETIC ATTRACTION.

'' I AM PROUD OF MY CAREER, OF MY AGE, OF MY HEALTH,'' RUBINSTEIN DECLAIMED, '' BUT ABOVE ALL I AM PROUD THAT MY WIFE IS STILL JEALOUS OF ME.

''AND BESIDES,'' HE ADDED, GAZING POINTEDLY AT THE YOUNG LADY, '' IF SHE WERE HERE NOW, YOU(UNDERLINED) WOULDN'T BE HERE.''

IT WAS ONLY THE NEXT DAY, ON THE PLANE BACK TO PARIS, THAT THE MAESTRO BEGAN TO ALLOW HIS FATIGUE TO SHOW A LITTLE BIT, EVEN THOUGH PROTESTING THAT '' IF I ADMIT I'M TIRED I'LL NEVER GET ANYTHING DONE.''

HIS TYPICALLY GRUELLING RUBINSTEIN SCHEDULE, STILL AROUND 100 CONCERTS A YEAR, LEFT HIM ONLY ONE NIGHT TO SPEND AT HOME IN PARIS BEFORE HOPPING ANOTHER AIRPLANE FOR SPAIN, WHERE HE WAS PLAYING IN SEVILLA AND VALENCIA. I MADE THE MISTAKE OF SUGGESTING THAT PERHAPS HE MIGHT CONSIDER SPACING HIS CONCERTS MORE WIDELY, TO GIVE HIMSELF THE CHANCE FOR MORE REST.

''WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY SCHEDULE?'' HE ASKED WITH A TOUCH OF IRRITATION. '' IT'S MY LIFE. I LOVE IT. YOU WOULD DO THE SAME THING AS A CORRESPONDENT, WOULDN'T YOU? SO WHAT'S SO EXTRAORDINARY WHEN I DO IT? I CAN'T SLOW DOWN. IF I DO, I'D BE AFRAID IT WAS ALL FINISHED.''

BESIDES HIS PHENOMENAL HEALTH, RUBINSTEIN'S GREATEST ASSET IS THE UNCANNY MEMORY HE WAS BORN WITH. THAT AND TALENT, OF COURSE. WHEREAS VIRTUOSOS LIKE VLADIMIR HOROWITZ LIMIT THEIR APPEARANCES STINGILY AND PREPARE EACH ONE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, RUBINSTEIN SIMPLY PLOUGHS ON, PLAYING AND LOVING IT AND -- WHAT THE HELL-- LETTING THE

RARE MISTAKES FALL WHERE THEY MAY.

"PADEREWSKI WAS ADMIRABLE AS A PIANIST," HE TOLD ME, "BECAUSE HE WAS BORN WITHOUT TALENT FOR THE PIANO. HE SUFFERED AGONIES. SOME DAYS HE WOULD SPEND 16 OR 17 HOURS PRACTICING. HE HATED TO PLAY. ME, I NEVER WORK. MEMORY AND SELF-ASSURANCE ARE THE GREATEST GIFTS IN THE WORLD. BY JOVE, I WOULD RATHER HANG MYSELF THAN WORK AT THE PIANO THE WAY PADEREWSKI DID"

COMPLAINING THAT HIS BACK HURT HIM AFTER TOO MANY NIGHTS WITHOUT ENOUGH SLEEP, THE MAESTRO DOZED OFF AND AWOKE ONLY WHEN THE POLISH AIRLINER TOUCHED DOWN AT VIENNA, WHERE WE CHANGED PLANES FOR PARIS. AS WE WERE TAXIING IN TOWARD THE TERMINAL HE DRUMMED HIS MUSCULAR FINGERS ON THE TABLE IN FRONT OF HIM AND BEGAN SINGING A MOCKINGLY SCHLOCKY VERSION OF THE BLUE DANUBE: " DA DA DA DA DUM -- DUM DUM EXCLAM DUM DUM EXCLAM "

"AH, THE VIENNESE," HE SAID WITH SURPRISING SARCASM. "THEY LIVE ON THE MEMORY OF MOZART, AND THEY BURIED HIM IN THE COMMON GRAVE OF A PAUPER."

AS WE BOARDED THE AUSTRIAN PLANE FOR THE QUICK RUN TO PARIS, A LARGE AND UNUSUALLY WELL-CONSTRUCTED TEUTONIC PERSON OF THE FEMALE STYLE STOPPED OPPOSITE US TO CHOOSE HER SEAT, THEN BUSIED HERSELF FOR SEVERAL MINUTES ARRANGING HER LUGGAGE IN THE RACK ABOVE HER. NEITHER RUBINSTEIN NOR I NOR ANYONE ELSE IN THE FIRST TEN ROWS OF THE AIRCRAFT COULD FAIL TO ADMIRE THE INFINITE CARE SHE HAD TAKEN IN PLACING HER PERSON WITHIN THE STRICTURES OF A PAIR OF JEANS THAT WAS MANIFESTLY MADE TO FIT A MIDGET. UNABASHEDLY, SPECULATIVELY, THE EXPERT EYE OF THE MAESTRO STUDIED THE AGREABLE SPECTACLE UNTIL IT TURNED AND RESUMED ITS PRIMARY ROLE AS THE BASIS FOR THE SEATED POSITION.

"NATURALLY, I LIKE POLISH GIRLS," HE CONCEDED TO ME. " FOR ONE THING, THEY HAVE GOOD LEGS. FRENCH GIRLS ARE TOO THIN."

DURING THE FLIGHT TO PARIS HE REMAINED LARGELY SILENT; GLANCING ABSENTLY OVER NEWSPAPERS AND OCCASIONALLY NAPPING. WE SPOKE BRIEFLY ABOUT THE BEGINNINGS OF HIS CAREER (" I WAS CLEVER ENOUGH TO DISCOVER EARLY ON THAT I HAD NO TALENT FOR COMPOSING") AND ABOUT THE IMPACT OF MODERN COMMUNICATIONS ("I WON'T PLAY FOR RADIO OR TELEVISION, IN SPITE OF SOME VERY BIG OFFERS, BECAUSE I CAN IMAGINE A FELLOW LISTENING TO ME WHILE SHAVING, AND HIS WIFE IN THE KITCHEN SAYING 'TURN THAT DAMN MUSIC DOWN' "), BUT MOSTLY HE WAS PREOCCUPIED BY PRESENT PROBLEMS. IT MIGHT JUST BE PART OF THE SECRET TO HIS GENIUS, I THOUGHT, THAT RUBINSTEIN STUBBORNLY LIVES FOR AND IN THE MOMENT.

"I'LL BE PLAYING SOME DEBUSSY, THE SCHUMAN FANTASIE STUCKE (UMLAUT OVER UU), A BEETHOVEN SONATA AND CHOPIN IN SEVILLA," HE SAID. " THEN TWO DAYS AFTER I GO TO VALENCIA FOR A DIFFERENT PROGRAM; I WILL HAVE GONE FOUR DAYS WITHOUT TOUCHING A PIANO, AND I WON'T BE ABLE TO TOUCH ONE UNTIL A FEW HOURS BEFORE THE CONCERT. I'M AFRAID OF SEVILLA."

HE FELL INTO ANOTHER LONG SILENCE.

"NO TIME TO REHEARSE," HE SAID AGAIN AS OUR PLANE TOUCHED DOWN AT ORLY AIRPORT. HE LEANED BACK IN HIS SEAT, LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW AND SAW THAT THE WEATHER WAS FINE.

"NO, " HE SAID, SLAPPING HIS HANDS DOWN ON HIS KNEES WITH FINALITY. "THEY'LL HAVE TO TAKE ME AS I AM."

ENDIT; CAPTIONS FOLLOW

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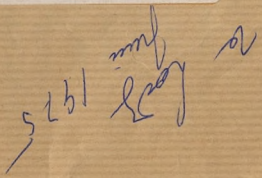

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