MUSIC

By WARREN WIRTZ

RUBINSTEIN

Everything Artur Rubinstein touches turns to gold of one carat or another. The real article is his first-rate control, tone and sensitivity doing straightforward work (rare), and the not infrequent impurities result from his overriding both convention and composer's intention. These go either in the direction of extravagant exaggeration or glib dismissal of the obvious.

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Take, for example, the Chopin group of his choppy program last night in Northrop auditorium, the last of the Artists Course. Here, of course, it may be high time to introduce some extra thrill and shock, and that may be why this group was most remarkably thrilling of all.

Especially the A Flat Polonaise, which could have made one gladly say, "This is the end. Now let me die." No doubt it was the logical conclusion of all Chopinimania. After such thrills, the Berceuse saw to it that baby was really snoozing. In the F Sharp Nocturne the rubato was so great as to be almost a caricature of a rubato. Yet the piece held together, Rubinstein being a great pianist.

Interesting sidelight on the rubato also was that it had a more than accidental habit of popping up in passages considerably tougher a tempo. In the Franck Prelude Chorale and Fugue, which was exquisite poetic torture (if not the more exact ecstasy), this happened several times. But still the Chorale crossing hands without a single loss and the Fugue piling up big counterpoint were plenty exciting. Does Franck suggest Gerard Hopkins to anyone else?

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The glib extreme appeared in the Debussy Prelude from Pour le Piano. Last chords of this were telescoped into about quadruple cut-time. Ondine was less so, but still a pretty glassy water sprite.

Granados' Maiden and the Nightingale, wriggling with musical cajolery, got the usual superb treatment. Other small pieces were the three Dolls of Villa-Lobos — Mulatto, Broken, and Clown, all sweet, post-impressionistic, and again thrilling.

Bach had an inning in the violin Chaconne as elaborated for piano by Busoni, but the program scrupulously avoided Mozart and Beethoven. So big an artist could have done a lot better by himself and us.