Staff Photo by Frank Jones

Artur Rubinstein in concert. The shadows are cast by the piano lid support.

Near-Capacity Crowd on Hand

Rubinstein Overwhelms Audience

By Beverly Wolter
Staff Arts Reporter

Artur Rubinstein came and conquered last night.

Before a near-capacity audience in Wait Chapel at Wake Forest College, he did what he has been doing for some six decades — he overwhelmed his audience with that special touch of genius that leaves even the most gifted in technique and interpretation bringing up the rear.

Rubinstein has had the reputation for years of missing notes —and for being totally unconcerned about it.

Let him scatter notes as he will, they fall like stars.

At the end of his program last night, his listeners rose almost as one to give him a standing ovation.

When he first appeared, he looked a little shorter, a little prayer and a little older than I was expecting. He is, after all, 78—or 80, depending on which source you consult.

The profile offered the familiar view of him, with head upturned and slightly contrast, sharply - defined nose, sweeping brow and a sizable remnant of curly hair.

He bowed quickly to the audience in the auditorium and to those seated on the stage behind him, and then set briskly to work. Rubinstein wastes no time between numbers. He gets on quickly with the business at hand.

It was in his final selections by his fellow - countryman Chopin that the qualities which have kept him in the forefront of the gifted men of his age were most apparent. He exerts a mesmeric influence as his fingers race lightly, fluidly, even playfully along the keyboard in breadth, scope and formulation of interpretation, in style and understanding, you can't touch him.

Technique is a word of no consequence to Rubinstein he has long surpassed any need to worry with it. Technique in his case is merely a means to the supreme end, which is making the music speak.

Love and long regard for the music, to the point that it seemed to belong as much to the performer as to the composer were registered as he poser, were registered as he minor (Op. 23), Nocturne, Scherzo in B flat minor (Op. 31), and as an encore, a Waltz. His other encore was a Prelude by Debussy.

The Chopin was preceded by Chabrier's delightful Scherzo Waltz and three movements of Villa-Lobos' "Prole do Bebe" ("The Baby's Family").

In the Villa-Lobos, Rubinstein seemed to take an impish delight in the complexity of his fingering.

He finished the first of the three movements, titled "Mulato Rubber Doll," with a smacking touch like a parent giving a reluctant child a gentle urging to get along to bed. He had special touches also for the other movements, the "Poor Rag Doll" and the "Clown Doll." The work is said to be a favorite of Rubinstein, an early champion of the composer.

Rubinstein made much of the wit and humor of the work in Schumann's "Carnaval," (Op. 9). Delicacy, romance, and passion were there, too.

He opened with Beethoven's Sonata in F minor (Op. 57) "Appassionata."

There was the complete master at the keyboard, so in charge of the instrument that the keys seemed to come up to meet his fingers.

The sonata is aptly named. Its music is passionate and powerful, reflecting stress and turmoil.

Rubinstein is no man to let emotions stay hidden in the music. He is there to bring them out and, if need be, amplify them through his own expressiveness.

Sometimes the "Appassionata" gets drowned in dramatics or in over-emotionalism. Not so last night.

Rubinstein's was a strong, vigorous, muscular, no-nonsense reading, but also one keenly aware of the emotional implications of the work.

The program pointed out that the pianos of Beethoven's day were not designed to handle the great climaxes and resounding harmonies of the sonata.

Wait Chapel now has, and Rubinstein used, a new Steinway grand, given by Mrs. Walter M. Williams of Burlington. Mrs. Williams and her late husband also gave the Moeller organ in the chapel. Mrs. Frank Bland of Winston-Salem also was credited with contributing toward the purchase of the instrument.