UNDER REVIEW

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Rubinstein at the Festival Hall

by Neville Cardus

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN, said to be rising seventy-two years, was the soloist at the concert last night in the Royal Festival Hall, playing with the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Antal Dorati. He darted to the platform, his vitality bristling the hair on his head. After the interval he darted back as though a little late for an appointment with Rachmaninoff in C minor. But he sounded the concerto's introductory piano chords with time to spare, sonorously, magisterially.

He is perhaps the last of the truly virtuoso school, now almost legendary, the cavaliers of the keyboard, glorying in their instrument and drawing music into its service. Yet Rubinstein has been no slave to the school. His experiences with Stravinsky—he was playing him marvellously thirty years ago—has kept his style astringent and athletic. He has never fallen into senile habits. His wit is still active. He plainly revelled in the Rachmaninoff concerto again and in the alluring orchestral setting called up by Mr Dorati's authoritative gestures.

He played the C minor concerto as only Rubinstein today can play it, full-scaled, evocative and vibrant—and as though for the six hundred and seventy-sixth time.

He proved his artistry, before the interval, the way he mingled his mastery with the orchestra in "Nights in the Garden of Spain" of Manuel de Falla. Here the piano is part of an ensemble and must, in its tones and rhythms suggest, imply, but not demonstrate.

Rubinstein touched the keyboard beautifully in the second "Impression," matching his tone sensitively to the woodwind of the opening movement. His performance in this piece was a model of imaginative and musical collaboration, an example to pianists today frequently seem to play without listening to the orchestral instruments around them in a concerted work. Mr Dorati very cleverly made a blend of the music's melodic and rhythmical material, all put to romantically picturesque use.

It is a mistake to suppose music such as this is composed without brainstuff, the ear merely changing to sound what has been seen. Any kind of music is an arrangement of notes involving some degree of control from the intellect. And there is more of this control in these Falla "Impressions"—and even in Delius, if it comes to that—than is apparent at once to the callow ear.

Mr Dorati and the orchestra gave us much expert and stimulating conducting and playing in the "Dance Suite" of Bartók. But the vast audience had mainly come to hear Rubinstein and Rachmaninoff, so the concerto was placed last in the programme. No risks of sudden back-slidings were taken. Ecstasy shone on nearly every face as the concerto was receiving as brilliant a performance, soloist and orchestra, as well could be wished. Ample compensation for the dullish conducting of Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" fantasy-overture, in which the Montague-Capulet riots were scintillating.