Rubinstein Demonstrates Why He's Up There on Top

When Artur Rubinstein dedicates a piano, it stays dedicated. And pianists who have an opportunity, in the future, to perform on the Mendelssohn club's memorial Steinway concert grand will have a goal to try for, if they were in the audience that jammed Shrine temple Monday night. They will know, having heard Rubinstein, the delicacy and sweetness of the piano's upper register; they will know, too, what can be done in the way of a stupendously thundering bass.

And even if they never come very close to achieving the tone qualities that the famous Rubinstein hands drew from the Steinway, those aspiring pianists will know, at least, what they're after—and there's no harm in trying.

The magnificent instrument that the stocky, vigorous Rubinstein dedicated Monday night was bought with contributions to the Mendelssohn club's perpetual memorial fund; it represents a memorial tribute to club members and club supporters who have died. Just as magnificent a tribute in memory of those who have gone was the concert that marked the piano's formal dedication; and it seemed too bad that the club's founders—women who pioneered to give Rockford the best in music—could not have been in the audience that sat breathless while Rubinstein transformed the familiar Chopin Nocturne in F Sharp into sheer magic.

NEXT: MUSIC CENTER

Printed programs for the Rubinstein concert carried, in two short lines of type, news of an ambitious venture that's in the making.

The two lines of type said: "Second project: Mendelssohn Civic Music center."

Acquisition of the concert grand piano dedicated by Rubinstein represented the first project undertaken by the Mendelssohn club perpetual memorial committee. Acquisition of a permanent home for the club is the next goal.

The world-famous pianist said after the concert, incidentally, that he was delighted with the piano, and particularly with the nuances of tone that its superb quality made possible in the Rubinstein—Chopin selections. He liked his audience, too; and proved it by playing three encores after his final Chopin group—Scriabin's Nocturne for Left Hand (in which Rubinstein proved that a left hand can do the work of two hands very handsomely, if it happens to be the right left hand); a Prokofieff March; and Ritual Fire Dance, by De Falla.

The concert, from some of the most memorable Beethoven that has ever been heard hereabouts, to the final rhythms of the final De Falla encore, was a conclusive demonstration of why and how Rubinstein has reached the lofty place that he occupies in the modern musical world. He is, for one thing, a spectacular technician; and the speed of his flying fingers in the rapid passages makes you doubt that the musical dictionaries can be right when they say that he was born 60 years ago. He is also an eloquent interpreter. And there is plenty of heart, plenty of emotion, in his playing.

From time to time, the force in the pianist's strong hands and muscular arms seems to need supplementing; and then he rises from his chair and comes down with a smashing assault on the keyboard. The fortissimos that he gets are thunderers. Then the mood of the music changes, and there is wrought a delicate phrase as lucent and fragile as a bit of highly frangible Venetian glass.

The contrast between resonant crescendos and sweet pianissimos was exquisitely presented in Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata. And in the closing movement, the pianist provided a pretty dazzling demonstration of what can be done in the way of making all the notes in a swift run perfectly audible and perfectly balanced.

Schumann's Carnaval, with all its opportunities to display technical mastery and tone control, gave the audience some pretty exciting moments—and a consciousness of what the Carnaval sketches can sound like when a master, and not merely a well-intentioned but pedestrian performer, tosses them off.

Debussy, whom Rubinstein plays lovingly, and beautifully, was represented by the Prelude in A Minor and a waltz—La plus que lente. There were a dash of Albeniz—the Navarra; and four Chopin pieces—the Nocturne, two well-contrasted Etudes, and the Polonaise in A Flat Major. And if you couldn't see the revolutionary mobs storming the barricades as those bass notes thundered in the Polonaise, you aren't the good listener that Rubinstein thought you were.

After the concert, the pianist was honored at a party given at the Addison Brown home, 819 North Main street, by the Browns and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Sills. There is a family connection, by marriage, between the Sills family and the famous Mlynarski musical family. Mr. Rubinstein's wife was a Mlynarski.

Among the party guests were the Sigfred A. Sandeens—Mrs. Sandeen having served as chairman for the concert; and Mrs. Charles Reitsch, chairman of the Mendelssohn club perpetual memorial committee.

—M.N.G.