RUBINSTEIN GETS STAGE FRIGHT

Nimble Fingers Cast Spell Over 60 Years

EDITOR'S NOTE — Pianist Artur Rubinstein doesn't worry about false notes; what he tries to give at every concert is "one drop of fresh blood." He's been giving for 60 years, and at 77 still books 100 concerts a year.

By MARY CAMPBELL

NEW YORK (AP) — Artur Rubinstein, classical pianist beloved by three generations, made his American debut in Carnegie Hall in 1906.

Last month, 60 years later, he gave three concerts in the same hall, creating new interpretations, missing a few notes and providing some of the most beautiful piano music the audience ever heard or ever expects to hear.

But Rubinstein has an unexpected weakness. After all these years, he still can get stage fright.

Case Of Nerves

The worst case was in Russia where, he admits, "I was scared to death.

"During the time of the czars I was often in Russia. But I was absent 30 years and when you don't go for many years, you become a legend.

"I was afraid they would treat me like an old man who can still play the piano. And I was thinking, 'If I fall through in Russia, I'm done with. Why should I ask such a thing?' Sol Hurok (the impresario) and my wife were saying, 'Why did we bring him here in all this nervous state?'

"Then it went off beautifully. The Minister of Culture came on the stage and said, 'Can I take you in my arms and kiss and hug you?'" Rubinstein pauses then continues: "The Minister of Culture was a fine-looking woman. Then we kissed, very worthwhile."

"My friends said I made Krushchev fall, but I can assure you it is not so. He fell two days after I left."

A visit with Rubinstein in his New York apartment soon puts a visitor under his spell. The master's cheeks glow and his eyes twinkle when he smiles. At 77 he is indefatigable, original, animated, courtly and mischievous.

"If I told you what I do in a year," Rubinstein says lifting both hands, "you would faint. I always play around 100 concerts a year, and after concerts there are parties and cigars and television. I sleep very little.

"Two things I have to see published, that I couldn't live without concerts and that if there was a law you couldn't get money for concerts, I'd play anyway. Managers who read that can get much more cheeky with me. Hurok gives me too many concerts and I say, 'You shouldn't have done it.' He says, 'You love it.'"

Until the end of March, Rubinstein is on a 21-city tour in this country. He will be in Dallas Feb. 28, then Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, New York, Pittsburgh, Ithaca, Albany, Cleveland and Washington. And he still finds time for recordings.

Between Christmas and New Year's he recorded all of Chopin's mazurkas — three long-playing records for RCA Victor. More than five million Rubinstein recordings have been sold.

Referring to his European tour last fall, Rubinstein said, "Everytime I come back from Europe it astonishes me. The American people think they are far behind Europe musically, but they are not."

"I gave a concert at the University of Michigan on a day when it was icy," he recalled. "It took me about 15 minutes to get around one block. From the stage I said, 'I don't like to stop in the middle of a sonata, so let's wait for latecomers.' Only five minutes after the hour, they were all there. 4,000 people. I gave a very difficult program, a Schubert Sonata, Schumann, things which are not in the usual run, no Liszt, no showpiece anything. I know that they listened, and they loved it.

"You couldn't imagine such a thing in Europe. It is a very, very difficult thing to fill Festival Hall in London. In France, outside of Paris, nobody would dream of riding to give a concert unless there was some special festival or push around it.

"Of course, in Russia the audiences for music are divine. The Russian public is extremely inclined to music. It always was, even hysterical. In my childhood I remember in Moscow and Leningrad young girls shot themselves in concert halls because they didn't want to survive hearing such music."

Romantic Pianist

Rubinstein always was, and remains, a romantic pianist, devoted to conveying the mood and meaning of the music.

"I criticize the trend of young artists who come on stage as if they have the whole thing in their pockets, so well prepared," he said. "I don't hear a performance, I hear an exercise.

"I expect from an artist at least one drop of fresh blood. There must be something which comes out of his inspiration, which he didn't plan, that brings real vitality to it.

"It is my joke that when people say, 'I hear you had a great success in Russia,' to say: 'Yes, and do you know why? They heard for 30 years nothing but perfection. They were happy to hear again a pianist who makes false notes. It was like fresh air for them.'

"When I go to a piano, I go to develop a piece artistically, to get into the content of it. I go for the sound, contrasts, dynamics, beauty of sonority.

"If I'm not sure of it, I sit in a cafe and think about it. Sometimes in the morning I start innocently a symphony of Beethoven or Brahms, or an overture of Wagner, and I play it in my mind, a good orchestra, conducted by myself, displaying it absolutely to my satisfaction.

(AP Newsfeatures Photo)

HOLDING BACK THE YEARS — The fingers of pianist Artur Rubinstein, which have enchanted three generations of music lovers, still have the stamina and nimbleness to play around 100 concerts a year. Here the 77-year-old musician's hands are seen in various exercises around his lively face during a recent interview in his New York apartment. The unconventional pianist does not practice with scales on the piano, but does exercises wherever he is.