Rubinstein's Endurance Feat

Straight from a piano recital at Croydon's new Fairfield Halls on Sunday night, Mr. Artur Rubinstein came to the Festival Hall last night to take part in the second of the three concerts forming the Philharmonia Orchestra's Brahms Festival under Mr. Giulini.

To "take part" is to put it mildly; in point of fact Mr. Rubinstein played not one but both of this composer's piano concertos, a feat of physical and mental endurance that only someone of Mr. Rubinstein's eternal youthfulness and unflagging energy could ever attempt.

Whether or not the inclusion of the two works together was a wise piece of programme-planning is a moot point. Twenty-three years separate them, during which time Brahms changed from a turbulent young man pitting himself single-handed against the mighty forces of fate into a mature and mellow philosopher with the wisdom to accept the inevitable. Yet both concertos are of symphonic proportions, and of similar weighty texture. To try to digest them both in the brief spell of two hours could be like trying to follow one big course of fowl with another of game.

Could be, yes, but not when Mr. Rubinstein plays them. For this pianist remains himself, wholly true to his own characteristic style of piano playing, even in Brahms. Glinting tone, transparent texture, buoyant rhythm and lively tempi prevented either concerto from ever sounding elephantine; spontaneous flashes of inspiration in phrasing brought them both up as fresh and as *un*sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought as if Mr. Rubinstein were playing them both for the first time.

The only debatable feature of an otherwise superbly poised account of the D minor concerto was the soloist's choice of tempo for the slow movement. This was faster than the *Adagio* prescribed by the composer, and would have robbed the movement of spirituality and repose had it not been for the exquisitely pure and ethereal quality of Mr. Rubinstein's *piano* tone.

As for the B flat major concerto, Mr. Rubinstein plunged into its opening flourishes with less than his usual composure, making this movement sound a little less majestically expansive than usual, while in the Scherzo he and Mr. Giulini together were guilty of over-relaxing the rhythmic tension in the contrasting episodes. But the slow movement was exquisite, and the finale a miracle of nimbleness and grace.

The Philharmonia Orchestra played with full-hearted cooperation and brilliance not only in the concertos but also in the Tragic Overture, where Mr. Giulini combined scrupulous care for detail with a glowing romantic impulse which carried the performance through like one great surging wave.