Superb Piano Recital

Rubinstein

By ERIC McLEAN.

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN, eighty-one years young, strode onto the stage of the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier last night and proceeded to cast another of his potent spells over the Montreal audience. Everytime this prince of pianists returns he seems to bring with him an even more powerful magic, one which enchants the philistine and the connoisseur alike.

He held three thousand people in his thrall last night through the length of a very demanding program which included the Prelude Chorale and Fugue of Cesar Franck, the heroic F minor Sonata of Brahms, a group of works by Debussy and Chabrier, and ended with the inevitable Chopin items (in this case the Barcarolle and the B flat minor Scherzo).

But it did not end there: the audience wouldn't hear of it. Rubinstein gave in to their demands to the extent of three Chopin encores — the F sharp Nocturne, the Waltz in A flat opus 34 No. 1, and the A flat Polonaise, upon which the crowd rose to its feet in a most spontaneous tribute to this great musician.

What can be said about a recital like this, other than thank you? One would expect a trace of the routine, a touch of absent-mindedness, to show up in such familiar works, particularly from man who has known them for such a long time. But Rubinstein is the very person who can give this music a freshness and a new pulse of life.

He is like a collector of fine things showing you about his house. What at first glance appears to be a battered piece of furniture suddenly takes on an unexpected beauty as he caresses its patina, pointing out its bold proportions, or a bit of delicate carving.

All of these pieces are Rubinstein's property, and I am convinced that the moment one of them ceases to give him pleasure, he will remove it to the lumber room.

It is particularly difficult to pick out highlights in a performance like this. I remember the glorious burst of sound at the end of the Fugue of Franck; the gentle song of the Andante in the Brahms Sonata, foreshadowing the great cello tune in the C minor Piano Quartet; the shimmering tone of the piano in Debussy's "Ondine;" and especially I recall the marvellous relaxation in the last pages of Chopin's Barcarolle.

Any music student will tell you that Rubinstein takes liberties. But these are the liberties of a man who knows the music in depth; a man whose purpose is to convey to his listeners something more than a correct assemblage of notes.