Greater London Council

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL

Director: John Denison, C.B.E.

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present

A Pianoforte Recital

by

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN

Monday, 7th June 1971 at 8 p.m.

PROGRAMME AND NOTES **15p**

Front page photograph by EVA RUBINSTEIN, NEW YORK

ALL-CHOPIN PROGRAMME

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A flat major Op. 61

Nocturne in F sharp major Op. 15

Mazurka in C minor Op. 56 No. 3

Sonata in B flat minor Op. 35

INTERVAL

Barcarolle Op. 60

4 Etudes from Op. 10 and 25

Berceuse Op. 57

Scherzo in C sharp minor Op. 39

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Programme Notes

by

MOSCO CARNER

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Polonaise—Fantaisie in A flat major Op. 61

Despite his French descent, Chopin was an ardent patriot whose love of his native Poland lost nothing of its intensity by his move to Paris. Poland's loss of a political identity in 1831 affected him most profoundly and this is strongly reflected in his Polonaises which are eloquent evocations of his country's glorious past and one-time heroic splendour. As Arthur Hedley writes in his Chopin book: "A threefold motive runs through the Polonaises: pride in Poland's past, lamentation for her present and hope for her future". The processional ceremonial character of his national dance with its martial rhythm fired Chopin's imagination most powerfully and his mature Polonaises are all large-scale tone poems combining nobility, heroic expression and pathos—the qualities most fitting to their exalted patriotic theme.

The Polonaise—Fantaisie, Op. 61 was Chopin's last work inspired by the traditional dance and represents his towering achievement in this genre. It is a very considerable work which harnesses the narrative style of the Ballades to the pliancy of form of such works as the F sharp minor Polonaise, Op. 44 and the great Fantasy in F minor, written at the same period. Its texture is almost symphonic, for the composer here concentrates on thematic development (instead of varied repetitions of sections) and thus sets it apart from the rest of his Polonaises. Moreover, its harmonic language heralds the advent of a new style which Chopin, unfortunately, did not live to develop much further. The intense and pervasive chromaticism resulting in marked tonal ambiguities points to the Wagner of *Tristan;* while the introduction is almost Straussian in its harmonic daring.

Its main theme, already foreshadowed in the introduction, is a song-like lyrical idea which, together with a more lively attendant strain, is subjected to extensive development. The central section or Intermezzo in B major (*Più lento*) introduces a tranquil melody of narrow compass which is subsequently made to grow into an expansive paragraph. At the end of the section there is a unique and unforgettable pianist effect—a long trill in one, two, three and finally four parts above a pedal which, increasing in dynamic strength, explodes into a shattering chord. In the concluding pages Chopin brings back the song-like theme as well as the melody from the Intermezzo, now transposed to A flat, and both change their original expression completely in the tempestuous, agitated character of the music. Towards the end the momentum subsides—it is as though the vision of a proud Poland grows dimmer and dimmer—when a final loud chord releases us from the magic spell of the piece.

Nocturne in F sharp major, Op. 15, No. 2

Together with the Waltzes, the Nocturnes represent the part of Chopin's output that won him his first great success in the Parisian salons of the 1830s. In their elegance, refinement and harmonic sophistication they are a reflection of the highly cultured atmosphere of a milieu where polished manners and an avoidance of all vulgarity were as characteristic as was the pervasive air of artificiality and polite insincerity. True, the Nocturnes largely display a single aspect of Chopin's many-sided musical personality, but at their best they can stand comparison with his more important works. Chopin's point of departure was the type of nocturne invented by John Field, but while Field's nocturnes are today all but dead and buried, Chopin's are gloriously alive, thanks to their melodic imagination, their harmonic ingenuity and the felicity of their pianistic style. The majority are in ternarry form, with a first section in a slow and dream-like character while the middle section is almost invariably fast and frequently dramatic in expression. They are usually rounded off by a coda for which the composer reserved some of his most exquisite poetic touches. The F sharp major Nocturne, however, has no coda and is comparatively short but is a piece outstanding for its delicacy and its consummate piano writing. It was published in 1834.

Mazurka in C minor, Op. 56, No. 3

Though a national Polish element colours all Chopin's music, it is perhaps in the Mazurkas where the influence of folkmusic is felt at its strongest. Yet Chopin hardly ever used actual folktunes for his material and there are indeed few among his sixty mazurkas in which an actual Polish folk melody can be identified. Mazur, Oberek and Kujawiak, the three closely related forms of this national dance, Chopin heard constantly during his early years at Warsaw, and in time he became a true connoisseur of his country's national music. This was, as it were, the matrix out of which these dances were born; they preserve their links with the mother-country through Chopin's subtle assimilation of the native inflections of melody and rhythm into his own style, to which he added harmonic colours of the highest originality (especially in his later Mazurkas). Many of these contain passages which at the time must have struck audiences as experimental if not indeed abstruse and jarring on the ear, but which we today find highly imaginative and foreshadowing modern harmonic developments. Moreover, the Mazurkas display an almost infinite variety of moods—gaiety and sadness, pathos and passion, fire and verve, nostalgia and longing.

Sonata in B flat minor, Op. 35

Grave—Doppio movimento
Scherzo
Marche funebre
Finale: Presto

In the summer of 1839 Chopin moved with George Sand to Nohant, his mistress's country place, in order to recuperate from an ailment which had been mistakenly diagnosed as an inflammation of the larynx. Chopin pined to get back to Paris, but in the peaceful, tranquil atmosphere of Nohand his downcast spirits began to revive again, and he completed several works there, among them the Sonata in B flat minor. The funeral march, however, he had written two years before (1837). The fact that the work fails to conform to academic rules is neither here nor there. As always, Chopin wrote it to suit his own, very individual purposes, and not with a preconceived, abstract formal scheme in mind. His strength lay in the invention of lyrical and dramatic *episodes* rather than in a closely reasoned *development* as was Beethoven's way. Nor does his sonata aspire to intellectual depths or spiritual heights but is the projection of an intensely romantic emotion. During Chopin's life and for some considerable time after it was criticized for its 'enervating character' and the opening movement was declared as 'transcending the limits of propriety' (whatever this may have meant). Even so ardent an admirer of Chopin's as Schumann found the sonata little to his liking delivering himself to the absurd pronouncement that it was 'a pity that Chopin did not substitute an Adagio in D flat major for the repulsive (*sic*) funeral march'. Schumann missed the whole point of the sonata which is that the funeral march forms its core and is the ideological germ from which the remaining movements sprang. The work is a sustained tragedy, a vision of mortal conflict and death which crystallizes in the third movement.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: During a recent test in the Hall, a note played 'mezzoforte' on the horn measured approximately 65 decibels [db(A)] of sound. A single 'uncovered' cough gave the same reading. A handkerchief placed over the mouth when coughing assists in obtaining a 'pianissimo'.

NO SMOKING IN THE AUDITORIUM OR TAKING OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE GREATER LONDON COUNCIL: Persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any of the other gangways.

FIRST AID FACILITIES are provided by the British Red Cross Society.

The first movement derives its main propelling force from the bold juxtaposition of a grave, sombre motive in the bass and an agitated broken-up series of quaver figures in the treble which recall the beginning of Mozart's G minor Symphony. Chopin's exquisite lyricism is seen in the expressive cantabile of the second subject. The prevailing impression of the development is one of tremendous turbulence and rhythmic drive, reaching at times a pitch of frenzy. As the first subject has been extensively used in this development, Chopin omits it in the recapitulation and begins the latter with the second theme.

The Scherzo is in E flat minor but ends in the relative major (G flat). It is a most tempestuous piece marked by hammering octaves and driving chromatic passages. The Trio, in G flat major, is slower and of an insinuating waltz-like character.

The Funeral March in B flat minor unfolds with a heavy tread below a poignantly lamenting melody, and occasional trills in the bass are suggestive of muffled drum-rolls. The Trio in D flat major, with its broad shapely tune, is like a consoling song. The Finale is an enigmatic piece scurrying along in a unison between right and left hand. It is to be played entirely *sotto voce*, except for the sudden *ff* stroke at the very end. By an imaginative use of the diminished sevenths and passing notes Chopin imparts to this movement a tonal ambiguity which greatly enhances its mysterious effect.

INTERVAL

A warning gong will be sounded for five minutes before the end of the interval

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Barcarolle, Op. 60

The Barcarolle (1846) is a nocturne in all but name and perhaps Chopin's finest nocturne at that. It represents a high point in his lyrical writing and achieves a perfect fusion of all those technical features which have made his piano style so unique. The music recreates, in a highly imaginative manner, the atmosphere of a boating scene in the shimmering haze of a luxuriant summer's evening and with lappings of the waves, to say nothing of the Italianate touches of thirds and sixths in the melody. Its form is ternary, but with some novel arrangement of the thematic material in the repeat of the opening section. Chopin, moreover, achieves an exquisite effect through his inspired use of the sustaining pedal.

Four Studies from Op. 10 and Op. 25

Like the Ballades, the Studies represent a type of composition of which Chopin may be said to have been 'the first begetter'. What sets them apart from the studies of Czerny, Moscheles, Thalberg and other piano composers of the time, is the complete fusion of imaginative beauty and poetic feeling with a masterly exploitation of the keyboard. Chopin was prompted to his studies by the need he felt to provide himself and other pianists with a series of pieces which would enable them to cope with technical problems posed by his other piano music. There are two sets of 12 Studies each—Op. 10 (publ. 1833) and Op. 25 (publ. 1837). Most of them confine themselves to a single idea whose musical and technical possibilities are realized with incomparable skill and resourcefulness. A noteworthy feature of the studies is their sequence of keys—the majority of them are written in pairs of which the second study is in the relative minor of the first study in major. In the 24 Preludes, Op. 28 Chopin carried out this plan more strictly.

Berceuse, Op. 57

Chopin's own piano playing excelled in a pure singing tone, a perfect legato, and those ravishing effects of digital limpidity which the French call *jeu perlé*. Small wonder then that the Berceuse which calls for precisely this style of performance made such an impression on the Parisian public when Chopin played it on 2 February 1844. It is a superb example of an instrumental lullaby. Over a gently rocking bass ostinato which never leaves the key of D flat major—the most pianistic of keys—unfolds a series of brief variations on a simple dream-like theme. An indefinable air of poetry radiates from these variations in which the theme is dissolved into delicate arpeggios, broken chords, euphonious Italian thirds and, partly diatonic, partly chromatic runs.

Scherzo in C sharp minor, Op. 39

Chopin's four Scherzi belong to his major contribution to romantic piano music and, like his Ballades and Studies, bear the unmistakable imprint of high originality. True, the title 'Scherzo' Chopin borrowed from Beethoven in order to indicate a fast piece in 3/4 time, but otherwise his scherzi have nothing in common with the Beethovenian type. They are not humorous but serious, full of emotional storm and stress and marked by a demonic drive very peculiar to Chopin. Moreover, they are self-contained pieces extending to dimensions far greater than those of scherzi in sonatas, yet in their structural treatment they come near to sonata form.

Thus, the C sharp minor Scherzo, Op. 39 has two strongly contrasted themes which Chopin handles like the first and second subject—a stormy melody in octaves in the tonic, and a solemn chorale, *meno mosso*, in D flat major. There is a 24-bar long introduction which, thanks to Chopin's ingenious use of the diminished seventh, avoids the key of C sharp minor until the entry of the first theme. A remarkable feature of the *meno mosso* section lies in the fact that each phrase of the chorale in sustained chords, is answered by a most delicate cascade of quaver figures from the high treble downwards—an effect that may be likened to an eloquent dialogue on some transcedental topic.

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN

" The man and his music enrich the lives of people everywhere "

by HOWARD TAUBMAN

formerly Music Editor of the New York Times

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN is a complete artist because he is a whole man. It does not matter whether those who go to his concerts are ear-minded or eye-minded—or both. His performances are a comfort to, and an enlargement of, all the faculties in the audience. And he has the choice gift of being able to convey musical satisfaction—even exaltation—to all conditions of listeners from the most highly trained experts to the most innocent of laymen.

The reason for this is that you cannot separate Artur Rubinstein the man from Artur Rubinstein the musician. Man and musician are indivisible, as they must be in all truly great and integrated interpreters. You know this at once when you meet Rubinstein off the concert platform, and you know it beyond any shadow of doubt when you hear him play.

It has been written that Rubinstein represents the last of a great line of magnetic virtuosos who were in the ascendant in the nineteenth century and who made their last stand in the first half of the twentieth. It has been added nostalgically that he owes his special position in the musical world to the expansive, romantic flair he has carried over from a departed age.

Such an analysis is only partly true. Rubinstein has the romantic flair, all right, but his stature as an artist as well as his hold on the public are based on other qualities. He is a modern man, too. He does not dramatize himself as a Liszt or as Paderewski did. He does not posture or theatricalize himself or his work in public, as a lesser figure might, to live up to a naive picture of what a virtuoso should be. He happens to be a thoughtful, alert, sensitive, generous-hearted, civilized human being who expresses himself through music.

Call him a universal man, and you will be nearest the mark. He would be at home in any place or time where cultivated values are respected. And the fact is that he has been hailed as an artist and dubbed as a man all over the World. In his decades as a public performer he has appeared, it has been estimated, in every country except Tibet.

The breadth of Rubinstein's sympathies are inescapable in the concert hall. He plays music of all periods and lands and to each he gives its due. Because Rubinstein was born in Poland, he has a special fellow-feeling for the music of Chopin and he recreates it with glowing conviction. But he is not simply a Chopin specialist, which would be accomplishment enough. He plays Bach and Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann, Brahms and Debussy and a host of other composers of past and present with equal felicity.

Rubinstein has a commanding technique. He can make the piano do whatever he wishes, but his aim is never to show off his virtuosity. His technical command is the servant of his art. He has the rarest of gifts of being able to play all kinds of music with eloquence. He can project his imagination into each creative world, as if he were a citizen of that world. And that is the test of the complete artist and the whole man.

Rubinstein is secure in his knowledge, and on the concert platform he conveys the impression of a man who has achieved serenity. This has misled some observers into thinking that he has no nerves, and some have gone so far as to say that he lacks the necessary ingredient of tension. You have only to hear the excitement of his playing to know that he projects tremendous tension, but it is the tension of an enormously powerful steel spring under full control. You have only to talk to him to realize that he is as subject to nervous pressure as the rest of us.

I heard him recall once that a young musician had boasted to him " Playing in public doesn't worry me at all, I have no nervousness." Rubinstein's response was, " How lucky you are! I wish you could teach me your secret."

It is almost bromidic to say that an artist conveys in his art the sum of what he has absorbed from life. But this truth needs to be emphasized in the instance of music because people with little knowledge or experience of this art may fail to see the connection. In the case of Rubinstein it is not only important to be aware of the connection; it must be grasped thoroughly, for Rubinstein, as much as any interpreter around today, reflects in his musical performances the kind of life he has lived and the kind of man he is.

Born in Lodz, he was the youngest of seven children in a family that was well-to-do; his father owned a handloom factory. At 3 Artur showed an aptitude for music. Offered a fiddle several times, he smashed it. By the age of 8, he was ready to impress the distinguished violinist, Joseph Joachim, with his progress at the piano. Young Artur's sister happened to be travelling to Berlin to prepare for her marriage at this time, and took the lad along. Joachim heard him and put him under the care of Heinrich Barth, who had studied with Bulow, Taussig and Liszt. When he was 11, Artur made his formal debut in Berlin in a Mozart concerto, with Joachim conducting the orchestra.

Artur, a cheerful, outgoing boy who had come from a happy home environment, seems to have relished the excitements of a prodigy's success for a time. He had played all over Germany and Poland, once in Warsaw under the direction of Emil Mlynarski, distinguished conductor, whose daughter, Aniela, not yet born was destined to become Mrs. Rubinstein. During this period Joachim sent Artur to visit Paderewski, the giant of his time at the keyboard, and Paderewski, delighted with the young fellow's ability and personality, prevailed on him to prolong his visit to three months.

At the age of 16, Artur made his first foray into America. In January, 1906, he played in Philadelphia with the Philadelphia Orchestra and a few days later with the same orchestra in New York. He played a lot of concerts in the United States, but the response was far from ecstatic. Later on he could sum up the reaction philosophically by explaining " I was not a prodigy any more, and I was not a mature artist. The critics were severe, much too severe. I thought I had lost America forever."

He returned to Europe and for the next few years seemed to drop out of sight. When he appeared in Berlin in 1910 he explained to friends who inquired where he had been, " Oh, I have been dead for a few years." Actually, the experience of those years amounted to a new birth. He spent most of his time in Paris, in those " missing years." He studied some, and met a great many men and women of all stations and backgrounds. He saw and did things that an adolescent ripening into manhood could see and do with profit, provided he has the energy and intelligence to profit from them. Rubinstein did profit. Later he was able to say that he was occupied in " hurdling the greatest obstacle in the path of a prodigy, that of shedding my immaturity."

Back in the concert swirl, success again greeted him in Europe. By 1914 he had toured all over the continent and his temperament had made his piano playing the sesame to acceptance everywhere. When the war broke out he was in London, where his knowledge of languages enabled him to find work as an interpreter for the Allies. Then he consented for the Allies in joint appearances with Eugene Ysaye. A desk job could not consume the energies of this young man.

In 1916 he went to Spain for a handful of concerts and remained to give 120. If Rubinstein is a musician with confidence in himself, the Spanish chapter could not but have reinforced this feeling. He became friendly with the royal family; he was invited to the royal palace for frequent dinners. Suddenly he was surrounded by money and success even he had not dreamed of. He admitted later that his technique was a bit erratic, but there was no need to bother about cleaning it up in the face of such adulation. It is the measure of Rubinstein's capacity for continuous growth that later on he took himself in hand and drove himself to iron out the deficiencies. But the impact of Spanish success remained on the Rubinstein career; in later years South America took him to its heart with a similar brand of Latin expansiveness and affection.

In February, 1919, Rubinstein confronted New York again. He was well received, especially by the elements of the press. He returned from time to time until 1927, but for reasons difficult to grasp he did not capture the hearts and imagination of the American people as he was to do later on. It was not, in fact, until his return in 1937—he had not played there (America) for ten years by this time—that he made an all-conquering return. This time he came back under the managership of S. Hurok. At once he was hailed as one of the great living musicians. His fees and his engagements multiplied. His field of activity widened to include an occasional film and radio appearance where he won his way not only as a pianist but as a charming figure as a guest with the redoubtable " Information, Please " panel of experts.

Was it America or Rubinstein that had changed? It may be that the United States, which has a way of remaining faithful to its pianistic heroes, was more devoted to people like Paderewski, Rachmaninoff, Hofmann. It may also be that changes had occurred in Rubinstein. An important event had taken place in his life in 1932. He had married Aniela Mlynarski. Soon he began to have a family. There are four children: Eva, born in Buenos Aires in 1933; Paul, born in Warsaw in 1935; Aline, born in Hollywood in 1945, and John Arthur, arrived in Hollywood in 1946.

Rubinstein is a firm advocate of love and marriage. Both helped him as an artist. " Suddenly," he once recalled " I became conscious of every wrong note." He and his new bride went in 1932 to a small chalet in the Alps, and in a garage he worked away at an upright piano, practising more intensely than he had ever done before. With the self-knowledge of maturity, he knew how to make every moment count. He found that work in itself was rewarding. He gained even greater technical assurance and, perhaps more important, he reached for and began to achieve new interpretive peaks.

Here we have one of the great secrets of Rubinstein's growing dominion over public taste. He has never ceased to grow. Driven by his own tremendous gusto and relish for life, he translated it into an ever-increasing breadth of musical vision. He dared to strive for the large simplicity, shucking off mannerisms that are the attributes of lesser artists. It may be said of him what was said of the venerable Benjamin Franklin, " The older the bolder." And the better musically.

Rubinstein embraces life as ardently as he does music. " I happen to be born with a terrific vitality," he has said. " I am happy unconditionally. Life holds so much—so much to be happy about always. Most can only be felt if you don't ask any conditions."

And Rubinstein can find happiness in all situations. He likes the company of all kinds of people, and he is at home with workers and creators in all the arts, with business men, politicians, taxi-drivers, waiters, diplomats, heads of state. He has gaiety in social encounters. He has a fund of stories and he knows how to tell them in any one of his arsenal of languages. He can also act them out with gestures and facial expressiveness that add to the jest. In his travels all over the world he has been not merely a tourist passing through a strange land, but an absorbed student.

Rubinstein is business-like about his artistic commitments and artistic in the affairs of living. When he first appeared in a film studio, there was trepidation that a temperamental virtuoso would make trouble. He took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and said " Let's make some music." In the recording studio—he is one of the best sellers in the glittering stable of Victor recording artists—he knows how to work with dispatch, and he knows equally well how to take a spacious breather.

In his personal life he lives in the grand manner, not from affectation but because it is native to him. He smokes Havana cigars specially blended for him and drinks the finest wines and cognacs. His home in Hollywood—he calls it his thirty-second " permanent home "—is a blend of elegance and simplicity. It is a proper setting for a man of his parts. But much as he adores being in it with his family, he could not remain long away from his concert rounds. Making music is in his blood, and the joy of reaching countless thousands of people through this music is ample reward for the difficulties of trouping.

No one place could confine a richly varied personality like Rubinstein. It is well that this should be so. For the man and his music enrich the lives of people everywhere.

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