Artur Rubinstein
Festival Hall
Joan Chissell

There can be no city in the world with more to offer pianist-fanciers than London in the course of the next few weeks. Rubinstein, Ashkenazy, Serkin, Brendel and Michelangeli head the list of recitalists: others in the ascendant can be heard in concertos and sonatas. Appropriately, it was Rubinstein who, as it were, opened the South Bank floodgates. The second of his two concerts in just over a week will go to his compatriot, Chopin. Last night he played a programme reflecting his lifelong catholicity of taste—which is to say a first half shared between Schubert and Brahms and a second divided between France and Spain.

What is the secret of his freshness? To do justice to the kind of playing he gave us on this occasion would take a whole weekend. A critic faced with a mere half hour or so can record only a few random impressions, fully aware that not for a long time has he seemed more in love with music and the piano. There, of course, is the answer: nothing done for a love is a labour.

Never once did his memory falter in the heavenly lengths (he repeated the first movement's exposition) of Schubert's posthumous B flat sonata. It was an interpretation that emerged a thousand times more penetrating, more deeply felt, more moving, than when he played the work in this hall a few years ago, while at the same time preserving all his basic simplicity of style and tonal translucency.

His response to key change was never exaggerated. Yet it was made the source of nearly everything the music had to say. Brahms's two Rhapsodies, Op.79, are included in his very newly-released record, *The Brahms I Love*, but with an outsize audience to stir him, he seemed to put just that much more into both of them: they were tense as well as strong.

Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, still more Debussy's "Ondine" found him at his most ravishing in terms of sonority. The phrasing throughout was nevertheless very purposeful and direct: there was no wilting in this more sensuous world. There was certainly no flagging of rhythmic energy in Chabrier's *scherzo-Valse* and the two dances by Falla with which he ended—though as always the ending was merely a new beginning. No one is more generous than Mr. Rubintein with encores.