ARTUR RUBINSTEIN at the Royal Festival Hall *by Neville Cardus*

ARTUR RUBINSTEIN packed the Royal Festival Hall last night, playing a programme of Schubert (two Impromptus); Brahms, F minor Sonata; Chopin, Scherzo Op 31, Nocturne in D flat, Op 27; and pieces by Villa-Lobos, "A Próle do Bébé."

He is in, or proceeding towards, the octogenarian period of his life, though nobody can for certain fix his accumulated calendar years, not even Time with his hour-glass. Rubinstein dances up the platform stairs, and walks briskly to the waiting grand piano, on athletic steps, white hair on his head apparently electrically sprung.

Rubinstein is the complete pianist; his fine art begins in the keyboard, never strains or abuses it, though his fortissimi can evoke Jovian connotations. He was nurtured at a time when any artist was expected to observe fidelity to his medium, and not to go against its natural limitations, wherein, as a fact, its strength and potentialities could be found. An ideal example of this fidelity to medium was Rubinstein's interpretation, at this concert, of the Sonata in F minor of Brahms, that incredibly mature creation of a twenty-year old genius who could never have been green or raw of mind. Rubinstein actually caused the writing in this sonata to sound grateful, not to say easy, of execution—which, of course, it isn't. The tension of tone, massive chording, staccato pedal points, and so on, suggest at times an orchestral conception, tympani and all. Every note sat beautifully under Rubinstein's fingers. During the Intermezzo andante, the repeated low notes, drumming on mournfully, were beautifully touched, not assertively but poetically muffled. The climax was reached inevitably, no obvious pressure of tone or tempo. Rubinstein shares the secret known to few—indeed, to fewer these days—how to set music into motion so that it seems to flow, rise and fall, by its own felicitous volition. The two-four "andante expressivo" of this Brahms sonata can easily sound long-drawn-out, for all its imaginative ideas. Rubinstein kept any longueur at bay by his delicacy of phrasing at the right moments, and by his unerring judgment of dynamic variation. The culminating climax of this movement is gigantic; the young Brahms is stretching his limbs, showing-off his muscles. Rubinstein observed proportion; the climax had the proper power, without excess. And the playing of the Scherzo was quite wonderful—allegro energico—with a downward drive of arpeggio notes which Rubinstein made to sound like a young abandoned, yet perfectly calculated dive into deep and refreshing waters.

It is hardly pertinent to assess Rubinstein's playing of Chopin at this time of day. He gives us the Chopin texture, the aristocratically romantic content, a melody which has a firm wing. A legato passage by Rubinstein has a lovely easeful flight; you can almost appreciate the dot on a crotchet which wings the way of a phrase. His fingers go to the keyboard as though by instinct. At times he turns his head and eyes upward, as though listening—not to the sounds which *we* can hear, but to overtones he himself is aware of, in some inner chamber of his consciousness.

An artist to cherish, a master whose art is beyond the need of forcing; ripeness here, certainly, is all. As for the Schubert—each Impromptu was so played that, if after dying, any one of us wakes to hear such music, we'll know at once that we've arrived in the right place.