Crowded Hall Hears Pianist Rubinstein

By Robert C. Marsh

Artur Rubinstein played a recital Sunday afternoon to an overflowing audience in Orchestra Hall.

For all that, it left me with some mixed feelings about artists and their public.

Quite a number in the audience obviously were infrequent visitors to Orchestra Hall. They had become acquainted with Rubinstein through records or TV, and their expectations seemed to be that he would play a program of "concert favorites" such as the Rachmaninoff C Sharp Minor Prelude and "Liebestraume."

When nothing of the sort was forthcoming, they scowled, mechanically rolled and unrolled their programs, and made noise. Their mind toward liberation from Liberace had hardened.

Rubinstein is a pianist of long-standing international reputation. He was doing his best all afternoon, but it was not until the closing group of Chopin pieces that he really had his audience consolidated and listening to him.

With two Chopin encores (a nocturne and waltz) he finally won them for good—at least those who hadn't made a fast break for the exit.

There is no shortage of great music for the piano, but two of Rubinstein's five groups of numbers were made up of arrangements of compositions intended for organ and orchestra.

Bach's "Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue" was written for a large pipe organ with two or more manuals and a pedal, an instrument on which different qualities of tone could be produced at the same time. Busoni adapted it, trying to make into good piano music what is structurally organ music.

Rubinstein showed that a powerful and dramatic work resulted, but it was alien to Bach's classicism and lacked the symphonic character and contrasts of an organ performance of equal merit.

Stravinsky's arrangement for Rubinstein of three excerpts from "Petrouchka" had a similar effect. It was like hearing a piano reduction of an orchestra score played with exceptional skill.

Schumann's "Carnival" was a different thing entirely. In many ways the composer's most successful work, it was written on a large scale in the one medium he knew thoroughly. Rubinstein's performance was one of surpassing mastery.

Two Brahms Intermezzi and the B Minor Rhapsody showed the artist to be a man of feeling who nonetheless avoided any crude excesses. In the Chopin this led to the interpretive triumphs long associated with his name.