Rubinstein recital shows capacity for growing young

By Robert C. Marsh

Artur Rubinstein is the kind of pianist who waits until he is nearing seventy before he records all the Beethoven concertos, evaluates the results, and then decides to record them again a decade later.

And the second time he plays them even better than the first.

For if there is anything one must not do it is to start talking about Rubinstein as the grand old man of the piano. Grand, yes. A pianist of course. But not old.

FOR IF there is one distinctive quality that can be assigned to youth it is the capacity for growth, and Rubinstein has never lost it. His career before the public is longer than the present century, which makes him (along with Pablo Casals) a living link to the high romantic period.

But this is a matter of style and attitude, not manner. He looks as if he were 60 and plays as if he were 30. And his gracious exchanges with his audiences, including the 200 or so who overflowed on the Orchestra Hall stage Sunday afternoon to surround his piano, recall some Paris salon of far away and long ago.

SUNDAY he offered a characteristic program that opened with the Grand Sonata No. 3 in B Flat (Posthumous) of Schubert and completed the first half with the Op. 79, No. 1 and Op. 119 Rhapsodies of Brahms and the composer's Intermezzo Op. 117.

After intermission there was a brief Chopin group, the Op. 60 Barcarolle and two etudes, the Forlane from Ravel's "Tomb of Couperin," a scherzo-waltz of Chabrier, and the "Mephisto Waltz" of Liszt. Encores were a Chopin waltz and some fireworks by Villa Lobos.

I always have the impression with Rubinstein that before submitting his Chicago program he has given a thought to the music he has played here recently and selects things to provide a varied sampling of his talents.

THUS, THIS TIME, there was just enough Chopin to remind us he is still unsurpassed as an interpreter of that music, and the emphasis went to romantics of the Viennese school. Well, Rubinstein hasn't much competition in that area either.

The Brahms was passionate rather than intellectual in its presentation, reminding us that the good Johannes was not always an old gentleman with a beard but, in fact, had written most of his important works while revealing a far more agressively masculine aspect to the world.

To make a great success of a late Schubert sonata with an audience of diverse musical backgrounds one must always keep the focus on its melodic force, the persuasive drive of its rhythmic foundations, and the sheer magnitude of invention it represents. Rubinstein did all these things, playing beautifully all the while.

BUT WE were not to go without a reminder of his supreme virtuosity. The Liszt did that, of course, and few others can play this brimstone waltz in a manner that is at once a great display of keyboard skill and the grasp of the way to shape and color a lyric phrase.

And let us not forget the French works, music long associated with Rubinstein's career, and played with the distinctive wit and sentiment of one who has long lived among the French and knows their hearts as his own.