

Christmas in January

Artur Rubinstein
listening to
Thomas Roberson (19)
perform the
B-minor Scherzo
of Chopin



Artur Rubinstein spent the last two weeks of January in a manner typical of the man and the places: Avery Fisher Hall, Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall. He performed twice before capacity audiences in the larger halls; then he visited the smaller one on behalf of the American Music Scholarship Association. In between, on January 28, he observed his 87th birthday.

Each of the recitals added something irreplaceable to the memory of those who were present. But, this has been going on almost longer than mentionable (when Mr. Rubinstein made his first Carnegie Hall appearance as a young man before 1910, 57th Street was way uptown). But the Tully Hall appearance was something special, even by his own standards.

He arrived a good 15 minutes before the starting time of 3 P.M. This might have struck some as an excess of punctuality; but it had its own calculated purpose. He spent the next 15 minutes, and ten more as well, chatting with the young trio of winners in the 1973 National Piano Competition, relieving them of their awe of the world celebrity, putting them, as much as he could, at their ease. When he took his place on the stage, it was not at some remote, pontifical point. He sat at the bass end of the keyboard, participating actively in each of the Chopin selections: counseled, suggested and finally, when the urge had become too strong to resist, sat down at the keyboard and made his points manually and musically, as well as verbally.

Rather than being a schoolroom session in the do's and

don'ts of playing the first six preludes of Opus 28 (by Ae Ee Kim, age 18, a student of Mrs. Ruth Slenczynska at the University of Southern Illinois), or the B-minor Scherzo (by Thomas Roberson, age 19, of Shorter College in Rome, Georgia, whose teacher is Mrs. Elizabeth Buday), or the F-minor Ballade (by Dean Kramer, age 20, who studies at the University of Texas in Austin with John Perry), it was more like an at-home with a master who had invited them in for an hour.

Not that it was all praise and compliments. Mr. Rubinstein found something good to say of each performer's effort; but when something didn't go so well, he queried: "That wasn't so good, was it?" And he proceeded to explain, with humor and to the point, how it could be improved. And while his remarks were directed at the young pianists, the audience was not forgotten. When one aroused a burst of applause, and didn't know quite how to respond, Mr. Rubinstein urged: "Stand up and bow—we all love applause, no matter what our age is."

Unlike most other audition procedures, the American Music Scholarship's does not address itself to those with a high level of conservatory gloss, but to performers on the college level. Each of those heard in Tully Hall had received a cash award as well as a scholarship incentive; but January 30, 1974, brought these three something more. Anybody can win a prize; but it was like Christmas in January to have the extra reward of an encouraging word, a warming smile and a shrewd word of counsel from "Mr. Rubinstein."

I.K.



"A very dynamic piece—you must give it what it needs."



"I am not allowed to play in public—I will be sued by my manager—but I will show you how to get twice as much sound from the piano if you get the weight of the body into it."

PHOTOS BY E. FRED SHER



"Bravo—that's good."



A picture of a relaxed professor, pleased with the results (despite the presence of a TV crew).