

**BRAHMS: Quartet for Piano and Strings No. 1, in G Minor, Op. 25; Sonata for Cello and Piano, No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 38; Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 108; FRANCK: Sonata for Violin and Piano in A. Artur Rubinstein, piano; Pro Arte Quartet Members (in Op. 25); Gregor Platigorsky, cello (in Op. 38); Paul Kochanski, violin (in Op. 108); Jascha Heifetz, violin (in the Franck). Odeon 1 C 2LP 137 (two discs, mono)**  
**BEETHOVEN: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, No. 4, in G, Op. 58; BRAHMS: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra,, No. 2 in B Flat, Op. 83; MOZART: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, No. 23 in A, K. 488; RACHMANINOFF: Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43; TCHAIKOVSKY: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, No. 1 in B Flat Minor, Op. 23. Artur Rubinstein, piano; Various Orchestras and Conductors (see text). Odeon LC 137 (three discs, mono)**

Whether one selects to call him "Arthur" (as he himself preferred after becoming an American citizen), "Arturo" (as in Spain and Italy), or "Artur" (still, for me, the most comfortable-- probably because of years of brainwashing from reading Hurok fliers and RCA Red Seal jackets and labels), Rubinstein was truly an institution unto himself, undoubtedly the most illustrious Polish (or, if you prefer; Polish-American) pianist since Paderewski--and probably just as much a crowd pleaser as his famous predecessor. The main point of Rubinstein's gift of communication is that playing the piano pleased him. So did beautiful women, distinctive wines, and fine cigars. In fact, by his own admission, Rubinstein didn't really begin to work hard at his music until 1938, the advent of his second American career. (He had appeared here, in recitals and as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra, as early as 1906, but to no great effect.)

One or two of the very early recordings let us hear, at first hand, the schmutzig Rubinstein (of which more presently), but, for the most part, the preserved examples of his "youthful" art (he was well into his middle age when he began to make discs) provide considerable pleasure, even if they are at variance from the more sedate lyricist we know from his "Elder Statesman" years. His playing in the 1932 Brahms G minor Piano Quartet and D minor Violin/Piano Sonata (made the same year) is responsibility personified: here is an absolutely ideal chamber musician--one who, being a great and natural soloist, is able to lead the way; but one who was also able to respond pliantly to ideas set forth by his colleagues. This is worth mentioning, for many today are under the mistaken notion that good teamwork simply means faceless anonymity--not doing anything of note before any of the others has done same (and expecting the compliment returned!). Yes, Rubinstein was a super-personality and, admittedly, also a super-ego. If he is well to the fore in his partnership with the relatively more mild-mannered members of the Pro Arte, the resulting performance of the Brahms quartet has, nonetheless, infinitely greater thrust and vitality than does the self-satisfied "Golden Age" remake with the

Guarneri. Those unfamiliar with the Pro Arte version may well be surprised at the essential, classical strictness of its treatment of rhythm--a far cry from the self-indulgence most musicians of today show toward Brahms.

(My favorite Rubinstein performance of the G minor Brahms is an ardent, indeed blood-stirring, 1961 collaboration with the Budapest Quartet at Washington, D.C.'s Library of Congress (it was broadcast over several FM stations). Rubinstein, himself, allegedly had quite a stormy rehearsal session with those equally egotistical and strong-minded Russians, and it only goes to prove that though the greatest performers sometimes prefer to be pampered, they often deliver their most inspired work when goaded by a stimulant--or even an irritant.)

On the whole, Rubinstein sounds even happier in his collaboration with Paul Kochanski than he does with the Pro Arte. Kochanski died prematurely in 1934 at the age of 48, and Rubinstein writes warmly of his departed friend [in his autobiography My Many Years.] Even without such corroborating prose, one would guess at the unusual rapport between these two instrumentalists. From this, his only recording of a major work, Kochanski emerges as a fiddler of obviously sterling quality. He has a sweet, but never cloying sound, a well-developed facility, beautiful intonation, expressive phrasing and a use of portamento that places him midway between the old school of Kreisler and the new one of Heifetz and Milstein. It is fascinating to compare this superb performance with the distinguished ones of all three Brahms sonatas that Rubinstein recorded with Henryk Szeryng so many years later: though the violin playing in the later performances is more detached and formal, the keyboard work is less altered than one might have expected. Equally fascinating is the comparison of the Rubinstein/Kochanski D minor with the sober, rugged Joseph Szigeti/Egon Petri interpretation of 1938. Both are, in a word, magnificent.

Rubinstein and Piatigorsky give a splendid account of themselves (and Brahms as well) in the E minor Sonata. The same duo, as a matter of fact, re-recorded this work in 1972, playing it just as beautifully the second time around. (The later performance is essentially similar--slightly weightier and more introspective.) Would that these artists had likewise made an earlier recording of the Brahms F major Sonata; while I'm certainly happy to have their 1972 version on my shelf, in this more athletic and demanding work, I'm certain that a 1936 reading would have avoided the moments of fatigue and strain which keep the later recording short of perfection.

I've heard it argued that the 1937 collaboration with Heifetz in the Franck Sonata was shallow, unsympathetic, and superficial in comparison to the Thibaud/Cortot recording of even earlier vintage. For my own part, I could dispense with Heifetz's cheap little contrary-motion interpolation at the very end, but, in the main, I find a smoldering earnestness from both artists, and very great sympathy with the music's bravura style. As with these other early

sonata recordings, the balance between the two instruments is well-nigh ideal; both protagonists are able to play out without overwhelming anyone but the listener.

The other Odeon box takes us on a guided tour of Rubinstein's early concerto recordings (minus the Chopin's, already paired on previous Da Capo and Seraphim discs, the Ormandy-led Grieg of 1942, and the 1944 Toscanini-led Beethoven C minor, the latter two belonging to American RCA.) Rubinstein's 1929 version of the Brahms Second was his very first recording with an orchestra, and is the only one of his recordings of that concerto in EMI's domain. (In addition to the three later RCAs with Munch, Krips, and Ormandy, there are a couple of airchecks with Rowicki and Cluytens floating around on underground labels.) Still, one questions the advisability of exhuming an antique that Rubinstein himself roundly hated and (in his memoirs) claimed was originally issued against his specific wishes. Along with the 1931 Chopin F minor on the aforementioned Odeon and Seraphim records, and, arguably, the earliest versions of the four Chopin Scherzos, this pioneering Brahms B Flat documents a more slovenly, impulsive player than do any of the later Rubinstein versions (whatever their assorted foibles and gallantries.) Certainly, there is an enormous vitality here, but it is an il-controlled vitality--coarse and rhythmically untidy. Nor does Coates' catch-as-catch-can accompaniment help matters much. The garbled sound has been admirably upgraded.

Mozart's K. 488 seems to have been the only Mozart concerto that Rubinstein performed habitually throughout his long career. He recorded it in 1931 (the present Barbirolli-led performance) and again in the late 1940s (with Golschmann/Saint Louis Symphony), before including it in that well-known Indian Summer series of Mozart recordings made with Krips and Wallenstein in the 1960s. (The other works comprised K. 491 with Josef Krips; K. 453, 466 and 467 with Wallenstein; the A minor Rondo, K. 511 and the two Piano Quartets, with the Guarneri.) Whereas in later years Rubinstein treated Mozart nondramatically, with pearling runs but a pervading blandness, this 1931 K. 488 was surprisingly removed from that sort of thing; the pianist was not at all afraid of taking bracing tempos or of rushing the rhythm to achieve melodic or harmonic tension. Indeed, had I not already known, I would have guessed the playing here to have been that of Schnabel (for whom Mozart was similarly an acquired taste). It's a wonderfully enlivening interpretation, and the purists be damned.

The much later Beethoven Fourth with Beecham (1947) is notable for Rubinstein's use of the Saint-Saëns cadenzas, as opposed to the garishly Busonified versions of Beethoven's own cadenzas heard in all three of Rubinstein's later RCA recordings. As a performance, it is closest in style to the one with Leinsdorf/BSO, which is to say a bit aloof but full of champagne-like fizz and virtuosity. I think that the heart of this spiritual music always eluded Rubinstein (as it did, in a different way, Gieseking), but at least this Beecham account, as the one with Leinsdorf, is without the

insipidity of the Krips (1957) and the ponderous insensitivity of the Barenboim (1975), and it can be enjoyed on a superficial level for its pure, abstract virtuosity.

In Tchaikovsky, one finds the great pianist on home turf. This 1932, Barbirolli-led performance was a mainstay of the 78 rpm catalogue and was by no means superseded by the appearance of the 1941 Horowitz/Toscanini studio version. Surprisingly, after years of recollecting a sane, expansive performance, I now discover that the Rubinstein/Barbirolli is almost as fast and furious as that first Horowitz effort, albeit considerably more flexible and relaxed. For sheer overwhelming sweep and electrifying intensity, the second Horowitz/Toscanini performance is in a class by itself (RCA belatedly issued that 1943 war bond concert aircheck in 1959); but the Rubinstein/Barbirolli certainly joins Richter/Mravinsky, Cliburn/Kondrashin, Solomon/Harty, Horowitz/Szell, Curson/Solti, Rubinstein/Leinsdorf and a few others in the "truly distinguished" category.

The 1946 Rachmaninoff Rhapsody, with Susskind, pales alongside the much more controlled and intense 1956 Reiner performance; it might have been advisable to include instead the contemporaneous Szymanowski Sinfonia Concertante, a work Rubinstein never re-recorded.

Listeners nostalgic for the old "RCA Victor Record Showcase," broadcast over New York's WQXR every Tuesday night at 10 p.m., will want to know that the eighteenth variation used for that program's theme music was drawn from this very account of the Rhapsody; for ripe deliberation, it is rivaled only by the recordings of Tirimo (Music for Pleasure) and Ousset (Angel).

All of these early Rubinstein recordings have been dubbed with maximum care, and those of the early post-war epoch sound almost contemporary in quality.

-Harris Goldsmith-