

The Lyons Den

By Leonard Lyons

When Rubinstein lived in Spain, he was a favorite of the Royal Family, and the Queen insisted on providing the royal piano for him to use at all his concerts in Madrid. At one concert, the audience and the pianist were ready, but there was no piano. After a 40 minutes wait, the royal piano finally arrived, the Queen entered her box, and the concert began. . . . During the intermission the Queen sent for the pianist and explained the delay: King Alfonso and his mother were having a Royal Argument in the Palace's drawing room, and nobody could enter the room to remove the piano.

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Artur Rubinstein made his film debut in Boris Morros' "Carnegie Hall." On their way to Carnegie Hall for the first location-shot, Morros told him of the high quality of the production: "We'll have these scenes with Toscanini, Stravinsky, Pinza, Heifetz and you" . . . "And then Harry James probably will come in," the pianist said, making a wild guess. . . . Morris patted him reassuringly and said: "Only for three minutes."

✓ ✓ ✓

Dinah Shore was at a party with her piano accompanist, Ticker Freeman, who accompanied the singer in entertaining the guests. Then Artur Rubinstein performed at the piano. Miss Shore's accompanist congratulated Rubinstein, and added, "You make me feel for the first time that the left hand is for something other than turning pages."

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Artur Rubinstein plays so constantly that he never needs a warm-up before a piano recital. In one city the lady in charge of the recital reminded him that she always expects the artists to arrive at least an hour before the concert. This usually enables her to introduce her personal friends backstage—a special group who don't care to join the crowd backstage after the recital. Rubinstein arrived ten minutes before the concert was to begin. "You're late," the lady told him angrily. "I am?" asked the pianist. "Then let's go"—and walked onstage, seated himself at the piano, and began.

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Artur Rubinstein was at the Stork Club telling stories which he always illustrates with remarkable facial expressions. He told of a trip he once made to South Africa, where he was trapped into playing bridge with the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. When he reached Johannesburg, the pianist was determined to buy some diamonds cheaply, by acquiring them from the Oppenheimers who head the diamond trust. He met Lady Oppenheimer at a party, and she agreed to arrange for his diamond purchases. "But first you must do me a favor," she said. Rubinstein was prepared to play a recital at her home.

"I heard about you from the Duke of Devonshire," she said. "I'd like you to come to my home—and make faces."

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On the piano in Artur Rubinstein's home is a rare photo showing him with his unruly hair plastered down. He plastered his hair because of the other man in the photograph—Albert Einstein, whose hair is wilder than the pianist's . . . Last summer Rubinstein plastered his hair down for the second time. It was for the Northwestern University ceremonies where he and Heifetz and Piatagorsky were receiving honorary degrees. The mortarboard he was to wear with the academic gown was too small to cake his wild hair. Mrs. Rubinstein wet his unruly locks, brushed them down, and even then she had to slit the back of the cap to make it fit. "Don't touch it," she warned, then sat down and watched him trying to get it back on again—for the ceremonies opened with the playing of the National Anthem.

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When Serge Koussevitzky visited Southern California he was given a dinner party at which Artur Rubinstein made the speech of welcome. The pianist told Koussevitzky of the rumor that the conductor was planning to settle in Beverly Hills, where so many renowned musicians have taken up permanent residence. Rubinstein then told of a Hollywood Bowl concert for a local benefit, at which these Beverly Hills musicians performed—Jascha Heifetz, Vladimir Horowitz, Yehudi Menuhin, Igor Stravinsky and Rubinstein. When the concert was over one lady said to a companion: "How'd you like it?", and the other replied: "Very well, considering it was a group of local talent."

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Because the S. S. Macmorland, which was carrying Artur Rubinstein's special concert grand pianos, was snagged in the harbor jam at Buenos Aires—the pianist needed the piano there for his concert that night—Rubinstein sent a cable to Steinway. On Monday his spare 1,000 lb. piano was loaded aboard a DC-4 and delivered to him in time for tuning. This is the first time a concert grand was airborne.

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Artur Rubinstein, the pianist, describes his father as "a violin snob," who couldn't believe that any child of his would play any instrument other than a violin. The only childhood picture of the pianist, therefore, shows him at the age of 4 holding a violin—which he quickly broke. . . . "I play each concert as if it were my first one," said Rubinstein. "As soon as you can say 'Of course I'm going to be good,' then you can bid your career goodbye" . . .

✓ ✓ ✓

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Artur
RUBINSTEIN

