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In retrospect, Arthur Rubinstein's program at Aeolian Hall yesterday afternoon seems pungently modern throughout, but analysis of its contents hardly bears out this impression. His first group was orthodox enough for any one, containing the Bach-d'Albert F major toccata, a Brahms intermezzo and a rhapsody and two Chopin mazurkas and a polonaise.

The second group was modern, to be sure. There were Debussy's "Poissons d'or", "Hommage a Rameau", and "L'isle Joyeuse", three Prokofieff pieces, and four bits by Villa-Lobos, marked "first performance" and entitled "Prole ~~don~~Bebe". There was some discussion among the linguists yesterday as to just what nationality Mr. Villa-Lobos claims. My guess is Portuguese, and that the title means "Baby's Children" and has to do with four dolls, the Mulatto, the Negress, the Poor Little Rag Baby, and Punchinello. At all events, they were pungent little sketches, rather Debussyan in idiom, but with plenty of humor and individuality of their own. The last group, which began bravely with two Spanish dances by de Falla, retreated hastily to the nineteenth century for a conclusion, and wound up with Liszt. So it could not have been entirely the music that left such a pronounced impression of modernism upon the hearer. What it was, of course, was Mr. Rubinstein's playing. I find it hard to recall another pianist who is so completely a contemporary. Everything he does is alive, is touched with the breath of actuality. His rhythms have the pulse of life in them, his outlines are clean and sharp, and his sense of form and color is a delight.

Which is not to say that he is matter-of-fact. His playing of Debussy alone would refute that notion, for his Debussy is a creature of passion and fantasy and dramatic power. The four doll pieces,

too, had a charming quality of make-believe that quite saved them
what
from ~~what~~ otherwise might have been unimportance.

But there is one characteristically modern quality in his playing--
a distaste for sentimentality that amounts almost to terror. It
served him well in the toccata, which had a bigness and sonority that
spoke truly of Bach. But in the Brahms intermezzo and the Chopin
polonaise--the middle section--he faltered a little. He seemed
to find them a little too outspoken, a little unashamed in their
nakedness. He veiled them somewhat and thereby blurred their
outlines.

Curiously, he did nothing of the sort with the Liszt pieces---
perhaps because he took them less seriously. At any rate he
made the Mephisto waltz a fascinating maze of color, and the
"Liebestraum" almost an adventure.

Deems Taylor