

RUBINSTEIN (AND ME) AT CARNEGIE HALL

Between January and December 1961, the famous Polish pianist Artur Rubinstein, then 74 years old, played ten recitals at Carnegie Hall. All were sellouts, tickets in such demand that audience members were also seated on the stage. The recitals were given for charity and raised a total exceeding \$100,000, although the average ticket price was just over three dollars. Reviews were rapturous. At the end of the series, an editorial in the *Times* paid tribute: "Artur Rubinstein concluded his massive series of ten piano recitals last night in Carnegie Hall. They were more than piano recitals. They were an attitude toward life - the expression of a civilized man who, in creating and recreating beauty throughout his life, has refused to grow old." I attended one of these concerts, along with my future bride Phyllis, but for me the evening was a near disaster!

I'd carefully planned the evening's events which began with a visit to my parents at their Fort Lee apartment where I cleverly surprised Phyllis by placing a diamond engagement ring in her glass of champagne - talk about romance! After that excitement passed, the two of us went to Oscars, a favorite seafood restaurant on Manhattan's East Side, where we ate and drank far too much. But we couldn't tarry because the grand finale was two tickets for the Rubinstein concert and, yes, we were among the lucky ones who were seated right up on stage, just a few feet behind where the great man would be playing.

Those who had stage seats were instructed to be settled a half hour before the concert began and once in place, were not to get up or move around until after it all was over. That would be a distraction and very bad form. However, as we peered out at the packed audience, I felt a strange rumbling in my stomach. I figured that it would pass but it got worse, and I was too intimidated to move. As Rubinstein, came out and the crowd went wild, I scrunched down and began to perspire. He began playing and the audience was entranced, but I only could think of one thing. I had to get up and out — fast. So I did! Probably Rubinstein didn't notice and perhaps the audience didn't either, but I was humiliated as I slunk off the stage.

Having done my business, I was too ashamed to return to sit with my new fiancée after intermission, but I found an empty seat in the rear of the house. Afterward, Phyllis didn't seem to have minded, nor did any one else seem to notice—and six decades later, I don't remember anything about Rubinstein's brilliant playing. It was a memorable night — both very good and very bad.

M. Nevins

