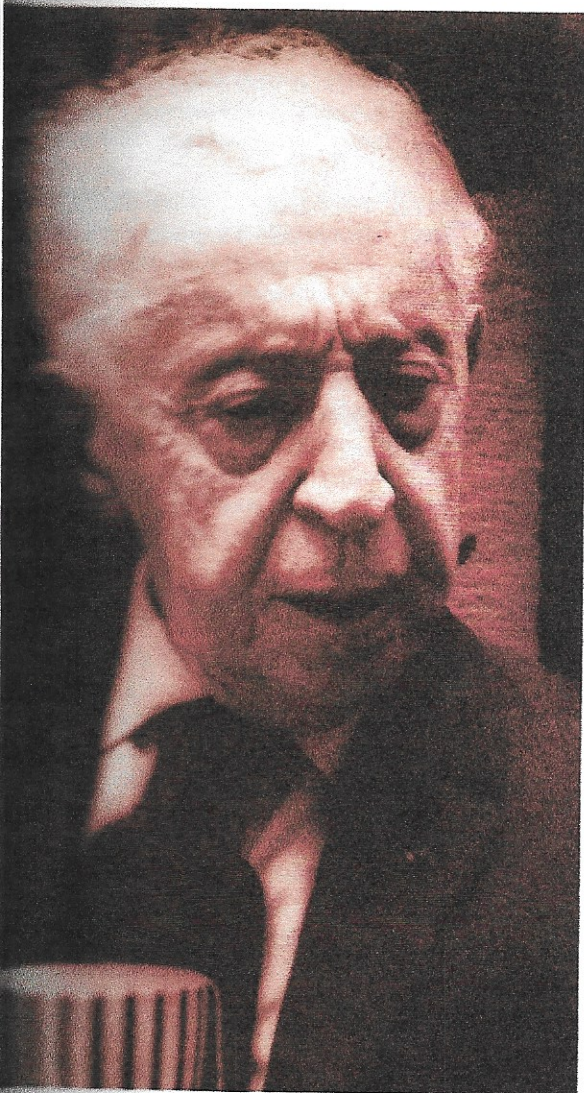


AN AFTERNOON WITH

Arthur Schnitzler



MAESTRO ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN recently gave a benefit recital at the Ambassador Auditorium for the Jerusalem-based International Cultural Center for Youth (ICCY). While visiting the Hebrew University campus, he participated in an informal question-answer session with Ambassador students. Even on questions seemingly far afield from the music world, the maestro demonstrated his great humanitarianism and human concern. Here, excerpted from that discussion, is some of the humor, wit and wisdom of Arthur Rubinstein — maestro, philosopher, humanitarian.



MUSIC — “THE DIONYSIAN ART”: Music is an art of great emotion. It is the only metaphysical art which comes from nowhere. You don't know where the ideas of music come from.

Painting is something which talks to you in a third person. Somebody must show you something, and you look at it. The act of painting is something solid. You look at it; you enjoy it or you don't enjoy it.

But music — it's of another dimension.

There is a man — a philosopher — who gave names to it which always pleased me very much. I quote it very often. You see, he called all the arts — but music — “apollonian arts.” “Apollonian” means the art where you see the thing to admire: sculpture, painting, etc.

But music — he called that “dionysian.” Dionysius was a god who was drunk. He was drunk with emotions, drunk with enthusiasm, drunk with an extraordinary eruption of temperament. Music is the “dionysian art.” I like that definition very much.

PERFORMERS AND COMPOSERS: We poor performers are nothing in comparison with the creators. Who am I to compare with a Beethoven or a Mozart or a Chopin or a Schumann — someone who gave us the incredible wealth of music?

We performers *transmit* music. We are the “connection.” We are the “antennas.” We are born, of course, with a very strong talent of our own — the talent of transmission.

I call the creators “geniuses” — that is, not “talent,” but *genius*, you see. What we see of the composers is their printed music. There it is. This is something solid. It is printed; it is written down. And, curiously enough, it talks to us personally, to each one of us differently. That's what makes it interesting to hear, let's say, a sonata of Beethoven being played by different pianists. We all will play it differently, because it talks to us. And therefore, we have the right to existence.

MUSIC, GOOD AND BAD: Essentially, for me there are only two kinds of music: good music and bad music. They're the only differences I admit. It can apply to anything; it can just as well apply to rock or to jazz or to Bach's cantatas or to Beethoven's sonatas, or to anything else. There are bad classics, there are bad romantics, there are bad moderns, there are bad jazz composers — and there are also the very good ones. Whether or not music is *good* is the only thing which matters. Music can appeal to me or repel me.

MUSIC WITHOUT EMOTION?: There are the modern musicians who say that emotion in music is not necessary. I think even the other arts also followed, saying emotion is not essential, that art ought to be practical.

I am absolutely against this. I will never accept this sort of theory, because I think that any music which has no emotion has no reason to exist.

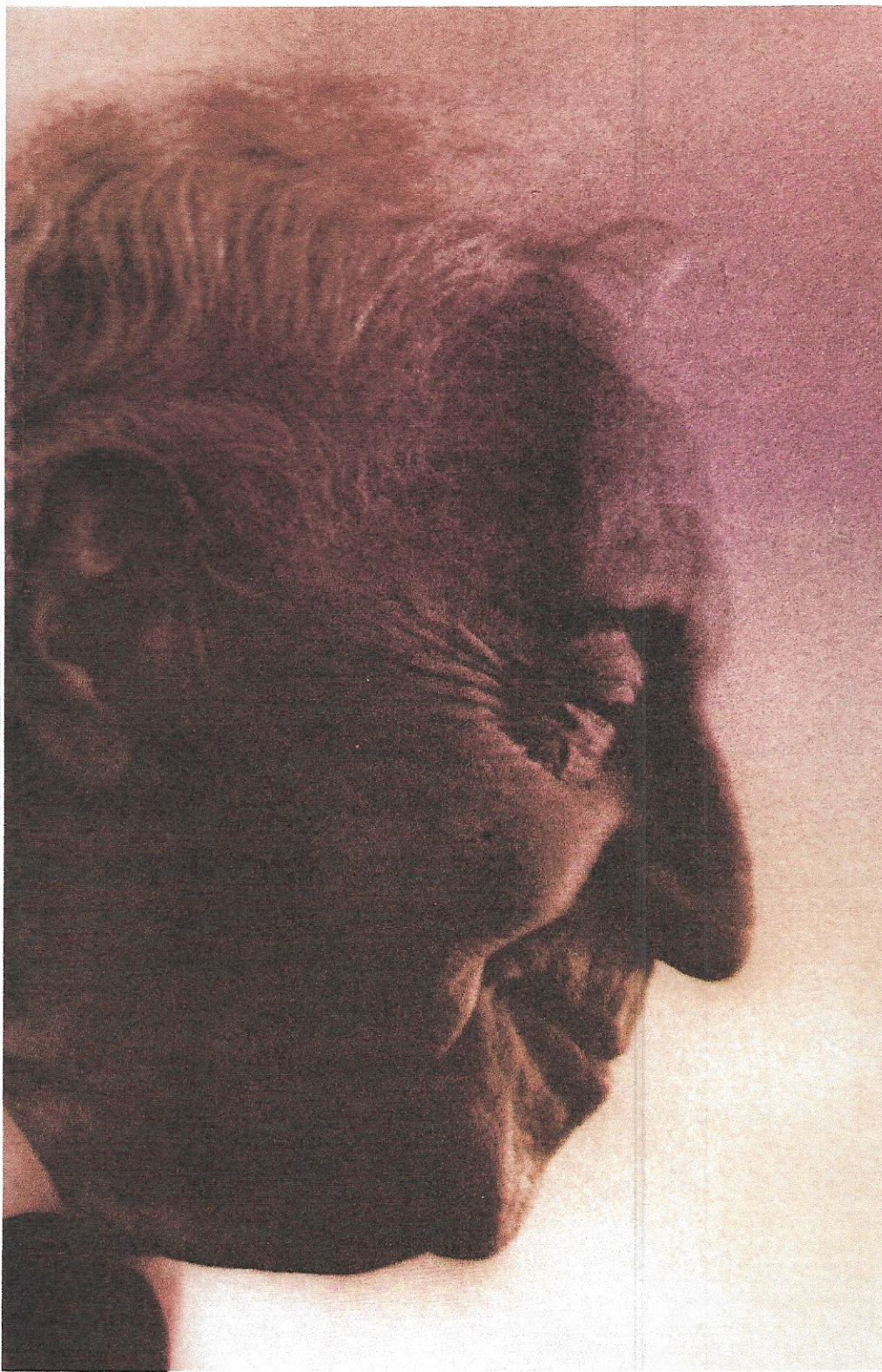
From the Psalms of David and the instruments of old China, music was always there to perform at emotional occasions. It was always something for funerals, for weddings, for happenings which gave joy or sorrow. But not just daily bread — it was never like that. Never. It shouldn't be like that. It is wrong.

I hope that this state of modernism — which denies emotion in the arts — is a passing show, is a revolutionary expression which will simply make some changes, maybe some freer attitudes toward the classics, some freedom in the form of music or art. I accept all this very gladly if it's good, but not when it's bad.

PERFORMING MUSIC: I think that interpreters who play music which they do not love are just foolish because they will never be able to transmit anything to a public. You can persuade the public only with enthusiasm — your heart with your emotion.

You must transmit your own emotion. Some interpreters remain with their emotions separated from the public. They have no ability to transmit them. Others have it. I'm one of those who fortunately have it.

You see, when I play I'll give my heart out because, first of all, I love



I have to tell you, nothing enchants me so much as being applauded when I don't have to play.

my public. I'm proud that they come; that they pay money to sit down in a chair and be quiet for two hours just to listen to my playing. That touches me very much. I think it's a great, great privilege. So, I want to give them all I have in my heart. You see, I give them the best I can with the music which I love.

A FAVORITE COMPOSER?: There isn't such a thing as a preferred composer. If I play a sonata by Beethoven; if I play a little piece of Schumann; a little encore of de Falla, invariably at the moment that I play those things, there is no other music in my mind or in my heart. It is the one thing which exists.

Music is always different. Differences bring the charm of living into everything.

WITH PICASSO — ON BOREDOM AND CHANGE: Picasso, the great painter — a good friend of mine — taught me a very good lesson. In our early friendship, we saw each other very much — three, four times a week.

Well, I noticed he had been painting exactly the same subject for three or four months. He had in his room a table; there was a bottle of wine; there was a newspaper; there was a guitar; the balcony had rather banal iron-work — nothing in particular.

I thought this work of his might be commissioned by a man, with a hundred clients, who wanted to sell a hundred examples of the same subject.

I asked Picasso: "Why do you paint the same subject? Aren't you bored with it?" He said: "What do you mean 'bored'? Every minute all those subjects suddenly become other things — other objects. Bored? What nonsense!"

He made it clear to me. You know, it's true. I have never played a composition the same way at any concert. Why? Because I'm two years or two days older. New experiences accumulate in me. Everything becomes completely different. That creates a great interest in life. Otherwise life would become very monotonous and very boring.

LETTER WRITING AND CHANGING YOUR MIND: I hate to even write letters. I never write letters. I prefer to take a train or plane to say "yes" or "no" to somebody, and not write it in any letter. I probably have some bad streak in my character. Re-

ion or a feeling
the minute I put it into the mailbox I think differently. I think: Why did I write that? I'm not quite sure. Not quite sure of the whole thing. And that stopped me from writing letters.

In personal conversation I see the immediate reaction. There's a different thing. The minute you see the reaction, you counter-react. You have a discussion. You see that he is not well persuaded, then you change your plan. You say it differently, you say more. You try to explain. In a letter, it's done — it's a document. People can then show you: "You said three years ago in a letter that you didn't like all of Beethoven." We are absolutely entitled to change anything we say. If you invite me to come tomorrow, I probably will say the contrary of what I said today. Maybe. Who knows?

MODERN CONVENIENCES: What would we do now without radio, without television, without all the wonderful gadgets that help us live and enjoy things? It is a completely different world.

I know a nice anecdote of the two great painters, Renoir and Degas. Renoir was a great modernist, an innovator. He wanted all the new gadgets. And Degas hated it. He wouldn't take an elevator. He wouldn't even think of a telephone. He was absolutely the old-timer — devoted to the old times, while Renoir was always ready for gadgets and things.

Well, one day Degas lunched with Renoir at Renoir's house. And Renoir looked down on him and said: "You are really a boring old-timer. You have no interest for anything. I will show you. I mean, during the luncheon, my son who is many miles away in Versailles will telephone me."

Well, they had something to eat. There was a hot beefsteak on the table. Degas started to eat it, but suddenly "Wrrrrr" — the telephone rang. Well, Renoir ran like mad to the telephone. His son was telephoning. A long conversation followed. Renoir's beefsteak, of course, became quite cold. Not for Degas. He had his hot.

Look at poor me, for instance. What would you call it otherwise? — it's servitude. I come to a town to give a concert, yes. I give orders not to be awakened till, let's say, nine o'clock. But, at seven o'clock they will let through somebody from another city. They have a great respect for long distance. They think that long distance



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can't be refused. So at seven o'clock I get, suddenly, a young girl asking me: "Mr. Rubinstein, do you still like Mendelssohn?"

STYLE vs. TRADITION: Style, tradition — they are great words you know. Style is something to admire. One has to adhere to style. You must feel that you belong to a certain style. That I do admit. I like style in many things — even outside of art. Style is something which is reaching for beauty. But tradition is another thing. I fight that very much. I'm not for tradition. You see, traditions are frightfully falsified. With time they change meaning. Our intelligences work differently; we receive those messages differently. It is something which is a falsification.

Look, I will give you an example. Beethoven had a very good pupil, very assiduous pupil, who was the famous exercise man, Czerny. Well, he is the man who gives us a certain tradition of what Beethoven was like, what he wanted, how he wanted to be played, and so on. It's all wrong. Czerny jumps to conclusions which are really rather misleading. He would give us in the *Appassionata* Sonata indications that Beethoven played it once very slowly, and then the next day — "presto" — very quickly. Where is the tradition?

CHOPIN: My ex-compatriot Chopin, the great, great genius of the piano, was born for the piano. The piano found its angel. Other composers wrote better music, greater music than Chopin; but the piano was rather treated as a utility instrument. But Chopin made a fairy tale out of the piano. It sounds differently than when any other composer writes for it.

Beethoven sounds orchestral on the piano. You have to translate Beethoven into the piano. But Chopin is made for the piano and for nothing else, and he makes the piano into the most lovely instrument I know.

CHILD PRODIGES: Child prodigies are really awful little beings. I must say they are in some ways little freaks. I was very lucky because an uncle of mine wrote a letter, about me, to a very old famous musician, Joachim, who was an authority of the very first class. He was the best friend of Brahms, of Schumann — I mean he was a great man — still alive and director of the Academy of Music in Berlin.

Well, he gave some brilliant, brilliant advice in his answer. This was when I was three or four and I played much better than my sisters who were 18 and 20. I had it — you know — they didn't. I had talent for playing. They just didn't.

But you see, the wonderful man — Joachim — wrote: "Please leave him alone! Don't force anything on him. Let him develop this gift as he feels like. If he wants to go to the piano and play, let him play. But his lessons ought to start when he is six. Before that it's nonsense. Let him hear music. Take him to a nice song recital of easy songs, something that's very nice for him to hear."

Joachim was right even in that, because I remember my parents took me when I was four years old to see the opera *Aida*. And when the trombones started playing, I gave a big shriek. I was scared to death. I was too sensitive to music, and they had to drive me home. I couldn't stand trombones for quite a while.

Prodigies should be left alone. A law should prevent parents from exploiting them. Because prodigies can become like circus freaks. The eight-year-old girl who can play five sonatas of Beethoven upside down, or blindfolded; or with a towel on the piano keys! — I did that too! I knew how to do that at home for my parents, just for fun. I could play on a towel — why not? I knew the keys. I knew where they were.

I have known quite a few prodigies who went to pieces because they were exploited by their parents. A little boy or girl at four or five, six being applauded, being showered with things, and so on — will never be an artist later on if they are spoiled at the beginning.

They do not have the intelligence to understand what they are doing. It does something to their character, and also to their art.

I have seen a great, great talent in a little boy who really had it. I begged the father; I begged him with force: "Please leave that little boy alone. Let him practice. But not too much." He said: "Oh, no. I wouldn't harm him. And he loves to play for the public. He loves it." I say: "I know, of course. I did too."

They gave me a big box of chocolates after a concert. Who wouldn't? But, that's very dangerous for the little one.

I dream about a law prohibiting the exploitation of young people.

PRACTICING: I have been exceptionally lazy — that is a confession I have to make. I hated to play exercises. I always loved to make music — that is a different thing. It's not working. It's enjoying. But I hated work. Therefore, my development went together with my concertizing — with my giving concerts.

Every concert I give — even now — days — is essentially for me a lesson for the next concert.

At home your concentration is — let's say — 50% to 60%. People come, lunch is ready; a telegram for you, they call you to the telephone; it's hot outside; it's cold inside — always something — and then the beautiful feeling that there is always *mañana*. Tomorrow morning you can pick it up again.

In a concert you feel like a bull-fighter. You have to give it. There is no excuse. There are a lot of people who are told: "He's pretty good. You will hear." And there I am.

So, while playing, I'm 100% intensely interested. I suddenly discover things. I ought to give the impression to the public — even now at the ripe age of 88, don't forget — that I am playing better than ever. It's not true but the impression ought to be there.

MUSICAL DIFFERENCES AMONG PEOPLE: You don't play different things to a Japanese public or to an Argentine public or to a Mexican public. But there are people in the world who are more musical by race — by some instinct. You see the Russians, the Mexicans, the Brazilians — somehow naturally musical. It doesn't mean that they right away can play a Beethoven sonata better than others. But peasants will come back from work and sing in tune, sing in divided voices. They keep the rhythm clearly. They have an enthusiasm for it. There are really some people more musical than others.

Look, the French are the laziest people for music in the world. And they really, unfortunately, go for the cheapest, most horrible music in the world — the modern rock singing. The French hardly go to concerts.

In Germany, every village has an orchestra or an institution of music. You can stop a German in the street and ask him: "Which number of Kochel is the D Minor Concerto of Mozart?" He'll say: "466." "Sing me the leitmotif of *Lohengrin*" — every German will do that.

But when it comes to understanding

new music, the Germans just sit there. When they heard the Brahms symphonies in Leipzig for the first time, the critics wrote that he ought to be shut in a madhouse. Serious critics wrote that.

But the French with this non-musical attitude — they have one other gift which is unique in the world. They have taste. They have unbelievably great taste; music which has something in it; a painting which has something in it, where there is some power in it, something which others might ignore — the French react to that. One of the great interests of my life is to observe all those things.

MUSIC IN TIMES OF TROUBLE:

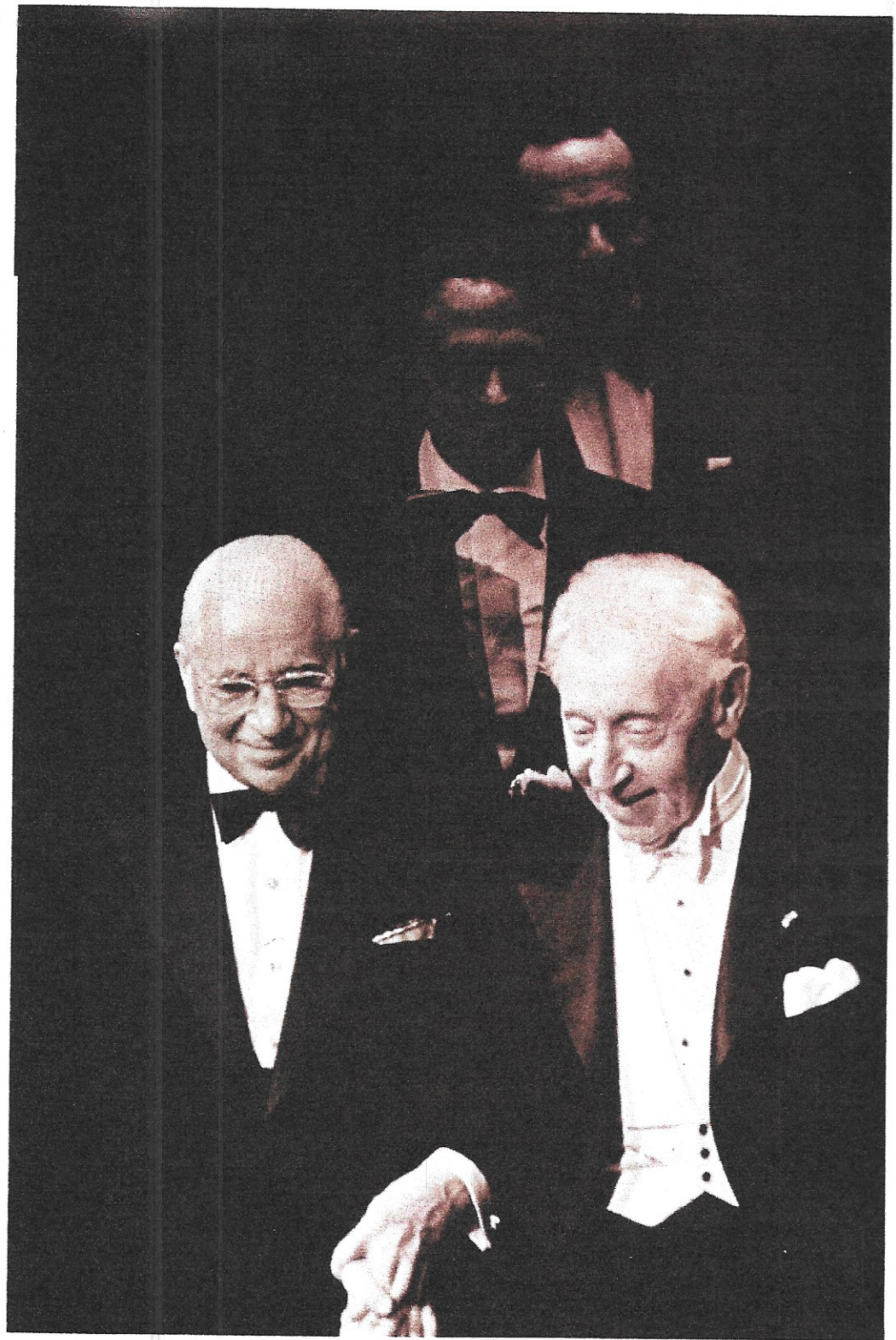
It is my personal belief that people and nations that are poor and living in despair are more enthusiastic about music than those who are rich and living in luxury.

I was playing in Mexico when Mexico was having a horrible revolution! Young people were killing in the streets. Sometimes I couldn't give a concert because there was fighting and shooting in the streets. It was the civil war in Mexico in 1919.

Well, you wouldn't believe it, but I gave 26 concerts in seven weeks. I had six or seven programs ready, and while I was playing them, I was learning the next six or seven. But imagine that! I couldn't do that anywhere in the world. They were fighting — and they needed music.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: Well, my dear young people, be sorry and cry over the diplomats who run the world. They were so horribly clever when they divided the world in two. Well, what do you think of politicians having divided Korea, divided Vietnam, divided Berlin, divided Jerusalem, divided Ireland, all leading to horrible wars and killings? And they all fight — they fight and go on fighting until they all die — probably in Vietnam a few pigs will remain and I don't know what else.

In Ireland too, at the rate it's going, in the next 100 years there won't be any Irishmen left. And what are they fighting for? Ask them! Everybody accepts only one God, but somehow humanity divided Him into six or seven heads — I don't know how to explain it. And they all are sure that theirs is the right God. Yet they all really believe that there is only one. I'm not a mathematician. I can't make it out. □



Mr. Rubinstein (right) and Mr. Armstrong together at the conclusion of the benefit concert at Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena for the Jerusalem-based International Cultural Center for Youth.