To those of us born after World War I, Paderewski was a legend in his time, and one shudders to think how many fond mamas made their little boys take piano lessons in the hope of bringing to light a comparable talent. Some of these little boys were dragged recalcitrantly to hear the distinguished Polish pianist and statesman play on one of his innumerable concert tours, the proceeds of which went to the cause of Polish independence or Polish relief. While there can be no doubt about Paderewski’s sincerity, fervor, and effectiveness in securing the liberation of Poland from the fate which befell it after the successive 18th century partitions by Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, one may question whether it was worth it after all. One could make a case for the observation that the Polish contribution to Western culture has largely been made by exiles, Chopin being a case in point. Even as long ago as 1574, the youngest son of Catherine de Medicis fled Warsaw in disguise in order to return to Paris and become Henri III. (To be sure, he came to a sticky end; he ran one guise in order to return to Paris and become Henri worth it after all. One could make a case for the ob-
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century partitions by Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-
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Paderewski’s Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 17
was written in 1888. Now that we seem to be in the midst of a “great romantic revival” — even Alkan has been exhumed — it seems a propitious time to listen again to this concerto. Clearly, it was designed as a vehicle for the performer. It is based on many Polish national themes, and they are expanded and exploited in characteristic bravura style. The slambang parts pack a wallop and the soft parts melt the heart — just what the fin de siècle concert audiences wanted. This is not to be taken pejoratively; if com-

posers don’t give the audience the music they want, the concert halls are soon empty, a lesson which sev-

eral contemporary composers haven’t learned. If one delib-
erately writes avant garde music, one must re-

member that during one’s lifetime it will be for the
coterie; one runs the risk that the posthumous fame one has courted may not occur. But, having made that election, the avant garde composer who is not

interested in giving his contemporary audience what it wants has no right to complain about poor attend-

ance (or neglect); he has courted that too. The one thing one can say for Paderewski is that he did fill

the hall, and the A Minor Concerto is typical of what
drew a crowd from 1888 to circa 1919. As concertos
go, it is a bit on the long side: playing time over 30

minutes. The three movements are marked Allegro,

Romanza-Andante, and Allegro molto vivace. Pad-

erewski is profligate with thematic material; the con-
certo is rich in melody, has delightfully pianistic pas-
sage work, and does have the advantage for the per-

former of keeping the piano front and center most of

the time.

Much in the same vein is Anton Rubinstein’s Con-
certstuck, Op. 113. Rubinstein (1830-1894) was one of the best known, most popular concert pianists of his day. He made his debut in Moscow at the age of nine and the following year went on tour, going as far as Paris. There he met Liszt and studied with him. From Paris he went on tour to England, then Holland, Germany, and Sweden—a somewhat wider range than Mozart, but Mozart was only 6 and Rub-
ninstein was 12! In 1845 he studied composition with Dehn in Berlin, and in 1848 returned to Russia as a fully developed, mature pianist and composer. In 1862 he founded the St. Petersburg Conservatory and served as its principal until 1867, then again from 1887-90. Rubinstein was in constant demand as a concert performer. Not only was his technique the rival of Liszt’s, but “there was fire and soul in his playing.” After Liszt virtually stopped performing in public in 1847, Rubinstein was the dominant figure in the European group of pianists, admired by all.

In addition to his work as a pianist and teacher, Rubinstein was a serious composer. He wrote 15 operas, including one based on Milton’s Paradise Lost, 6 symphonies, 10 string quartets, as well as a variety of other full scale works for vocal, orchestral, and instrumental combinations; he was not merely a virtuoso-composer who wrote vehicles for his own use and that of his students. True enough, he wrote 5 piano concertos which he played frequently, but he also wrote 2 cello concertos and a violin concerto. The-Concertstuck, Op. 113 dates from late in his career, some time in the 1880’s. Having been trained in the German school of composition, its resemblance to similar pieces by Weber, Mendelssohn, and Schu-

mann is obvious, but it is an attractive piece with-

soundly organized and effectively orchestrated. It is

quite evident that Rubinstein was not in sympathy

with the then-rising Russian national school headed

by Balakirev, Cui, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and

Moussorgsky. Like Tchaikovsky, he was a European

rather than a Russian composer, and, all things con-

sidered, that was not such a bad thing to be.

Dr. William B. Ober
PADEREWSKI
Concerto, Op. 17
Allegro (16:17)
Romance Andante (7:57)

TV-S 34387  Side 1
(VS 3530)  24:19 min.

Felicia Blumental, Piano
Pre Muusica Symphony, Vienna
Helmut Freschauer, Conductor

Made in U.S.A.
TURNABOUT

PADEREWSKI
Concerto, Op. 17 (conclusion)
Allegro molto vivace (5:17)

RUBINSTEIN
Concertstuck, Op. 113 (18:24)

TV-S 34387
(VS 3531) Side 2
27:46 min.

Felicia Blumental, Piano
Pre Musical Symphony, Vienna
Helmut Fraschauer, Conductor
Made in U.S.A.