SIGHTS

SOUNDS

Istomin excites audience

By JOHN HIRSH EPSTEIN
Thrasher Staff Writer

Pianist Eugene Istomin was presented in concert Monday and Tuesday under the auspices of the Student Center Board. Throughout a finely balanced program, Mr. Istomin demonstrated to an appreciative audience that his is indeed one of America's finest pianists.

The evening began with a Sonata in A Major by Haydn, which on the whole was delightful, marred perhaps only by a tone which rang a bit hard and cold where the music called for delicacy and warmth.

Tone is probably the most difficult part of musical technique, and certainly the most talked-about. To my ears, Mr. bit cold and, at times, even brittle. The C-Flat Impromptu of Schubert which followed the Haydn seemed lacking in what is often described as "liquid tone," which is essential in a composition of that sort.

Fault Evident

The same fault was evident in the Chopin F-Sharp Nocturne, which was lacking in delicacy. Nowhere in the evening, for that matter, was there any delicate playing, and though, admittedly, the times when such playing was called for were relatively few, the lack of it in several places was obvious.

From the beginning, too, it was obvious that Mr. Istomin is a pianist of calculated effects. That in itself, of course, is not a criticism, and in many instances was the source of delightful and interesting moments.

Bounds Exceeded

But in other places, one could not but feel that Mr. Istomin's effects nearly exceeded the bounds of good taste. The opening movement of Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata, for instance, was marked by inconsistency in tempo and overly exaggerated dynamics, and the Chopin Nocturne, whose marked rubatos must be handled with utmost care, was overdone.

But none of these flaws detracted from the fact that the evening's concert was punctuated by moments of real greatness. Mr. Istomin displayed an extraordinary virtuosity in the final movement of the Waldstein.

Treacherous Passages

He adroitly manipulated the treacherous octave passages in the closing pages of the work by a neat glissando, and brought the movement to a dramatic close.

The second half of the program was, in many respects, the more satisfying. If the first movement of the Stravinsky Sonata was slightly understated, the modern work was nevertheless completely successful.

Stravinsky is hardly the shocker he was at the beginning of the century, but a work such as this 1924 Sonata still demands a kind of expositional approach on the part of the performer to assure its comprehension and appreciation by the audience.

Reading Notable

Mr. Istomin's reading was notable for a marvelous clarity and expressiveness which made the Sonata a delight to hear.

The program ended on a brilliant note with the B Minor Scherzo of Chopin. The artist was called back many times, and rewarded the audience with a Mendelssohn Song Without Words, and the Dance from the Three Cornered Hat of Manuel de Falla.

The appearance on the Rice campus of a professional pianist of Mr. Istomin's stature is somewhat of a phenomenon, and the Student Center Board is to be congratulated for such an exciting contribution to the local cultural scene.