Fiedler looks sharp in concert that roams over tour of popular music

By MIKE KARCHMER
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There is little doubt that the Houston Symphony Orchestra’s annual New Year’s Eve Gala is one of the nicest musical traditions that Houston has.

With Arthur Fiedler conducting his third Gala in a row, this year’s concert was certainly no exception.

**Piano Forte**

The program started with a rousing performance of Rossini’s popular Overture to “L’Italiana in Algeri.” Oboist Raymond Weaver’s commendable solo work contributed to the orchestra’s satisfying reading of the piece.

Next came Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 in B flat minor. This work, the same that thrust Van Cliburn into prominence several years back, is now probably the best known piano concerto.

After intermission followed Respighi’s impressionistic “The Pines of Rome.” Again, Fiedler and the orchestra gave a most satisfactory rendering of a symphonic poem that depicts everything from the gloomy shadows of pines standing before the entrance to a catacomb to the nightgale’s song in the pines of the Janiculum.

Finally came the lighter part of the program, with the orchestra playing the best known selections from “Fiddler on the Roof.” This medley from one of the most tuneful Broadway musicals in years met with great approval from the audience.

The last piece listed on the program was the bright “Look Sharp—Be Sharp,” the Gillette theme song which is just about synonymous with the World Series and other Gillette sponsored sporting events.

**Batman**

But the Gala wasn’t over yet. There were several encores, and these were actually the most enjoyable offerings of the evening. “The Shadow of Your Smile,” “Mame,” and “Seventy-six Trombones” were all brilliantly played.

Then came the stirring theme of “Batman,” during which a percussionist shot a pistol twice into the air and feathers started raining down on Fiedler. Apparently the percussionist had shot the nightingale Respighi had so tenderly treated several pieces before.