

Paderewski

BY GAMA GILBERT

WHEN Ignace Jan Paderewski strikes the last note of his present American tour, he can leave the stage with the profound gratification of one who has discharged a critical responsibility in the face of tremendous hazards. And although this is but one of countless tours in a long life of triumph and honor, it is likely that Paderewski will remember it with particular pleasure.

His return to America at the age of 78 was a perilous one. To the new generation of music-lovers he was a legendary figure poised on the unsubstantial pedestal of others' memories. These others recalled a being of fable whom sentimental reminiscing exalted into an easy target for disillusion.

Under such circumstances, the nervous and physical strain of extensive concertizing—an ordeal for artists younger than he by decades—must have been enormously intensified for this oldest of practicing artists, making what would probably be a farewell tour. Illness and the return of an old muscular trouble came crucially after his very first appearance, at Radio City. First one, then two, then three and four concerts had to be cancelled, and new arrangements made for postponements. Wagging cynical tongues were saying that they knew it all along. Too much for the old man, he couldn't go on, the whole tour would be called off.

But that was the end of February. Here it is the middle of May, and the "old man" has done pretty well, thank you. He has husbanded his strength by confining himself most of the time to his special pullman hotel-on-tracks, where he practiced on an upright (enchanted the railroad workers of the station where he happened to be parked); dined sparingly on the fastidious fare prepared by his own traveling chef; read several volumes on and by his favorite statesman, Benjamin Franklin; played his daily couple hours' bridge with his esteemed opponent, François, the valet; retired for a regular period of self-communion; and chatted away the idle hours with the members of his entourage: his tour manager, his piano-tuner, his secretary, his chef, two porters, and François.

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So this strange caravansary rolled over some ten thousand miles of track, stopping—so far—at about twenty-two cities scattered through the land. Apart from the times when he sneaked off for a movie (preferably a Western), Paderewski left his Pullman palace only to taxi to the town's largest auditorium where he played for a worshipful audience that had bought out the house weeks in advance. In Chicago he appeared at the old Auditorium Theatre and set a new house record: total receipts \$13,020.70. Boxoffice denizens recalled that the old record had been made at the hall's opening almost a half-century ago, by a lady named Adelina Patti.

As the musical season's biggest money-maker, Paderewski will gross about a quarter of a million on his tour. There is divine justice in the eager public response indicated by this figure. Though the fact is not widely known, it is betraying no secret to say here that the tour was undertaken for that most peremptory reason—money. He who had earned ten millions had spent or given about as much for causes large and small that have awakened his sympathies.

The whole world knows of the huge equestrian statue that Paderewski commissioned in 1910, at a cost of \$200,000, and donated to his beloved Poland in commemoration of the Battle of Grunewald. But only a few friends know of the tribulation and expense that attended the safe arrival of the colossal work from the studio at Paris to the square in Cracow.

It seems that the statue, cast in one piece, was too large to be shipped by the normal railroad route because of obstructing tunnels, overhead bridges and station sheds, built for merely normal traffic. Rather than risk injury to the work by separating the figure from the pedestal, Paderewski amazed the railroad officials by asking them to find some route with an uninterrupted view of the open sky, so that the colossus could gallop the heavens with impunity. After prolonged consultations, they conjured some crazy route that zigzagged to Cracow after visiting half of Europe—at Paderewski's personal expense. What's more, because of a threatened railroad strike in Paris, the statue had to be shipped in a specially chartered

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train—again, of course, at Paderewski's personal expense.

THIS is a single instance of the man's noble prodigality. Appearing now as artist, he is in a certain sense giving more of himself than ever before, for there were easier ways of assuring himself a modicum of security and comfort in these his late years. Facing the challenges of his own unique standards—already aggrandized by the memories of his listeners—Paderewski, the living musician, has triumphed over Paderewski, the legend. If his performances have disappointed the perfectionists, they have, on the other hand, shamed doubt and cynicism from the minds of thousands. And none who heard him has been unmoved by his courage. It is good to think that the American musical public, responding so warmly to his current appearances, is paying homage to a man, not a myth.

