

Sergei Rachmaninoff

A Commanding Figure in World of Music

Written Especially for The Washington Times by ROY T. BURKE.

NEW YORK, Dec. 17.—Sergei Rachmaninoff, composer, conductor and pianist, is one of the most commanding figures in the world of music today. Certainly the art of no musician of recent years has been more widely commented upon.

Rachmaninoff is today practically an exile from his homeland. The unhappiness and misery, the bloodshed and the political, social and industrial upheavals that have been Russia's fate during the past few years, have left their permanent impression upon him.

I recently called on Dr. Rachmaninoff at his American home in East Ninety-second street, New York, city. Although he speaks English, slowly and distinctly, but rather hesitatingly, he uses French mostly in conversing. His long, delicate fingers graphically aid him in emphasizing his statements. He is tall and broad-shouldered. His rugged face is that of the genius who accomplishes practical things. In his eyes—patient, observing and expressive of many moods—glows the soul light of the dreamer who makes his dreams come true. His nose, prominent and aquiline in mold, is that of the practical man of the intellectual business type. His mouth, broad and full-lipped, backed by a chin of determination, shows the man whose ambition to realize a hope, to help others, to accomplish that which will better himself and his neighbors, urges him on through all obstacles. His face is that of a man who has sacrificed much, suffered much, and would give infinitely more to realize his ideals. His hair is close-cropped. The casual observer would never say "There is a great musician," but rather "There is a good, practical business man."

Rachmaninoff, the pianist, is always pre-eminent in crystalline clearness of technique and in his finished execution. The deep personality of the poetic genius surges through his every interpretation, whether it is as pianist, composer or conductor. A few years ago I was one of a party that listened to Rachmaninoff's interpretation of the "Second Hungarian Rhapsodie," Liszt's composition that every amateur pianist plays or attempts to play.

One feels that Rachmaninoff, the musician perfect, the artist supremely sympathetic, assumes the mantle of Liszt, the pianist brilliant, and originally and incomparably interprets the soul and reveals the heart of the "Second Hungarian Rhapsodie." In Rachmaninoff's interpretation he interpolates his own cadenza, pregnant in brilliancy, but deeply somber in its Cossack strain, in passing in the "Rhapsody" from the lasso, or slow movement, with its indolence of the Gypsy East, and its fragrance of heavenly scented harems, to the friska, or fast movement, vibrating with the dash and vigor of the Magyar peasant dance and pulsating with a throbbing of the velvet-throated chimes of the Hungarian desert-winding caravans.

Rachmaninoff is now forty-five years of age, and the music loving world is eagerly awaiting many more compositions from his versatile pen. He was born in the province of Novgorod, Russia, and is the son of wealthy parents who are descended from the best of Russian nobility. He inherits his musical talent, as his grandfather



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was a pianist of great capability. His cousin, A. I. Silati, is an eminent pianist and a once favorite pupil of Liszt himself. Rachmaninoff was educated at the Petrograd and Moscow conservatories, and only the death of Liszt prevented him from being a pupil of that most brilliant of pianists. In 1904 and 1905 Rachmaninoff held the most important position of first conductor of the Moscow Imperial Grand Opera, and in 1908 he accepted the vice presidency of the Imperial Russian Music Society and labored earnestly and effectively for the further development of music in Russia.

Among his compositions, which have won world-wide recognition, are the C Sharp Minor Prelude, G Minor Prelude, Melody in G Minor, and the colorful symphonic poem, "The Isle of Death." His admirable Third Symphony is subtitled "The Bells," after Edgar Allan Poe's poem. His preludes and other short pieces are popular with every pianist, while his operas have won the highest commendation in Russian theaters. His symphonies are among the noblest contributions to the world's richest treasures in music.

Rachmaninoff pays a high tribute to American music. He says that there is no place in the world at the present time that has music such as America has. He says that the American orchestras are the finest and the American people the most musically appreciative. But he repeats the criticism so often made by foreign musicians of the chances offered American students to obtain a better education. "In many American cities," he says, "I understand often concert tickets are so expensive that many students cannot afford to attend, while in Russia a student who displays ability above the average is recommended to the director of a conservatory as worthy of the privilege of attending the final rehearsal of orchestral concerts. That student is admitted without cost. Such a procedure would be of great advantage to the student of music in America."