

Rachmaninoff Recital Brings Back Liszt Age

BY EDWARD BARRY.

Periods in music are all mixed up. Sergei Rachmaninoff is alive and well in this year of 1941 and his prowess as composer and pianist entitles him to rank among the three or four most eminent of modern musicians. Yet it is easier to think of him as "romantic" than as "modern"—perhaps as the last of the great romantics. His vivid imagination, his high degree of subjectivity, his love for rich and somber colorings—these are among the things which ally him with the 19th century rather than the 20th.

The mammoth audience which filled and overflowed the Auditorium yesterday for his recital heard not an exponent of 1941 musical fashions, but an eloquent emissary from another age. The best way to describe what Mr. Rachmaninoff did is to say that he played the music of Chopin and Liszt as if those composers were still alive and as if the esthetic principles they represent had never been challenged.

For instance, the Chopin waltz which began the encore group had a delicate, languishing, decadent quality which was not spoiled—as it would be in the case of some present day pianists—by any tendency to treat these qualities as if they were quaint or amusing. And in the Liszt Rhapsody Mr. Rachmaninoff was not a patronizing antiquarian, but a man who could toss off a phrase in the grand manner with all the conviction of Liszt himself.

Played by a man who so obviously believed in what he was doing, the music of the romantic era stood forth again in all its color and beauty and regained all of its old power to move and to delight. As Mr. Rachmaninoff's persuasive right hand sang the melody of the Sonetto del Petrarca only the most casehardened cynic could still refuse traffic with the glowing world it represented.

The pianist was in royal form. His taxing program began with Mozart and Bach, bowed to Beethoven [the "Appassionata" Sonata], and ended with Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and Liszt. To it, in response to insistent applause, he added an encore group consisting of two Chopin waltzes, a transcription of the opening song in Schubert's "Miller Maid" cycle, and Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Flight of the Bumble Bee."

Thruout the entire afternoon Mr. Rachmaninoff's vitality and imagination never flagged. One could recognize and admire these qualities even where one might differ with his interpretations—in the Bach A Minor Fugue, for instance, where sonority and horizontal feeling seemed to be sacrificed often to speed and sharp accents, and in Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccioso," where the playing [in the coda, at least] was too fast for the ear to grasp.