

RECITAL IS GIVEN BY RACHMANINOFF

Carnegie Hall Is Crowded for
Program of the Masters by
Pianist in Afternoon

ETUDE TABLEAUX HEARD

Bach, Beethoven's Sonata
Opus 31 No. 2, Chopin, Liszt
Works Among Selections

By OLIN DOWNES

When it is known that Sergei Rachmaninoff will give a recital in Carnegie Hall, as he did yesterday afternoon, the hall is promptly sold far in advance of the performance. Usually, as on this occasion, a number have to be seated on the stage. When he wants to stop playing encores he has to close the piano, which he did, personally, yesterday. And the cause of his exceptional hold upon his audience rests solely upon the depth and legitimacy of his art, which is unmistakable, and has nothing to do with sensationalism or press agency.

Nor is the interpretation itself any more spectacular than the other aspects of a Rachmaninoff recital. It never attempts to excite the more superficial set of reactions to music. Sometimes, indeed, by comparison with certain species of emotional fireworks in which virtuosi have been known to indulge, it has the special significance of understatement. The pre-

vailing value is the fact that during this hour the listener is in another sphere than that of the every-day round of self-interested preoccupations. These are forgotten. They disappear in the presence of such art. The public that knows great music—a large public too—knows this, and it is there when Rachmaninoff plays.

Melodic Line Rules

No other pianist of whom we know today gives music such profile. It may not be sensuous beauty which is paramount, though it is never absent from Rachmaninoff's palette. It is melodic line which always rules. This line is drawn with a special power and sensibility. If, devoid of its nimbus of harmony and pedal overtones, Rachmaninoff etched out a phrase with one finger, that phrase would stand indelible in the memory—and, what is more, in mind and heart.

For this musician is never a sterile intellectual. Tonal structure; intense, but untheatrical feeling, characterize him and carry straight and true the message of the music. And the whole impression is one of a singular unity—the spare, gaunt figure, the singular line of head and jaw, saturnine visage, the past-mastery and concentrated thought of the interpretation.

Whether one agrees with everything the pianist does is a matter almost negligible. There is the likelihood that he is right, anyhow, and there is the certainty that in music there is no one "right"—only sincerity, feeling, vision, knowledge in the choice and treatment of the material. As soon as this musician begins to talk in his own language the at-

tention is seized and it does not relax or wander till he is finished.

Thus we do not care for Mr. Rachmaninoff's piano arrangement of the three movements from the Bach unaccompanied E major Partita for violin, with which he began his program yesterday, and of which found his playing of them the least distinguished moment of the recital.

He then played the Beethoven sonata, the second of the opus 31—the sonata with the rhapsodic opening and the recitative in the first part which here comes with the sonata straight from the opera, in a manner unusual for the early Beethoven writing in the classic form. Here was one of the places where restraint worked so well, for Mr. Rachmaninoff did not become melodramatic, did not gesticulate, musically speaking, in this passionate interlude. Not once did he force its delivery. He read the slow movement with a noble simplicity, and made the finale, which is so much weaker than the rest of the sonata, interesting by his special gift for proportion and profile.

Other Numbers Played

Of Chopin he played the C minor Polonaise, the F minor Ballade, the F-sharp major Nocturne, and C-sharp minor Scherzo; of Rachmaninoff the four Etude Tableaux of opus 39; and of Liszt the "Valse Oubliée," "Sonetto del Petrarca," and tarantelle, "Venezia e Napoli." The Polonaise not too often played, but well worth hearing, with the lordly proclamation of the theme that stalks in the base, and the restless flashes of fantasy in the intermediate section. The Ballade was taken in Rachmaninoff's own way, including a very rapid tempo in the last pages; yet the whole so masterfully juxtaposed, and the incomparable loveliness of the form

so revealed, that this alone would have justified the occasion.

And it was owing the composer, since of course the F minor Ballade is one of the most beautiful and original compositions ever written by anybody. It is unique, even with Chopin, who could lay that work alone on the altar of his tortured life and torturing consciousness and say, with a sigh of complete achievement, "I have finished."

Mr. Rachmaninoff was fully as fortunate with his playing of the Nocturne, his singing on the keyboard of its song, and his shaping of Chopin's magical arabesque. We prefer the Scherzo with a deeper coloring, a more elemental drive. But it is not necessary further to particularize. All were thankful to Mr. Rachmaninoff for his playing.