

RACHMANINOFF GETS ORCHESTRA HONORS

Famous Russian Plays His
New Concerto for World
Premiere at Concert

Mendelssohn Club Singers in
His Folk Song Settings on
Russian Programme

By LINTON MARTIN

The gaunt, grim figure of Sergei Rachmaninoff decisively dominated the Philadelphia Orchestra concert in the Academy yesterday afternoon. Both as composer and pianist, the famous Russian was the lion of the occasion. And Occasion it was, spelled with illuminated letters in caps, for it marked the world premiere, nothing less, of Rachmaninoff's Fourth Piano Concerto, with equal honors for his instrumental settings and vocal arrangements of three Russian folk songs, which commandeered a chorus of about eighty singers of contraltos and basses from the Mendelssohn Club, trained by Bruce A. Carey, to sing the songs in Russian.

For a man and musician as modest and retiring as Rachmaninoff, the appreciative approval of the audience must have been embarrassing. To cover his confusion after the conclusion of the concerto, he austere ignored the audience at first, shook Stokowski's hand (the left one, of course, since the right is still a victim of neuritis), and bowed appreciatively to the orchestra, before he gave a nod to the audience on his exit. Rachmaninoff was still more embarrassed after his settings of the three Russian songs—"The Drake and the Duck," "Oh! My Johnny!" and "Powder and Paint"—had been sung and played. For then the audience paid him the almost unexampled tribute of vocal cheers, although there had been absolutely no applause between the songs. After the cheering had continued some moments, Stokowski pushed Rachmaninoff on the stage to acknowledge the ovation, and Rachmaninoff reciprocated by dragging Stokowski out to receive the plaudits.

A grand time was had by all. And, after all this, came the musical event of the afternoon, in Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" fantasy overture, drenched with a poignancy of pathos and a breadth of beauty that make it memorable on any occasion, but which proved compelling in extraordinary degree yesterday, because of the emotional intensity of Stokowski's conducting, and the superb performance of the orchestra. Here is music which is almost Wagnerian in sweep, ranking beside the "Pathétique" in certain elements of emotion, despite its comparatively early origin, and it will be remembered long after more pretentious pieces of self-conscious character and composed complexion have been forgotten.

Rachmaninoff's Fourth Concerto has intense energy, an austere indifference to sensuous sound, and little lyric inspiration. Something hard and chiseled about his style prevents his concerti and his symphonies from achieving persuasive popular appeal, however impressive they may appear upon first performances. The new concerto makes interesting use of Russian themes, is intensely introspective, with some powerful passages, and never descends to such devices as the commonplace cadenza of convention, the piano being pitted against opulent orchestration most of the time.

The three folk-songs effectively employ orchestra to enhance atmosphere. The voice parts are comparatively simple in scoring. The Bass voices only are employed in the first, the contraltos alone in the second, while the third, with its rhythmic energy of peasant dance melody, is scored for both. The Mendelssohn Club singers, drilled to a high degree of perfection by Bruce A. Carey, did some magnificent work, shading their concerted singing with individual artistry.