

MUSIC IN LONDON

Rachmaninoff at the Queen's Hall

LONDON, FRIDAY.

Rachmaninoff's only appearance in London this season drew a huge audience to-night to the Queen's Hall. For the fourth time in five days every seat in the house was sold. Rachmaninoff's power of attraction as a pianist in this country began no doubt in the curiosity of thousands of amateur pianists to see the composer of the famous Prelude in C sharp minor. Once Rachmaninoff had been heard at the keyboard there was no stopping the spread of his fame. He is at once the least ostentatious and the most compelling of pianists. He droops on to the platform as if he were physically and mentally exhausted and bored by the idea of touching a piano. His bow suggests the lassitude that craves only a deep chair and peace, and he smiles wryly and tiredly as if to say, "If you insist I'll try to muster the energy." Even when he is seated at the instrument of which he is the supreme master the air of weariness hangs about. His face remains a wearily smiling mask while his fingers work wonders.

He has the subtlest sense of beauty of tone and line of all the pianists of our time. He spins out a melody with such ravishing tone that one ceases to believe that the piano is a percussion instrument clumsily devised in the true Heath Robinson manner. Not even Toscanini excels him in the gradation of a crescendo or the gracious turning of a phrase. He seems physically incapable of making the piano give out its all too familiar clanging tone.

Art such as his is deceptive. To-night it nearly persuaded us against our better judgment that his "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini" is a masterpiece.

The London Symphony Orchestra, which was conducted by Sir Hamilton Harty, missed this exceptional opportunity of regaining the supporters who have fallen away in recent seasons. Before the largest audience it has had for many months it played with conspicuous lack of polish. W. L.