

**Music and Theatre: By Stephen Williams**

# Rachmaninoff Trapped The Critics

**D**OES the British public base its appreciation of music on genuine perceptiveness, or is its judgment perpetually swayed by titles and composers' names?

The theatre critic who, in "Fanny's First Play," said he couldn't say whether the play was good or bad without knowing the author's name, anticipated a good many musical verdicts of to-day.

Mr. Rachmaninoff, by substituting in his recital last week a work which nobody knew for a work which everybody knew, has raised this problem.

Most of the critics—including myself—were trapped and, directly or indirectly, accused the pianist of inaccuracy.

## Misunderstanding

**M**R. RICHARD HOLT, author of the programme notes, writes to me:

"The work originally announced was Liszt's Variations on Bach's *motiv* from the first movement of Cantata No. 12—'Weinen, Klagen—Sorgen, Zagen,' and from the Crucifixus of the B minor Mass.

"The one Mr. Rachmaninoff played was the Chorale-Prelude, 'Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen.'" Mr. Rachmaninoff told me the same mistake had occurred wherever he had played this early, much shorter work, which is also in variation form.

"The similarity in titles and the fact that Mr. Rachmaninoff was not accessible for reference led to the misunderstanding."

## The Masters Nod

**I**F more artists followed Mr. Rachmaninoff's example, they might cause a very healthy readjustment in musical values.

We should perhaps learn to estimate music by its substance instead of by its labels, by what we heard instead of what we were told.

Who can deny that vast stretches of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and even Wagner are dull, perfunctory and commonplace—products of heart-breaking hours when the Master knew that he had to grind out

something by an appointed time, and indigestion, domestic strife or money troubles had temporarily upset the co-ordination of brain and hand?

Yet so powerful is the memory of the B minor Mass, the Ninth Symphony or "Don Giovanni" that they invariably "get away with it," and we dutifully write that "though this section is not in the Master's highest vein, yet it shows hints" . . . and so forth.

## Galling

**A** CONCERT in which the composers' names were withheld would be cruelly illuminating.

How galling to mistake a blithe *rondo* for early Mozart and find you had been praising a laborious thing by some worm-eaten professor of harmony of last century!

Such a procedure would be terribly hard on the critics, however. For the critic is in a far worse plight than the artist.

The pianist can muddle through life with two concertos and a dozen pianoforte pieces. But the critic is expected to know by heart all the symphonies, concertos, sonatas, operas, cantatas and oratorios ever written, all the technique of the piano, the violin, the bassoon, the oboe, the tin whistle, the jew's harp.

Let me appeal to recitalists not to make life any harder for him.