

# MUSIC

By Dr. BRUNO DAVID USSHER

RACHMANINOFF played the piano last evening at Philharmonic auditorium as only Rachmaninoff plays at his greatest. It brought to mind a conversation with the great Russian basso Chaliapin. The latter already had suffered that decline when personality counted more in his art than voice. We talked about eminent Russian singers of the day. Said Chaliapin with a grave expression, his heavy lidded eyes blazing at me for a moment: "The greatest Russian singer . . . today . . . Rachmaninoff."

I understood what he meant, and I understood again or tried to understand last night how Rachmaninoff, the Russian pianist, could sing through the complicated mechanisms of a piano. He sang with the voices of Bach and Beethoven, for Schubert, Chopin and about himself.

Then I had to leave, realizing that it mattered not what Rachmaninoff, that pianist with a humanitarian universality, had chosen to play. And yet he never idealized the composers whose messages he revives from the past. He speaks them with a veracity proving that genius, no matter of what period and which country, has necessary meaning for all people all the time.

WHEN Rachmaninoff plays the sonata "Les Adieux" of Beethoven, then he is Beethoven. Rarely has technique been of such equal completeness of the digital and the emotional. The famous theme of farewell was turned into more than a thematic germ, although one was inevitably aware of that sovereign clarity which enhances the ideal refinement of feeling and technical detail. Here was Beethoven saying adieu, a romantic Beethoven, to be sure, but nobly classic in his bearing.

How imaginative was also the E minor toccata of Bach. One has been so crammed with the reminders of the fugal skill of the contrapuntally almighty organist that one overlooks the poet, the dreamer and the romantic also in him. How irresistibly and absolutely right is the naivete of Schubert when told by the smiling fingers of Rachmaninoff.

A dozen "preludes" by Chopin acquainted one with the whole man last night. Fiery, gay, affectionate, brooding, here

was Chopin, a volatile creature driven by his own obsessions of the moment, the man who lived on his emotions until there could be only a tragic finale.

Rachmaninoff has a dozen ways of differing the jargon of his hands, as it were. He plays not in one style only. Sometimes the left differs in technical application or "method" from the right, but never for any other reason than to intone the "songs" of Chopin, a Bach, Beethoven or a Schubert.

UNABLE to attend last night's federal music project symphony concert at Hollywood auditorium, I listened to a rehearsal of the program which included two novelties—a sketch called "Spring," by Pietro Cimmini, Los Angeles maestro di opera; the "Poeme," by Eglise Jaques-Dalcroze, in which Robert Pollak played the violin sensitively. As could be expected, the music of Dalcroze would be delicate though by no means lacking in force. Nor do I think I am wrong when I believe that the originator of Eurythmics had an idealized dance poem in mind.

The "Poeme" must be an early composition by this gifted French-Swiss musician. Melodic invention is not extraordinary, and it is treated too methodically, perhaps because of the imaginary dancers which Dalcroze fancied when he strangely halves rhythmic figures between solo instrument and sensemble.

QUITE different, gusty, earthy, a bit folklike in tunefulness and accent, is Cimmini's joyous evocation of the forces of "Spring." Gastone Usigli, who directed, tried to fetch fullhandedly the brilliant, vividly overlapping interplay of Cimmini's tunes and accents. It is a splendidly effervescent, very difficult piece, fairly modern of idiom, yet mirroring perhaps jewelled springtime morning in the Italian Appenines. There muleteers and laborers in the vineyards, so I fancied while listening, sing as they trot along and work. Quite a short composition—the first of several numbers in a suite—Cimmini, however, switches from scene to scene in a rapidly changing panorama that contains poetic visions and robust jollifications. Anything can happen in "Spring."