

MUSIC IN LONDON

A Rachmaninoff Recital

LONDON, SUNDAY NIGHT.

Though he can fill Queen's Hall by beckoning with one finger, Rachmaninoff does not put his power to base uses. As an instance, the music of his recital on Saturday was all worthy of his attention, though it varied in its appeal to the attention of the audience. Rameau and Bach stood for music that the public ought to wish to hear, Beethoven's "Farewell, Absence, and Happy Return" Sonata and two items by Schubert stood for what the public might possibly like to hear, and Chopin and Liszt stood for what it was undoubtedly dying to hear. And in the central place Rachmaninoff produced his visiting-card in the form of a prelude in G major. What the programme lacked, and this is also true of his second programme three weeks hence, was some recognition of the mass of neglected and deserving music, written to-day or yesterday, that needs a helping hand from some crowd-compelling player such as he.

Yet one is little inclined to reproach him on this score. To see him approach the piano, a weary Titan, is to exempt him from all artistic duties but those he has made up his mind about long ago—such as the right way to play Beethoven. The right way of doing things was ubiquitous at this recital. It first clearly asserted itself in the final fugue of Bach's Toccata in E minor. Its force was that of inevitable rhythm that ran a headlong fight but never went at a rush. With the kind of urgency in the tone that we look for in a Beethoven allegro Rachmaninoff combined the clear handling of texture that we insist on in Bach. Coming to the Beethoven sonata he revealed another right way that was not everybody's. He made little attempt to give the music a shiny coat of polish or expression or to deck it with vivacious trappings. He gave the gist of the music, firm and whole, and made it feel like something springing to life under his hands. Part of the gist that he gave us was situated in the middle layer of the text. Rachmaninoff does not greatly believe in sotto voce middle notes, the delicately shaded undercurrent on which the melody floats like a royal barge on obedient waters. Whether it be a line of figuration or a succession of chords, he gives the middle part an action and a surface of its own. He did so in three of his twelve Chopin preludes, to their advantage as inventions of music, and he did so, guardedly, in the D major rondo from Schubert's Sonata Op. 53, thereby telling us how much more this delicious piece had to offer than its airy surface.

If the recital can be summed up, it is by saying that Rachmaninoff went through it making good music into better. At the end of each tribute of applause he bowed with such extreme gravity that he seemed, like Jeeves, to be saying "I always endeavour to give satisfaction."

Beecham Sunday Concerts

That also is a summary of the Mozart concert at Covent Garden this afternoon. Sir Thomas Beecham set out to choose the best of everything—of symphonies the greatest of the G minors, of piano concertos the D minor, of smaller pieces the familiar Serenade in G or "Kleine Nachtmusik." For a fourth work he added the C major Symphony No. 36, which seemed less interesting than it was long—inevitably so, after three masterpieces of inspira-