

COMPOSER SHOWS SKILL AS PIANIST

Sergei Rachmaninoff Returns
to San Francisco and Charms
Audience With His Program

By REDFERN MASON.

When Sergei Rachmaninoff played for San Francisco last season he seemed rather to condescend to his public and the program was not quite worthy of a great artist.

Yesterday he made the "amende honorable," and played compositions by which any artist might wish to be judged. Without leaving the platform, he gave us one of the Bach-English suites, the "Variations Serieuses" of Mendelssohn and the "Appassionata."

The Bach was vital and beautiful. One would prefer the clavier, to be sure, for there are delicacies of nuance in Bach's romanticism to which the modern piano cannot do justice. But the Star has vision; there is poetry in his soul, and people who think Bach mathematical because he expresses himself in the counterpoint of his day must have recognized with delight that when there is a master at the keyboard this subtle idiom can be as finely emotional as Chopin.

CARELESSLY SUPREME.
In the matter of finger dexterity Rachmaninoff can do marvels with the best of them; but his technique is characterized by an almost careless supremacy. His real interest is making people feel what the composer has to say and anything more tenderly, almost contritely beautiful than that Sarabande we are not likely to hear.

The Mendelssohn variations, which by the way, owe a good deal to old Bach, were nobly read. They came with good grace from a Russian. In these days when the fortunate Felix is apt to be underrated, it was music that suggested Mendelssohn improvising at the organ, a meter in which he had few equals.

PALACE OF SOUND.
Then came the "Appassionata" and I never heard a more inspiring reading in my life. These great chords with which Beethoven builds up the sense of tonality at the very setting out, are often played as if the pianist did not grasp their significance. Rachmaninoff made them buttresses of his palace of sound. The work grew in glory as we listened. That slow movement, which all the toying of amateurs has not been able to make hackneyed, unfolded in an uplifted solemnity, and the passion of the Allegro ma non troppo swept the audience off its feet.

The enthusiasts at the New Coliseum—there was a houseful of them—were stirred to the depths. They recalled Rachmaninoff again and again. He looked them through and through, with something of the dubiousness of a tired angel, who is not quite sure whether what he has tried to make clear has been understood. But the gladness of the audience was no make believe; it was appreciation based on sympathy and understanding.

LIGHTER MELODIES.
The pianist resumed his place at the piano and then played the A flat, opus 64 waltz of Chopin. Its effect was akin to that of one of the choruses with which Euripides eases the heart of its too great burden after a great scene in the "Trojan Women" or the "Bacchae."

The second part of the recital was lighter in tone, though it included the "Funeral" of Liszt and the same composer's variations on the "Folles d'Espagne" of Corci. Many of us would have wished that the artist had kept to the purer ether of the first half of the concert; but, if it is not always possible unreservedly to admire the great Magyar, in whose music there is usually a good deal of tinsel, it was impossible to resist the giddy virtuosity of Rachmaninoff's playing.

There were numbers of the artist's own composition and, of course, as a sop to Cerberus, the C sharp minor prelude which, I am sure, Rachmaninoff heartily wishes he had never written.

It was a memorable recital, and if last year's recital left us with doubts as to the quality of the artist's idealism, his playing of yesterday removed those doubts wholly and entirely.

While the recital was in progress Waldemar Gleese, contra-bassoon of the San Francisco Symphony, was emulating the great Bartok. It would have been a pleasure to hear him too. But Gleese stays with us and we may have to wait a long time for another chance to hear Rachmaninoff.

And Rachmaninoff is one of the immortals.