

RACHMANINOFF THRILLS

Master Plays Own Compositions

BY ALEXANDER FRIED

It was a big day—Rachmaninoff day—of the San Francisco Symphony yesterday afternoon at the Memorial Opera House.

Seats had to be stuffed into the opera pit to hold all the audience that applauded the Russian pianist-composer in a program (conducted by Pierre Monteux) of his own music.

Lank, sallow and orientally majestic, Rachmaninoff was soloist in his rarely heard First Concerto and in his fairly recent "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini."

In Rachmaninoff's appearance there is a peculiar moroseness. But it is deeply sympathetic rather than forbidding. And with all that, he is a pianist of easy and dazzling brilliance.

TOUCH OF MASTER.

He shapes melody with a beautiful tenderness. His fingers ripple with crisp intricate mastery. His rhythm, neat and exhilarating, can grow to thunderous grandeur.

Much of his music is written for just such pianistic qualities.

Only a minority of the "Rhapsody" variations develop the more spiritual possibilities of Paganini's famous "Caprice." Mainly the work is a showpiece of Lisztian glamour, and its ingenuity lies not only in the piano but also in the richly inventive orchestral colors.

REVISED EARLY WORK.

Although Rachmaninoff composed his First Concerto in boyhood, he revised it completely in 1917. It contains a goodly degree—but not all—of his famous melodic charm and Russian

sweep. Another probable reason why it is less popular than the Second Concerto is that it is less heroic.

The greatest music of the concert was the Second Symphony (1907), a worthy descendant and companion of Tchaikovsky's great Fourth, Fifth and Sixth. In conducting it, Monteux preserved its fervor, its songfulness and its tremendous vitality even while he led a performance of distinguished finesse. The orchestra played splendidly.

Tonight the whole concert will be repeated.

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