

RACHMANINOFF AS VIRTUOSO

Fine Playing in Town Hall Recital

By Our Music Critic

IT is several years since Rachmaninoff last gave a pianoforte recital in Birmingham. I remember the occasion well, however, and the powerful effect of austerity, even pessimism, which his interpretations made upon me. I doubted then whether he even spoke a common language with the ordinary listener.

Last night's recital in the Town Hall was an opportunity to test these perhaps somewhat naive opinions, and I will say at once that the verdict of that earlier hearing cannot stand.

On the evidence of one piece alone—Beethoven's D major Sonata (opus. 10)—it has to be admitted that however deeply strained with melancholy Rachmaninoff's thought may be, there is no lack of emotional light and shade in his playing.

Faultlessly organised, the sonata swept with almost lyrical fluency from mood to mood—a thoughtful adagio might have been expected, but hardly that exquisitely gracious minuet! And the rondo was positive fun. . . .

A SPELLBOUND AUDIENCE

The other big work in the programme was the B flat minor sonata of Chopin. The thing which interested me most in a wholly masterful performance was the spell which it cast upon Rachmaninoff's listeners.

The audience was a large and rather tiresome one—given to arriving late and wandering stupidly or insolently about between movements, but this interpretation (a communing, rather, with the spirit of Chopin) seemed to awe even the most casual.

It may be added that the pianist's mild "doctoring" of the close of the *marche funebre* was quite an improvement on the original!

SCARLATTI PIECES

As further proof that Rachmaninoff is a true virtuoso in the happy breadth of his sympathies came two joyful little harpsichord sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti, played with just the right staccato brilliancy—what a mine Scarlatti is for pianists with an assured technique!

Rachmaninoff modestly left a small group of his own compositions until the end. At the head of them came It (no further identification necessary)—perhaps slipped in there in defiance of the printed programme so as to get a painful ordeal over before encores became due. It is really a very nice little piece.

D. M. F.