

RACHMANINOFF IN BIRMINGHAM

Piano-Wizard Holds Audience Spellbound

At the end of it all we were left amazed at the masterful technique, the wealth and beauty of tone, and its endless variety, the delicacy and the strength, the feathery pianissimos and the stupendous reverberations of the fortissimos that seemed to shake you. We were amazed at the sheer muscular magnificence of the digital display and at the majestic and effortless ease of that display.

Having given my impression of what I heard and saw at the Birmingham Town Hall last night I have to say it is the impression, composer-pianist Serge Rachmaninoff left with me.

The recitalist began with Beethoven's 32 variations in C Minor. He played them brilliantly, but not as a set of brilliant miniatures. Contrasts there were, but always there was the feeling that each variation was a relative of the one before.

After the Beethoven there were three short sonatas by Scarlatti—Domenico, son of Alessandro. Of these slight, but academically clever pieces Rachmaninoff made delightful game. It was an execution of unerring precision and a faultless negotiation of florid passages. And oh, how brilliant again.

A CHOPIN SONATA

So far we had heard Rachmaninoff the master technician. In the Chopin Sonata (the B minor Op. 58) we heard Chopin the supreme interpretative artist.

Any attempt, however, to fixedly set both sides of the artist into separate compartments is to be false, however neat it may sound, for Rachmaninoff is above all the complete pianist in whom technique and interpretation combine to make his completeness. In the Sonata his mastery of melody, his mellifluous tone with its magnificent gradations and wealth of colour, and his deep interpretative insight raised the performance to the heights of artistic perfection.

THE POPULAR GROUP

After the interval there were works of the more popular kind—his own and Liszt. For sheer delight the latter group surpassed all that had gone before. His playing of the Nocturne in A flat lifted us up to the clouds; the Valse Impromptu was a work of magic.

When I left the recital the Town Hall was echoing with applause; urgent clamouring for more. I expect it was answered—by *The Prelude*.

I. A.