

Piano Genius Enthralls Music Lovers

By Susie Aubrey Smith

A concert by Rachmaninoff is a unique experience. The Russian genius of the piano scorns any of the showmanship that is usually part of the successful pianist's stock in trade. He simply walks to the piano, sits down and, after waiting until the audience quiets down, he begins to play.

His expression never changes, his dignity of posture does not vary. Yet—or, perhaps, because of this simplicity and detachment—his interpretations bring to his listeners all the beauty and splendor of the great music he chooses to play. Here again, Rachmaninoff does not conform to rule or tradition. Monday evening for his program at The Auditorium, he chose his numbers from the classics of piano literature. He gave us Bach, Beethoven and Schubert, Chopin, Liszt and Rameau, the one exception being a prelude of his own. And he played them all—Rameau's charming "Variations," a Bach Toccata, Beethoven's E-flat major sonata and two Schubert selections—with amazing facility of finger technique and perfect command of tone quality and color.

To the reviewer his Chopin was the most satisfying music of the evening. He played a ballade, a valse and a polonaise and one wished he had included a nocturne. Only the late Gabrilowitsch of his own generation of pianists could equal Rachmaninoff in interpreting the Polish composer's music in all its nostalgic loveliness, and even that super-interpreter of Chopin, De Pachmann, in his best days could not have rivalled the exquisite delicacy of the Russian pianist's runs and trills or the polished elegance of his phrasing.

When his capacity audience gave him thunderous applause, Rachmaninoff bowed and looked pleased, but he granted no encores at all until after the closing number on his program, a Liszt "Tarantella" which gave him his best opportunity of the evening for a display of brilliant pyrotechnics. At last he came out and played his own C-sharp minor prelude and then the concert was over.

The event was one of the Ellison-White bureau's greater artists' series.