

RACHMANINOFF SHOWS HUMOR IN D. C. RECITAL

Schubert E-Flat Rondo Belies

Artist's Unsmiling Mien;
Hearers Granted 3 Encores

By GLENN DILLARD GUNN

Rachmaninoff, who addressed the usual host of admirers last night in Constitution Hall, hides an unsuspected sense of humor behind his grim, unsmiling mien. Likewise he is a confirmed romanticist, as both his compositions and his playing prove.

Another trait, confirmed by last night's program, is an enduring love for the elder masters and a passion, indulged in moderation, for the neglected works of the repertoire. Rachmaninoff rarely plays modern music and is himself his best loved contemporary. So again he turned his face resolutely to the past to lend a bell-like percussiveness to the Rameau variations, to lift the forgotten E minor Toccata of Bach to acoustic levels far more potent than its original harpsichord sonorities and to revive "The Farewell" sonata of Beethoven, unheard for some seasons past.

Parting Is Brief

This sonata sketched a brisk parting in the Rachmaninoff version, a brief absence, not too deeply touched by melancholy, and a swift and eager return—a program for this variously read sonata that neither the traditionalists nor the sentimentalists would have sanctioned. Yet it was often in the Beethoven spirit and almost in the Beethoven text.

Had a new artist presented it in this fashion for the critics of New York or Chicago, he would have been treated with scant respect. Similarly had a talented unknown indulged in the orgy of inarticulate speed developed by Rachmaninoff in the Liszt Tarantella, which closed the program, these same critics would have torn him to shreds, and doubtless ruined a career.

It is much too late to harm Rachmaninoff's future, however, so no one need complain if a few of the inaccuracies of last night's performance are recorded. There was, for example, the B Flat Minor Prelude of Chopin, which was played so rapidly that the passages could not register in the large hall, or the feeble upper voice of the G Sharp Minor Prelude which no student could be advised to copy. Yet many of the preludes—he played 12—were quite perfect as to sound and mechanics, though often far removed from the indicated dynamics.

Plays With Humor

The unsuspected sense of humor was disclosed in the Schubert Rondo in E flat, a work quite unknown to fame. It is a quaint piece that suggests a sophisticated in a kindergarten, discoursing quite anachronistically with the arid but as yet unborn soul of Carl Czerny. Finally there were two moments of purest art—Rachmaninoff's own little Prelude in G and his original and utterly free reading of the Petrarca Sonnet of Liszt.

Of course there were encores—"Troika" by Tchaikowsky, "Hopak" by Moussorgsky, and his own C sharp minor Prelude.

Mischa Elman is soloist with the National Symphony tonight in Constitution Hall. The program will present for the first time here "Scenes of Poverty and Toil" by the brilliant Chicago composer, Robert L. Sanders. It also will include the B minor suite for strings by Bach, the flute obligato to be played by Albert Tipton.