

FINE RECITAL GIVEN BY RACHMANINOFF

Pianist Shows Montreal Audience He Is Still Unique Musician

STYLE IS UNCHANGED

First Appearance Here in Several Years Proves Him Same Master—Bach Concerto Outstanding

By THOMAS ARCHER.

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Sergei Rachmaninoff returned to Montreal yesterday after an absence of some years to prove that he is still unique among interpreters of music. At a pianoforte recital given for a capacity audience in the Plateau Auditorium, he showed that his phenomenal gift of re-creating a composition, so that it sounds as if one were hearing for the first time, is still as potent as ever.

Mr. Rachmaninoff's playing has changed in nowise since he was here last, except that, if anything, it has become simpler and purged still more of the dross of mere virtuosity and catinuous showmanship. In fact there is no show in his playing except what the music itself has to demonstrate after it is put through the alembic of his mind, and has been touched by the fire of his imagination and galvanized by his tremendous energy.

It is playing which is at once modern and classical; modern in its remarkable precision and its disdain of sentimentality, classical in its beautiful form and its equally beautiful continuity and logic. The Beethoven Sonata in C minor, opus 111, made one think of a cathedral in which the architectural sweep of the structure is never lost sight of notwithstanding the profound attention paid to beauty of detail.

Mr. Rachmaninoff is always the musician first and only then the pianist. He seems above all pre-occupied with grasping the thought of the composer and translating it into sound. Considerations of the piano as the particular instrument he used are then taken into consideration. That, however, does not obviate the fact that he is one of the great pianists of the world, an absolute master of the resources of that instrument.

PROGRAMME WELL CHOSEN.

His programme yesterday was a particularly fine one. It began with Bach, continued with Beethoven and Schumann, took in two of his own Etudes-Tableaux and four Chopin etudes and concluded principally with Liszt.

Bach's Italian Concerto showed conclusively the results of a great mind operating on a great score. The allegro and presto demonstrated how clearly Mr. Rachmaninoff can convey the essential continuity which lies at the base of Bach's music. He played these movements all in one breath, so to speak. In the slow movement he realized Bach's poetry and made of it a meditation poignant in its beauty and exquisite in its shape.

The Beethoven sonata was bone and sinew. Here you were given the essence of Rachmaninoff the architect in music. But expression played its part too. The first movement sounded that note of simple tragedy which distinguishes Beethoven's last period from all other music. It was worth hearing how Rachmaninoff executed the affecting theme of the variations and let it speak for itself.

Of the eight pieces in Schumann's Fantaisie-Opus 12, Mr. Rachmaninoff selected four which represented more the Florentian than the Eusebian side of the composer's genius. They were performed on a bigger scale, perhaps, than particular Schumann lovers might favor. Yet how simple and direct they sounded and how free from unessentials. Also how grand they seemed and how deeply poetic. A man must be a great and single-minded musician to declaim the slow theme in the "Fable" as Mr. Rachmaninoff did.

The Etudes-Tableaux in C minor and A minor marked the only appearance on the programme of Rachmaninoff the composer, aside from the expected addition of the Prelude in C sharp minor among the encores. Like most of Mr. Rachmaninoff's writings they are easy to grasp melodically and show a fine feeling for the piano as an instrument. Needless to add, they were played magnificently.

Four etudes from opus 25, in C sharp minor, E minor, A minor and C minor embodied a Chopin which often suggested orchestration. In the middle section of the E minor, for example, one thought instinctively of the cello. The tragic C minor was a veritable tour de force. Some of the best of Mr. Rachmaninoff's playing occurred in the concluding group devoted to Liszt. In the Concert Etude in D flat, he gave a demonstration of exactly what poetic rubato sounds like as apart from the merely mechanical use of the device. The "Waldesrauschen" was a study in form without missing the romance, and the "Dance of the Gnomes" the same in relation to execution.

The pianist was generous with his encores. They included his famous prelude, Moussorgsky's "Hopak" and, of all things, Liszt's transcription of Wagner's "Flying Dutchman." As played by Mr. Rachmaninoff, the latter sounded not only eminently pianistic and convincing but also a thing of beauty in its own right.