

RACHMANINOFF

PIANIST COMPOSER AT TOWN HALL

ENJOYABLE RECITAL

As one of the international celebrity concert series a recital was given last night in Birmingham Town Hall by the Russian pianist (who is also a composer of distinction) Sergei Rachmaninoff. Our citizens have been offered



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the privilege of listening to the executive art of this master musician on several occasions and there can be little doubt that those who have availed themselves of it will cherish the memory of their experience as ranking among the greatest occasions of their lives. For there is about Rachmaninoff, despite his austere simplicity of demeanour, the atmosphere of greatness. Even in an age prolific of celebrities to contrast with mediocreties, he would be noteworthy; in the present period, when adequate performance is a commonplace because of the general raising of standards, he still stands out as an artistic landmark.

As a pianist he possesses a technical ability which excites general admiration — fluent, expressive and beautifully graded tone, and perfection of poise at the keyboard. His readings of the music he plays, whether they accord with or depart from our personal or usual conceptions, are authoritative. The listener may disagree with them at times—most pianists who hear him probably do—but there is always a feeling that he is stating an interesting case which he would be prepared to plead on reasoned lines.

In every respect he is a personality, compelling respect but not repelling warmer feelings from his audiences. As evidence of this was the way he played as his last encore that Prelude in C sharp minor which has obtained a fame far greater than any of his other music for no particular reason except a popular whim. Acceding to the general desire its composer rendered it with as much care as he might have taken over something he was playing for the first time. There was no suggestion of boredom or indifference, and this pleased discerning folk very much.

His programme began with Rameau's Variations in A minor written for the harpsichord, but effective enough on the piano. Then came Bach's Toccata in E minor followed by Beethoven's Sonata in E flat Op. 81A (the "Farewell, Absence and Return" Sonata). Two Schubert pieces followed, the A flat minor Impromptu and the Rondo from the Sonata in D major.

After the interval his own Prelude in G major, the 12 by Chopin which make up Op. 28, and two Liszt pieces, the Sonnet of Petrarch in E major and the Tarantella from "Venice and Naples," afforded Rachmaninoff plenty of scope to show the brilliance of his pianism in all its facets. It was a period of ravishing enjoyment all too short—one of those rare visits of the Spirit of Delight which poets perceive but less gifted folk only realise, alas, when they are over and gone.

C. F. M.