

Celebrity Concerts

MARRIAGE OF MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE

By CLEF

RACHMANINOFF, the world-famous pianist-composer, who arrived in England from America this week, began a tour of this country when he appeared at an International Celebrity Concert at the Birmingham Town Hall last night.

And before we go any further it ought to be mentioned that he did play the Prelude with which his name is popularly associated, and played it well enough to show what a really excellent piece of music it is—although, in fairness to Rachmaninoff, let it be added that he wrote music that is much better

The Prelude came as an encore vociferously demanded after a programme of utterly magnificent piano-forte playing. The hall was not as full as it should have been, numerically, but not often is it filled with such full-blooded applause as came again and again last night.

THERE is no question about the appeal of Rachmaninoff's playing. It can even make Birmingham audiences, tolerably versed in the technique of concert etiquette, forget themselves so far as to applaud before the work is completed—or was it ignorance caught out at a full close? Yet, despite that appeal, the playing of Rachmaninoff is very much an expression of his aloof and austere personality.

Indeed, when he played the com-

paratively frivolous Impromptu in A minor and Rondo in D major by Schubert one felt like asking "is this the same man?" Perhaps it was because of these qualities in his playing that one more readily admired the superb brilliance of performance.

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THE best work of the evening, because it displayed the personality of the player as well as the composer was Bach's Toccata in E minor, one of the saddest and most charming things Bach ever did. The Bach was preceded by Rameau's Variations, which, in the prelude by Rachmaninoff—G major—all like a work for harpsichord.

His second half consisted of another prelude by Rachmaninoff—the major—twelve of Chopin's Op. 28 Twenty-Four, and the "Sonetta del Petrasca" and "Torantella" by Liszt. In those Rachmaninoff revealed a command of the keyboard which can be described only as perfect.

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BUT it was the Beethoven Sonata in E flat major which was the touchstone of the evening. Here technique, even piano, were forgotten in the glorious marriage of music and performance.

Those amazing gradations from pianissimo to fortissimo, which seem to come less from the composer's instructions than from the pianist's expression, and tempos that seem to halt and hurry with his emotions, wrought all the dramatic possibilities and made beautiful all the lyricism of this lovely work.