

## RACHMANINOFF PLAYS TO 3,800 MUSIC LOVERS

By GLENN DILLARD GUNN

Rachmaninoff played to nearly 3,800 music lovers yesterday afternoon in Constitution Hall who lingered, demanding encores, until the great composer-pianist himself closed the piano lid.

This enthusiasm offered only a partial measure of the public's reaction. The greatest tribute was the silence of this audience, their reluctance to break the spell which the artist developed with constantly mounting authority. For this was no "popular" program. Rachmaninoff invited the multitude to study with him the sure visions of beauty and of human experience which he has discovered in a life-time of communion with the masters.

### *Noble Playing Makes 'Whole Page Human'*

He discoursed upon Bach, Chopin, Schubert, Liszt, and a disappointingly limited representation of his own music. He never has played more nobly in my many contacts with his art, nor with more complete command of the instrument and its acoustic resources. He made of the simple Bach suite, which really is a studio piece, an address that was alive with humor and gently touched by sentiment. It was a revelation of the scope and discipline of a scholarly but amazingly alert creative imagination, that gave purpose to each seemingly dry convention of an ancient idiom and made the whole page human.

In fact, all the lesser compositions of the afternoon—the Schubert Impromptu, the Schubert-Liszt song, the Liszt and Chopin Etudes—became recreations and revisions in which one heard as much of the performer's musical personality as pieces Rachmaninoff takes as subjects for his own refashioning and for the play of his own fantasy. But though there were revisions of the texts there was, one felt, no violence done to the spirit of the composer. A recast Chopin Etude remained Chopin, if only as he might have written it; and the same was true of the Liszt Etudes. Here the justification was greater since Liszt was himself a great reviser of his own and of others' music.

The great B minor Chopin Sonata, however, was not revised. Rather it was illumined by the fires of an enthusiasm kindled by its tragedy, its poetry and its triumphant bravura. This was the kind of playing that makes the pianoforte as great as any orchestra; that exhausts its capacities for tonal variety and flexibility of expressive contrast. Rachmaninoff is past 60. He has known sorrow, hardship, and now rides the crest of a wave of popularity. Neither extreme of fate really has touched his soul, which always has lived in and with these images of beauty which he and the other masters have created. In the Chopin Sonata he revealed more of himself than in all the rest of the program, with the single exception of his own A minor Etude-Tableau.

### *His Etude Proves Arresting, Dramatic*

Rachmaninoff declines, for reasons unexplained, to play as much of his own music as the world wants to hear. For each brief contact which he allows with this art that is his very own is startling in resource and in expression. The Etude played yesterday is a scene drawn from some dark battle of the spirit—luminous, arresting, dramatic. It also is a new adventure in acoustics, in somber, yet fiery tone-colors that paint this unexplained, untitled picture. One wishes that he would play the whole series of the Etudes-Tableaux, or let us hear his own great pianoforte sonatas before he retires.

Of course, he is not retiring, despite the story wired last week from Minneapolis. He arrived there after a sleepless night on the train. Some reporter asked him when and if he expected to retire and the weary pianist said, "Certainly I will retire," thinking fondly of bed. "This trip was especially tiring." Out of which came the tale of a thirtieth anniversary farewell tour.

As said before, there were encores, four of them, before he closed the piano and sent the multitude home. They were two Chopin Mazurkas, an excerpt from Bizet's "L'Arlesienne" suite and the Liszt "Liebestraum" in A flat. Even then he did not get rid of all his admirers. In his dressing room he shook hands with many and autographed their programs, having first donned heavy gloves to protect his hands.