

Rachmaninoff And Reiner's Players Score

Famed Pianist Is Heard In One of His Own Compositions

The superb pianistic artistry of Sergei Rachmaninoff and Fritz Reiner's introduction to Pittsburgh of Randall Thompson's Second Symphony featured the concert of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra last night at Syria Mosque.

Sergei Rachmaninoff is an old favorite with Pittsburgh audiences and his Second Concerto has been performed here countless times, yet as the composer played it last night, the work seemed invested with new clarity and insight. Rachmaninoff is unquestionably without peer in the performance of his own music. His inordinately facile technique is effortless but it is never sacrificed to faulty musicianship and he constantly weaves a tonal web with a prodigious ease that is almost unbelievable.

There is poetry, too, in those talented fingers particularly in the slow movement where he at all times maintained a fine spun tone. The Second Concerto is probably not among the great piano master works. It is Russian to the core, reminiscent of Tchaikowsky, sombre in the opening movement and emotional in content, yet Rachmaninoff makes it seem much greater than it is; in his hands, a work of great intensity and beauty. Mr. Reiner and the orchestra provided superlative accompaniment.

American music is, with good reason, having its innings this year throughout the country, and Pittsburgh is no exception. Dr. Thompson's Second Symphony played last night is the third American Symphony played here in as many weeks and we have all certainly had an opportunity to observe the homo Americanus compositor in action. One approaches any critical discussion of Dr. Thompson's Symphony with misgivings, not because it is lacking in fertility of ideas, but rather because of it. Thematic material, there is in abundance—an overpowering abundance. Ideas tumble over themselves in the score, only to be forgotten in apparent under-development. Ideas, borrowed from Tin Pan Alley, from Blues, "hot" bits, folk-tunes, Gershwin-esque tunes all appear for a brief moment and are then dispatched forgotten to limbo. Dr. Thompson has enough material, it would seem, for two or three symphonies. This same under-development appears to a certain measure in the orchestration. The program notes speak rather proudly of the sparse scoring, which seems to be a fault rather than an asset.

All this does not mean that the work is to be dismissed casually. It is American in spirit, entertaining, tuneful almost danceable in spots. The finale, frankly jazzy in character reaches a really superb climax and if Dr. Thompson doesn't watch closely, someone is going to make a song hit out of the catchy melody of the Largo. The audience enjoyed the work immensely and gave Mr. Reiner and Dr. Thompson, who was present, a large round of applause. The orchestra performed nobly and the composer could not have asked for a more satisfying presentation of his work.

Preceding the symphony, Mr. Reiner led his men through a broad smoothly flowing playing of the Overture to the Fire music of Handel and a beautifully restrained performance of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's Octet played as lightly and delicately as one of Mendelssohn's own sprites.

The concert will be repeated tomorrow afternoon at the Mosque.
D. S. STEINFIRST.