

Rachmaninoff's Concert Hailed 'Real Triumph'

By J. FRED LISSFELT

Last night's concert of the Pittsburgh Symphony Society, the first of the New Year, will doubtless stand out as one of the season's best. Surely the orchestra never sounded so well as during the last part of the program: Reiner has never been more enthused; and Rachmaninoff never played better.

It was the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto which happened to unite all the potent forces of our orchestra. Reiner listened well to the soloist, and Rachmaninoff himself often lingered over a beautiful phrase as if he were listening to the loveliest tones these players could make.

To begin with, this concerto employs all the eloquence of Russian music, richness of color, brilliance and contrasting sombreness of phrase, entrancing rhythms.

REAL TRIUMPH

Rachmaninoff, as always treating the piano in its best sense as an art instrument, not as percussion, imbued his work with such a wealth of delicacy, grace, and warmth of tone which made his performance a real triumph.

The symphony was Randall Thompson's Second, the composer being present and receiving his honors at first hand. Its form is the conventional four part and it is without poetic program, absolute music.

Yet in listening to its development I was constantly thinking of the rhythms and melodies that frequently accompany moving pictures, music for the dawn, for the covered wagon train, even for the red man. As in so many of the recent American works, rhythm is the predominant feature of theme and development, rarely a melodic figure.

FINE FOLK MELODY

Thompson has, however, created a fine folk melody for his slow movement and its accompaniment is fascinating. The development of the last movement is a fine accomplishment, clear and alive, building steadily towards its noble climax.

Two classic fragments were no less important a part of the evening's music. Handel's "Fire Music" is occasional music in its best style, made for the celebration of the treaty at Aix-la-Chapelle, not without its repercussions in American history. A well rounded orchestration permitted our players to sing their parts with something of grandeur. In contrast, the finer lines of Mendelssohn's Scherzo from the Octet Opus 20 gives us further assurance of the improved virtuosity of the orchestra.