

GREAT MYSTIC PIANIST PLAYS GRAND PROGRAM

Rachmaninoff Rises to Classic
Heights in Well-Balanced
Recital

INTELLECTUAL GLOW

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

Rachmaninoff, as heard last night in Eaton Auditorium, is still the greatest intellectual mystic of the piano. Other masters, as you think of them, are more romantic, rhapsodic, theatrical and stupendously dynamic. The greatest purely Russian pianist is a paragon of classic romanticism. His angle on piano art is that of the transcendentalist who in all matters of mechanistic control is just about the perfect instrument.

Gigantic Personality

A gigantic personality, he approaches the piano with a sort of Olympian austerity. He waited for the last rustle and cough to subside before he began to play the Bach-Liszt Organ Prelude and Fugue. Into this resonant classic, built by Bach and pianized by Liszt, he obviously made Liszt, secondary to the diapason continuity of organ tone. I doubt if Harold Samuel, prodigious Bach-pianist, ever built quite such a balance of classic precision and dynamic drama into this fugue as we heard last night.

When, if ever, did Rachmaninoff play Beethoven's fireside "Sonata Appassionata" here? And by whom, except Paderewski and Rosenthal, was it ever played with such pungent perception of its musical story? Its most intricate polyphonic episodes were displayed with consummate clarity of tone and rhythm. The opening theme melodies ran through its harmonics like a crystal river. The low-tone Andante was chiselled perfection of line animated by exquisite legato, and its variations were skilfully interwoven in a masterly specimen of "tempo rubato," which to me now and then was somewhat puzzling in metric control—but to the maestro as clear as the lines of a great etching. The second Allegro was handled with almost mathematical finesse, and the short finale had a bravura that in this pianist's gloriously regimented crescendo made a wonderful postlude.

Some Ancient Studies

Of four Chopin Etudes, there were obscure to any but the numerous pianists in the audience, for whom the player seemed to have chosen what to most of us were rather academic studies, though the A minor was a superb contrast of staccato passages and melodic themes. The C minor, to most of us, was with the other three, a gorgeous pageant of clarified tone, impetuous rhythm and crescendoing climaxes, under perfect control of a great master.

His own Etude-Tableau was a briefly chiselled masterpiece of absolute music. Three Liszt Etudes were emphatic examples of a superb intellectualist, keeping the Hungarian's romantic naturism under purely æsthetic control. "Song of the Woods" might easily have been maudlin, instead of a commonplace scenic painted by a critical master. "Dance of the Gnomes" was a perfect specimen of picturization, with a rare sense of humor.

Of three encores, the Chopin Waltz in A major, was notable for rhythmic ecstasy in crystalline tone, and Korsakoff's "Bumble Bee" for a delightfully exquisite delirium of naturistic fantasy.