

Large Audience Hails Pianist At Eastman

By NORMAN NAIRN

THE years seem to take no toll of Sergei Rachmaninoff, eminent Russian pianist-conductor-composer, whose piano recital at the Eastman Theater last night was an occasion of intense enjoyment for an audience of capacity size. Time has stooped his shoulders a little but, judging by the spell he cast, it has given him additional warmth and depth of soul.

As he took his seat at the piano the audience was in expectant mood. There came one preliminary chord, and the master launched into a program of the greatest stylistic contrasts, which proved so enchanting that the applause rolled up in increasing waves. At the end scarcely a person in the great theater moved, and then came an ovation, the like of which is not often seen here.

His Liszt Brilliant

Following the little known variations by Tausig on a theme of Schubert, exquisitely played, Rachmaninoff presented the Liszt arrangement of the Bach Organ Prelude and Fugue in A minor, in which his tonal mastery, his shadings, his intellectual penetration made this work a thing of life, so clearly was it wrought.

Brilliant and sparkling was his Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso, taken at terrific speed without sacrificing a bit of clarity, and the piece de resistance was the Beethoven Sonata Appassionata, tremendously thrilling as he ran the dynamic gamut in this challenging drama.

In the Beethoven the andante con moto section provided moments of rare beauty, and in the first and last movements his forte effects were commanding, sonorous and exciting.

The trite expression, "a thing of beauty and a joy forever," aptly describes Rachmaninoff's Chopin. He chose to play the Nocturne in D flat major and two mazurkas which were a sheer delight, fashioned with grace, of a delightful evanescence, and romantic and emotional warmth.

Plays Own Compositions

Followed then three of his own compositions, his Humoresque and Moment Musical, both newly revised, and Etude-Tableau in E flat major, all conspicuously engaging.

Memorable technical virtuosity was that of the Liszt Sonetto del Petrarca in A flat major and the Rhapsody No. 11, the latter particularly a magnificent feat.

Any Rachmaninoff recital always is attended by numerous extras, for no audience would think of letting him go with the stated program. And they came in good measure, including more Chopin and the Rimsky-Korsakoff Flight of the Bumblebee.