

Inspiring Concert Is Given In City By Rachmaninoff

Huge Audience Is Enthralled
By Superb Mastery
Of Pianist

By RONALD D. SCOFIELD

Sergei Rachmaninoff, the superb musician of the piano, played in the memorial auditorium last night under the sponsorship of the Sacramento Music Series and brought to the huge audience which nearly filled the big hall one of the most inspiring concerts in the city's history.

During the course of years of listening to secondary artists one is all too likely to forget what exquisite and subtle music can be made with the piano. Rachmaninoff refreshed this memory gloriously.

In an age when concert artists and composers both tend to emphasize the percussive qualities of this instrument, and when too many performers mistake brilliance and theatricality for the romantic, it is refreshing and inspiring to hear this man who typifies, more than any other living pianist, the best qualities of Nineteenth Century music.

With him, complete technical mastery is assumed as a matter of course, together with austere discipline and perfect control. But this is mere craftsmanship, although a prime essential. It is in the realm of creative art, in which Rachmaninoff merges his genius with that of the composer, that his real stature appears.

This writer, like many in the audience, had heard Beethoven's Sonata in F Minor, Opus 57 (The Appassionata) a score or more of times. Yet he felt he never really had heard it before when Rachmaninoff played it last night. It was no single quality which stood out; other pianists are just as meticulous, just as impassioned, just as delicate and powerful; it was a perfect synthesis of all the factors of expression which made his performance a true work of fine art instead of just a competent rendering of a notable composition. There probably are means of analyzing the exact dynamic shading of a phrase, the minute pause before a resolving chord, the degree of emphasis given a melodic line over its rippling accompaniment, the timing of the pedal—but in the end it boils down to the inherent genius of the man, his fine sensitivity, his intuitive feeling, and his unsurpassed skill for expressing these values through the keyboard.

Other listeners who may prefer a more intellectual, more dynamic or more exuberant interpretation of the Appassionata, naturally will disagree with this reviewer's impression; but they must concede that for its kind it was a performance beyond criticism.

The Nineteenth Century mood also was present in the Bach-Liszt Organ Prelude and Fugue in A Minor, which opened the program. The structural grandeur of the work, the miraculous intricacy of design were made manifest by the exquisite articulation of the pianist, but it was no cold, impersonal abstraction he was recreating; it was a thing of melody and phrase, of notes that questioned and chords that proclaimed, of nuances and human feelings—yet never sentimental or theatric.

To complete the first half of the program he played Schubert's Impromptu in A Flat Major and Liszt's arrangement of The Trout. Here were easy brilliance, sentimental delicacy, youthful gaiety, in keeping with the lovely and ingratiating music.

After the intermission he opened with his own Etude Tableau, in A Minor, Opus 39 No. 2, a small work full of haunting beauty, somewhat suggestive of Tchaikowsky in idiom and mood. Then followed the colorful and variegated etudes of Chopin—the C Sharp Minor, E Minor, A Minor and C Minor, and three of Liszt's, more lush and theatrical—the D Flat Major, the Song of the Woods and Dance of the Gnomes.