

Rachmaninoff Displays More Than Virtuosity

Recital by Eminent Russian
Composer Brings to a Close
Highly Successful Concert
Series

By FRANCIS REGAL

Another highly successful series of the Community Concerts under the management of the Springfield Junior League closed last week with a recital at the Auditorium by the eminent Russian composer and pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff. It is many years since he first visited Springfield; he looked old and sad then, with the woes of Europe heavy upon him, and last night he looked no older but equally weighed down by a melancholy that distilled itself into sweet music. There are many wonderful pianists nowadays, but Rachmaninoff is something more, and his personality, like that of Paderewski and Fritz Kreisler, affects even listeners who do not profess to know much about music except what they like.

Only in a secondary way is this distinguished musician a pianist, for it has often been related how he by intensive practice acquired the technique useful for a concert tour; but, of course, he had always played beautifully, and only a great personal gift could have enabled him to make the piano sing so beautifully. In the playing of melodies he is fairly comparable to Paderewski, and while he does not bother much about display of virtuosity his larger, heavy and supple fingers execute the most florid or crabbed passages with astonishing ease and sonority. But the essential thing is that he always gives the impression of a musician making music, rather than of a pianist playing the piano.

In the Great Tradition

Another point in common with Paderewski is that both have been plagued through life by an all-too-popular composition; it might have simplified things if Paderewski had played the "Prelude" and Rachmaninoff had reciprocated with the "Minuet." But this burden has now been sloughed off, and Rachmaninoff the composer was heard last night in another of his works, the "Etude Tableau" in A minor, opus 39, No. 2, which may not have the fatal gift of universal popularity but is a pleasing and interesting work with the idiomatic quality found in all his piano music.

The program in the main was in the great classical and romantic tradition which kept pace with the mechanical evolution of the pianoforte. Rachmaninoff's massive fingers gave peculiar clarity and beauty to Bach's organ prelude and fugue in A minor, arranged by Liszt, and the tense emotion of Beethoven's "Sonata Appassionata" was magnificently brought out. But no less beautiful and perfect were two melodious Schubert numbers, an impromptu and the Liszt transcription of "The Trout."

Yet the highest pitch of beauty was perhaps reached in a group of four etudes by Chopin, in C sharp minor, E minor, A minor and C minor, the last in particular being marvellous in every respect and a thing to cherish in memory, for its like will not often be heard. There was exquisite piano playing also in the group of three etudes by Liszt which closed the program—D flat major, "Song of the Words," "Dance of the Gnomes."

For encores Mr Rachmaninoff gave the cloyingly sweet "Liebestraum," by Liszt with the sticky sentiment which it requires, Liszt's transcription of Schubert's beautiful song "Wandering," from "The Miller and the Brook," and Moussorgsky's "Hoppek." An old-fashioned program, perhaps, but fresh when played by a great master.