

Rachmaninoff Conducts Own Work 'The Bells'

BY EDWARD BARRY.

The world at large may swoon as much as it likes over Sergei Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony and Second Piano Concerto, but to the composer himself the 28 year old choral symphony, "The Bells," is dearer than either of these. He came to Orchestra hall last night to conduct it in person on the occasion of its long delayed Chicago première.

To work with he had the Chicago Symphony orchestra, the Apollo Musical club, and the following soloists: Janet Fairbank, soprano; Jan Peerce, tenor, and Mack Harrell, baritone.

Based on Edgar Allan Poe's poem of the same name, "The Bells" is a musical embodiment of four emotions associated with the sound of bells—gaiety [sleigh bells], joy [wedding bells], terror [fire bells], sorrow [the bells of death or national calamity].

Just as Poe's virtuosity with words redeemed a rather childish idea and made it somehow important and beautiful, so Rachmaninoff's virtuosity as a musician allowed him to build still higher on the same foundation and to create a work of extraordinary nobility and giantlike power.

Its power and drive are especially in evidence in the third movement, wherein the alarum bells are shrieking "in a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire." Here the music takes on the very quality of terror, and in last night's presentation the performers worked with a momentum and abandon which heightened the effect immeasurably.

A much more elusive quality—that inherent in the tinkle of sleigh bells and in the "crystalline delight" with which the stars themselves are asserted to view the scene—is nicely caught in the first movement. The second is all mellow and molten gold, as befits a division of the piece devoted to the slow, delighted swing of wedding bells. The fourth is ominous and chilling, full of the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

Preceding the performance of "The Bells," Mr. Rachmaninoff conducted his own Third Symphony, a work much less songful and less immediately attractive than the Second.