

Ormandy's Baton Steals Show From Rachmaninoff

Masterful Conducting for Composer's 'Symphony No. 2 in E Minor' Brings Prolonged Applause

By ALICE EVERSMAN.

It was Rachmaninoff evening for the Philadelphia Orchestra's opening concert of their season here last night at Constitution Hall. Yet in spite of the fact that the program consisted of but two numbers by the eminent Russian pianist-composer, with himself as soloist in the second, Eugene Ormandy stole the show with his magnificent conducting of Rachmaninoff's "Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27." Such an ovation broke out at its conclusion that the popular conductor came out repeatedly to bow to the unabating applause. And as usual, Mr. Ormandy refused to take the credit alone, but called the orchestra musicians each time to stand before he turned in acknowledgement.

Mr. Ormandy has plenty of dramatic material in the symphony and constantly changing themes with which to exercise his artistry. The work is extraordinary in many respects, the most prominent of which is the revelation of a continually viril drive that at no time slackens for an introspective mood. It is again unique in the sudden cessation of a melody to be followed without warning by another outburst of sound and in the massiveness of orchestral volume. Only for the briefest moments is there any melody sustained by one section of the orchestra with the remainder filling in the background, and always preference is given the woodwinds over the violins. For the most part it is massed tone rich and dynamic, formed of the intricate blending of the full orchestral range.

Its unsatisfactory side lies in its surface quality. In all the superb mixture of sound, the skillful interweaving of Russian folk melody, an adagio that would mirror sentiment and the never-lessening passionate note throughout the whole work, it but skims over the depths of which it would speak. It does not stir, it does not evoke. It is as if some one spoke with many words and with great intensity yet the listener knew that the real feeling, the real emotion was not touched upon, but hidden still deeper under the quality and the quantity of what is said.

The symphony pretends. It pretends a great spiritual unrest, a carefree gaiety, tender sentiment and emotional upheaval. Its expression is grandiose and vigorous, the creation of a skilled musician with a vast understanding of his craft. But the unburdening of the soul is not there. It is an effective work, particularly as Mr. Ormandy interpreted it, and carries an appeal by sheer force.

It has been announced that the composer's playing of his fourth piano concerto would be the first time it has been heard since a performance by the Philadelphia orchestra in 1927. It was, however, played by Henrietta Schumann in a Rachmaninoff radio festival recently under Erno Rapee's direction and in a revised form, but whether the same as used last evening is impossible to ascertain at present.

While the characteristics of the composer's style show a kinship with the symphony, the concerto has little of the outspokenness of the former. More compact and more melancholy in tone, it is also less turbulent in its expression. The many brilliant passages for the piano gave Mr. Rachmaninoff occasion to dazzle with her superb technique and in the nostalgic melodies to display another side of his art. The interweaving of orchestra and solo instrument resembles the intricacies of the symphony, yet with a well-maintained balance between the two. The masterly performance by the composer received a storm of applause which continued for minutes.

The program opened with the playing of the national anthem, which pleased the audience, for scattered bits of applause were heard in approval when the con-

ductor's intention was understood. Even the cellists stood to play, the first time they have snared the traditional attitude. A slight change in the seating of the orchestra was adopted for this concert, the violas being placed next to the cellos, with the woodwinds in the center. Whether this will be a permanent arrangement when Mr. Ormandy conducts remains to be seen, for, as yet, he has not indorsed, by example, the revolutionary seating Mr. Stokowski prefers. For the first time since he has been coming here, Mr. Ormandy had to rap for the audience's attention before each of the movements of the symphony. Waiting patiently a few minutes for the talking and the rustling to die down, he finally had to tap a cellist's stand with his baton. Surely, by this time, the Constitution Hall patrons know the etiquette of symphonic concerts.

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