

4,500 Of Three States Honor Concert Leader, Sergei Rachmaninoff

Famed Artist Opens
Music Season Here
With Piano Program

A crowd of 4,500 representing three states Friday night at the Municipal Auditorium paid homage to a great man. It was one of those occasions when honor is conferred while the recipient is still in the hale Autumn of his long and distinguished career. And Sergei Rachmaninoff, the 68-year-old pianist-composer, made the evening a memorable one when he opened the season for the Birmingham Music Club.

Those there may be who respond more completely to the electrifying performances of a Horowitz, but to this reviewer, Rachmaninoff, like Kreisler, is still the master; still plays to the heart. There is a mellow beauty and understanding in the music of Rachmaninoff that comes with maturity. Rachmaninoff works for the big line of music rather than for the perfection of detail.

There is a fundamental difference, too, in the mechanical technique of Horowitz and Rachmaninoff: Horowitz' strength is in his wrists; Rachmaninoff's in his arms and powerful bony fingers; Horowitz sits below the keyboard, Rachmaninoff above; the Horowitz tone is thinner, more steel-like; the Rachmaninoff tone has a granite quality that is monumental.

Acknowledges Ovation

Tall, lean, gravely formal, Rachmaninoff acknowledged the ovation that greeted him without a change of expression on his sad, lined face, and not once during the evening did he smile. But he played—and that playing rewarded those who had driven from distant points in Mississippi, Tennessee and South Alabama to hear him.

The Rachmaninoff program included many old and familiar compositions—compositions that are familiar because people have loved them down through the years. He played the Schubert "Serenade," his own arrangement of the Tchaikowsky "Lullaby," the Kreisler "Liebesfreud," arranged by Rachmaninoff; his own "Lilacs," a lovely sentimental piece, and a "Schumann Novelette."

Opening the concert with the beautiful Bach Organ Prelude and Fugue in A Minor, he followed with the Beethoven "Sonata in D Major," the highlight of the evening for this reviewer, and interpreted in a manner by Rachmaninoff that I believe Beethoven would have liked.

Two field Nocturnes, Schubert's "The Trout," "Contrabandiste," by Schumann, "Maiden Wish" by Chopin, and "The Return Home" by Chopin, completed the program. Rachmaninoff responded with a Rachmaninoff Prelude and the "Flight of the Bumble Bee" as encores.

Many Late Arrivals

One thing marred the concert—the arrival of late-comers, who continued to show up between each number until 9:15 p.m. Perhaps the fact that so many in the audience came from great distances was partly responsible, but no less disturbing to those who had reached the hall on time and to the artist who was obviously annoyed by the repeated interruptions of the program. Thanks to the Birmingham Music Club no one was admitted during the numbers. May I urge the public to be more thoughtful during the brilliant concerts to come and make every effort to be seated before the programs begin.

The concert Friday night opened the most brilliant musical season in the city's history, a season in which the Birmingham Music Club realizes a 36-year-old dream in bringing the Metropolitan Opera here, and which will include such attractions as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Lawrence Tibbett, Helen Traubel, and Zino Francetti.—LILY MAY CALDWELL.