

Rachmaninoff In Grand Form In Ottawa Concert

Governor General and Princess Alice Present for Brilliant Program at Capitol Theater by Renowned Pianist.

By Isabel C. Armstrong.

Like Shakespeare or Tolstoy, Rachmaninoff stands out as a mountain peak among lesser mortals. No given names or titles are necessary for identification. There is an absolute quality about his personality and art which is awe-inspiring and this never has been more impressive than in his concert last night which opened a new Tremblay series.

In the experience of the writer he never has been in finer form, assuredly not in any of his Ottawa appearances in the past dozen or more years. There was a warmth and glow of feeling and sparkle that sometimes has been missing and not entirely compensated for by the intellectual depth, sense of architecture and grandeur of style that are Rachmaninoff. His technique seems to gain in fluency and authority and freedom to achieve just the effects desired from orchestral sonority to the most delicate of tone weaving.

He needs space and remoteness and he had these on the stage of the theater, the audience far enough away and sufficiently hidden in the dim lighting to give him a chance to feel alone with the piano. But he responded, nevertheless, to the tribute of silence in listening, the enthusiastic applause from the great throng that had gathered to hear him, the multiplied recalls.

Spell-Binding Rendition.

Some days ago, there was disappointment in noting in an advance announcement of the program that the Chopin Funeral March Sonata would be included. This was not due to any criticism of the sonata but the fact that it has been played by the majority of noted pianists to visit the capital. It has been done beautifully on previous occasions but it never seemed shorter or more moving and spell-binding than last night.

The first movement was stirring in its rich colorfulness, the scherzo exciting in the contrast between the rush of tempestuous feeling and the celestial beauty and tranquility of the singing melody.

Display of Anger

The return to the funeral march after the serenity of the trio was clash of arms, bombing of Stalingrad, bitter resentment against imposed tragedy of grief, then after philosophical reasoning, not so much ashes and dead leaves, but sharp protest in the Presto which reconciled clarity with breath-taking pace.

Exceptional Choice.

The choice of the Beethoven Sonata in D minor, Opus 31, No. 2, was exceptional. While some from the long list have become hackneyed from constant performance, this one in the shorter category practically never is played by recitalists except when presenting a cycle. One could wonder why after discovering in it new beauties through the Rachmaninoff interpretation.

Three movements from the Bach Partita in E major for violin alone, transcribed for the piano by Rachmaninoff, formed a refreshing and appetite challenging first course in the clean etching of tone and phrasing, buoyancy and rhythmic grace.

Unmoved by changing modes and uninfluenced by tendency in this era to substitute cacophony for melody and harmony, Rachmaninoff keeps serenely to his classical and romantic school tastes in his own composition as well as program building. Thus the group of his own works which he presented was entirely in tune with Bach, Beethoven, Chopin and also Liszt, whose Tarantella, Venizia e Napoli was a finale for the concert—so far as the printed program was concerned—of superb bravura and scintillating brilliancy.

The surprise of the evening, sprung by the pianist-composer, was his own C sharp minor Prelude which didn't sound at all like chunks of ice thumping down the cellar steps the way he did it. With the first few measures, it was generally recognized and applause seemed imminent, but it was reserved for the end. This was a tribute to its fame though rumor has been persistent through the years that Rachmaninoff himself doesn't like it. Anyway, he rarely plays it.

His Excellency the Governor General and Her Royal Highness the Princess Alice, occupied the vice-regal box.