

MUSIC

Rachmaninoff Heard
in Recital at 'U'
Hall

By JOHN K. SHERMAN

Rachmaninoff is one of those rare personalities in music whose interpretative art crosses the line into creative art. He can touch nothing without re-evaluating it, throwing it in a new light, conveying to the listener an uncanny impression he had never heard it before.

The reason for that, of course, is that Rachmaninoff is fundamentally and instinctively a creative artist, a personality so strong that all music passing through his mind and fingers is like light refracted through a prism, emerging in new colors and meanings while still being that same ray of light, the same music in a deeper identity.

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The Russian composer-pianist appeared last night at the second concert of the University artists series in Northrop auditorium, playing before one of the largest audiences that ever assembled there. Like Paderewski, his face has become an impassive mask, a wizened countenance resembling on Asiatic seer's. As he shambles out to the piano—tall, stooped and seemingly weary—you think of him as one of the wise men of the East. The illusion of weariness vanishes as soon as those long fingers press the keys; you feel immediately the inescapable force and originality of that mind which moulds music according to its own laws and logic.

We don't know how to describe the Beethoven opus 31 No. 2 sonata except to say that it held your mind like a magnet. Here was the indelible impress of the pianist's personality on Beethoven, making of it super-Beethoven in its Rachmaninoff reincarnation. There was profound suggestiveness in this music. Mood—mystery even—hung over it. The second movement wove a spell that defied any analysis of its apparently simple and direct treatment. A wealth of shading, a wide palette of colors were applied to it to produce a wondrous fabric of tone, a living musical document.

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After the Beethoven came the Bach violin sonata in E major transcribed for piano by Rachmaninoff, a composition of such forthright vigor, such irresistible verve and vitality that it is destined to take a high place in piano repertoire. From the basis of the single line of the violin's voice, the composer has summoned all the harmonies Bach implied and many that Bach could have written only if he had lived in the twentieth century. The closely interlaced figures were woven with quick and strong fingers, producing a miracle of flashing, struggling phrases.

And then the Schubert "Rondo"—a thing of flirting grace, run off with astounding speed and clarity. The Chopin group—that "Valse" in E flat major, an enchanting thing so veiled in utterance that you felt you heard it from an oblique angle; the F sharp nocturne which was like a benediction; and, finally, the A flat ballade, played as no one has played it before, brought to stormy and dramatic conclusion that made this the apotheosis, rather than mere interpretation, of the A flat ballade.

The second half of the program was less interesting programmatically, but it continued to exploit with ever-increasing brilliance the virtuoso powers of the pianist. After numbers by Rachmaninoff, Borodin, Weber-Tausig and Mendelssohn-Rachmaninoff, the artist played as encores Tchaikowsky's "Troika en traineaux," his own inevitable prelude in C sharp minor, and Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Flight of the Bumble Bee."