

CAPITAL AUDIENCE APPLAUDS RECITAL OF RACHMANINOFF

By NATHAN WEINBERG

Once upon a time Sergel Rachmaninoff was a great pianist. But his piano playing last evening was that of a successful composer.

Composers, of course, seldom play well. Absorbed by their own creative work they seldom have the time or inclination for painstaking, conscientious recreation of other men's works.

Only occasionally was there a glimmer of the old Rachmaninoff at last night's recital. And his audience had to wait some time before it heard even this glimmer. The opening Bach Fantasia and Fugue in G minor was an utterly inadequate representation of that grand work. The Fantasia lacked Gothic Baroque bigness in its massive sections and the quieter episodes were without the tender humanity of the lovable old organist. As to the Fugue, it might just as well have been a Perpetual Motion by Alkan so far as Rachmaninoff was concerned.

Even more disappointing was the Beethoven Sonata Op. 109, one of the greatest of the 32. A listener unacquainted with the score could not possibly have realized its alternating quiet tenderness and passionate ecstasy from this performance.

Rachmaninoff apparently has very definite ideas regarding the interpretation of Chopin's C minor Polonaise, especially as to rubato. For this listener, his arbitrary, violent changes of tempo were without musical logic. The D flat Nocturne is foreign to his temperament, a Mazurka fared somewhat better, but not until he had played the Rondo Op. 16 (glittery superficial Chopin) did the audience come alive.

We heard four of Rachmaninoff's compositions, "Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 33. The first is Sturm und Drang banality à la Liszt and the second a rehashing of romantic sentimentality. Much better are the third and fourth, the former having an iron-grey color strength, and the latter a handsome strut.

The program concluded with the "Feuerzauber" from "Die Walkure" Liszt's transcription of Paganini's E major Etude and Rhapsodie No. 12.

What are the qualities of Rachmaninoff's piano playing at the present time? First and foremost a stupendous technique. Aside from that, we hear occasional bass chords with the quality of a bronze gong and again with a particularly tigerish snarl. There is a magnificent staccato which scampers gloriously across the piano, and at the top of the instrument, Rachmaninoff's tones have an inimitable blue-white glitter.

What is lacking? One all-powerful, indispensable musical element—the capacity for rapturous song.