

Rachmaninoff At Lyric

Noted Pianist Is Soloist
On Philadelphia Orchestra
Program

AT THE Lyric last night there were few topics of discussion that were not related to the many-sided and large-souled art of Sergei Rachmaninoff. For this notable all-Rachmaninoff program of the Philadelphia Orchestra, under the wholly admirable leadership of Eugene Ormandy, was further enriched by the artistry of Rachmaninoff himself, as soloist in his own C Minor Piano Concerto.

Every seat in the auditorium was occupied, and more than 300 listeners paid tribute to a great composer and distinguished pianist by standing throughout the concert. And the prospect of hearing Rachmaninoff's lengthy four-part Third Symphony, "The Bells" (inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's poem of the same title), was no small part of the attraction held out to last night's auditors.

The symphony, in last night's discussion the composer's intimate knowledge of orchestral and vocal resources, the symphony required the services of a large chorus and three vocal soloists—Agnes Davis, soprano; Fritz Kreuger, tenor, and Elwood Hawkins, barytone, a native of Maryland and a former student at the Peabody Conservatory.

RISING to heights of power in each of its four movements, the work was given a splendid interpretation by Mr. Ormandy, his players, and 150 singers of the University of Pennsylvania Choral Society. Much of the success of the performance resulted from the work of the chorus and the competent singing of the soloists. Enthusiastic applause brought Mr. Ormandy, the soloist, and Harl McDonald, director of the chorus, back to the platform several times.

The symphony, in last night's discussion, held many memorable moments, though its thematic material seemed less distinguished, on the whole, than that of the Concerto which was to follow. The impassioned dialogue between violins and 'celli, at the beginning of the second movement, was surely suggestive of "a lover's yearning glances."

Here there was happiness, and the eager expectancy that looks forward with clear-eyed confidence. This is music that comes close to the emotional intensity of "Tristan." There was heart-touching loneliness in the English horn solo passages of the final movement. The writing for voices was effective, and at times almost overpowering in dramatic forcefulness. And the third movement was remarkable as an evocation of fearful excitement.

It must be admitted, however, that this work by the Russian composer is greatly handicapped by the use of a text that is at least twice-removed from that of Poe, being "an English translation of a German translation of the Russian translation set by Rachmaninoff."

THE RICH connotations of silver sleigh bells, mellow wedding bells, clangorous "alarm bells," and finally the heavily tolling funeral bells—here is an opportunity for the symphonist. But, touched with genius as numerous passages of this work are, there is nevertheless the impression that the score has been overloaded with instrumental effects where a Wagner, a Sibelius, or a Vaughan-Williams, might have made infinite appeal to the imagination with much greater economy of means.

Yet how many achievements of other contemporary composers can be compared to the dusky winding loveliness of the C Minor Concerto's second theme? There is always the temptation to pluck the conductor by the coat sleeve and ask for another hearing of that magically expressive theme, and it is the later development of this upward-reaching tone sequence that makes one of music's most stirring experiences.

There is no pianist who plays this music quite as Rachmaninoff does. And Mr. Ormandy has seldom appeared to better advantage than as the gifted interpreter of these two scores, which make such great demands on the orchestral conductor.

G. S.

Clubs