

Rachmaninoff Patrons Have Ovation Habit

Equal Applause Welcomes
Every Number.

BY EDWARD BARRY.

When sober, unsmiling Sergei Rachmaninoff returned to Orchestra hall yesterday for an afternoon recital [his first here in more than a year] the famous Russian pianist and composer unconsciously proved the truth of a curious proposition. Stated simply, it runs somewhat as follows:

"A great musician does not need to be consistently great. Once his name has become a household word, his professional efforts are sure to be punctuated by huge ovations whether the performance invariably deserves such tributes or not."

The D Flat Nocturne of Chopin, played with a ravishingly lovely tone that succeeded in being delicate without a trace of puniness, drew tumultuous applause. So did the Beethoven Opus 109 Sonata, although it is difficult to understand how a matter-of-fact, steely performance of such an exalted work could justify the demonstration which ensued.

In the latter case the audience may have been applauding the name and fame of Rachmaninoff, not his rendition of the Beethoven Sonata.

For this pianist gives the impression occasionally that he is a little suspicious of lyricism or anything that resembles it, and that he would rather dispel a mood prematurely by a few iron phrases than run the risk of even the slightest sentimentality.

Preceding the Beethoven was the Liszt transcription of Bach's G Minor Fantasia and Fugue. Rachmaninoff's uncompromising, often unresonant chords may be suited to the sternness of the work's first division but one wonders how many in his audience was able to gain from the fugue an adequate idea of Bach's prodigious sweep of idea or of the opportunities for color which the old Leipziger built into it.

It is true, of course, that in both the Beethoven and the Bach (and still oftener in the Chopin group and the four highly pianistic Rachmaninoff études that followed) that powerful grip was relaxed from time to time to permit a hearer to explore some fragrant bypath that the music opened up.

But, strangely, the pianist passed the tenderly introspective second variation (in the sonata) without moderating either tone or general tempo. A little more mellowness here would certainly have been justified, for who will recognize the amazing beauty of this page if the performer himself sharply denies its enchantment?