

RACHMANINOFF PLAYS FIRST-RATE PROGRAM

Great Star Pianist Breaks His
Own Rule by Not Play-
ing Prelude

AIR OF SCIENTIST

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

Rachmaninoff broke his rule of 20 years in his music master recital at Eaton's last night. He did not play his most famous Prelude for encore. Not even Kreisler has ever played any one piece quite so often. It was time to quit. And he had done a big program.

The greatest of all purely Slav pianists had the genial air of a fine scientist as he stroked a few preliminary chords for perfect silence, gazed benignly at the crowd and began to play Bach's Organ Fantasia and Fugue in G minor. This was magnificent Bach. The Fantasia did not sound disorganized and the Fugue was a sublime Bachian contest of two splendid melodies in glorious tempo, piling up crescendos to an enormous orchestral climax.

So colossal an opening made the Beethoven Sonata in E, opus 109, sound rather like fine intellectual technique by comparison. This is the Sonata that Rosenthal first chose for his Toronto program next Monday, but changed to the Appassionata. One of three Sonatas written in the same year as the 9th Symphony, Beethoven in his note-book claims to have tossed off the three "at one sitting". Critics doubt that. But as Rachmaninoff played 109 last night it was a far different sort of Sonata from the Moonlight, the Pathétique or the Waldstein.

The earlier ones are romantic. The Waldstein, as described by Iturbi, who last played it here, is orchestral. The E major, called a "fantasia sonata" is an impressive, intellectual monologue written when the composer heard not a note of it; some of it in two parts only: playing lively bass themes against treble; an adagio of great dignity but no passion; a strenuous prestissimo. Then the player glided into a second slow movement, as calm as a ship sailing in, and before the audience knew it, he stopped on a soft chord—and the Sonata was all over. A fine, chaste performance of a work that interested piano students more than the general crowd—especially the Toronto pianist who, when she first heard Rachmaninoff in Edmonton 15 years ago got her first impulse to play the piano.

Four Chopin pieces were done with high respect to the genius of one whom Rosenthal declares must have been a greater pianist than Liszt: the familiar Valse that sounds so much like 4-4 rhythm, a lovely Nocturne, a ripping Mazurka and the gaily rollicking Rondo, op. 10. His own three Etudes-Tableaux were presented as three splendid tone-scenes as definite as pantomimes. Fine imagination and playing art in these; the most interesting originals ever played here by a pianist-composer since Godowsky.

Liszt's "Sonetto del Petrarco" was a fine touch of elegant romance. The Magic Fire—arranged from Wagner's Valkyrie—was superbly orchestrated by the pianist, who finished his series of tone-pictures with a magnificent Rachmaninoff interpretation of Liszt's variation on a Paganini Etude. Encores brought the final scene, with the Mendelssohn version of the Spinning Song from Wagner's "Flying Dutchman" and Rachmaninoff's own arrangement of Kreisler's "Liebeslied".