

RACHMANINOFF'S PLAYING WAS "BEYOND WORDS"

By OLEF

Sergei Rachmaninoff played at the Birmingham Town Hall last night.

And there I am sorely tempted to leave it, or criticise Birmingham, and bemoan the fact that there were a few (though not many) empty seats. But that would be talking of the audience, who are, after all, very secondary to the principal figure of the evening!

There are, you see, two kinds of performances which leave the critic speechless. And this was the kind in which anything that he might say is feeble, wordy description of something that does not lie in the realm of words, but can only be expressed, as it was expressed, in that wonderful wordless speech that men call music.

I might so easily talk, as last time when I heard Rachmaninoff I talked of his masterful technique, of the wealth and beauty of his tone, of his delicacy and his strength, of the feathery *planissimos* and the stupendous reverberations. And still you would know nothing of what happened at the Birmingham Town Hall last night.

"RELENTLESS LOGIC"

His programme began with Liszt's arrangement of Bach's organ Fantasia and Fugue in G minor. He played it with a relentless logic rather than with the mechanical exactness that usually goes for Bach. A friend turned to me at the end of it and, in an auditorium whisper, said it lacked sparkle. I think he meant it lacked flash.

This was followed by the main work of the evening, Beethoven's "Sonata in D minor." There is a legend that says that when somebody asked Beethoven for the meaning of the sonata he replied "Read the Tempest." Now no legend is less trustworthy than a legend about Beethoven. But it helps me to say that here was a Prospero; although his abode was not so much a magic island as magic caves of mystery.

And then, inevitably, came—maybe I'm leading you astray here, because it wasn't the Prelude!—a group of Chopin, the Polonaise in C minor, Nocturne in D flat major, Mazurka in F minor and Rondo in E flat.

It was not the Chopin that you hear on the pianola; not the Chopin of fanciful dreams and over-decorated salons.

Rather it was that deeper, romantic,

CROWDS SURGE ROUND CAR

WITHIN less than twenty hours of arriving in England, 64-year-old Sergei Rachmaninoff, the world-famous Russian composer-pianist, gave a two-hour recital at the Birmingham Town Hall last night.

Amazing scenes greeted him at the end of his recital, and policemen had to control the crowd which, eager to see the pianist and flourishing their programmes in the hope of getting autographs, thronged around the car which awaited him outside the hall.

consumptive-gnawed Chopin. Or shall we say that the Russian Rachmaninoff understands Chopin, the Pole, as well as Chopin the Frenchman?

The second half began with a group of Rachmaninoff and Liszt's Petrarch in "Sonnet" in E flat. A neat conjunction this since Rachmaninoff himself is nearer, I suppose, to Liszt than anybody else in the position he occupies in the musical world.

And there the real music of the evening ended.

Rachmaninoff has played at lots of concerts. He knows what concert-goers like. And he is a kind man.

So the rest of the programme was for the especial benefit of those who wanted, some time during his evening, to gasp "Marvellous."

SIR HERBERT EVERSHERD

The funeral of Sir Herbert Eversherd at Burton-on-Trent yesterday was attended by representatives of scores of organisations including town councillors and magistrates. The Borough Police and Special Police Force formed a guard of honour at the church gates and headed the procession to the Cemetery, hundreds of townspeople lining the route.