

Music in Review

By GLENN DILLARD GUNN

For the first time in the 30 years that I have been reviewing Rachmaninoff's piano recitals, I saw him smile at his audience last night in Constitution Hall.

Indeed, he rarely smiles off stage, betraying pleasure only by a glint in his eye. The proverbial cordiality of the Washington public broke down his reserve, however, and he grew more genial as the program advanced, even adding the C sharp minor Prelude, a work New York and Chicago have not heard at his hands for a decade or more, as a penultimate encore.

The satisfaction which his own playing must have offered

him could also have explained his good humor. This was one of those happy occasions when the master excelled himself, adding to the glittering virtuosity which he always displays, a warm legato, a floating softness of tone that matched perfectly the contemplative beauty of the Liszt variations on the Bach theme, "Tears, Fancies, Sorrows, Fears," and carried through the mounting climax without harshness.

This was a new color in Rachmaninoff's piano playing and seemingly it is to be a permanent asset; for it came again in the second movement of the Italian concerto and even in the incredible velocity of the Liszt "Forest Voices." Virtuosity was tempered by this soft and glowing beauty of tone. And there was yet another new accent in this recital, one concerned with repertoire. Rachmaninoff played Debussy for the first time in my extended contact with his art.

It was not impressionistic Debussy but the early and charming Suite Bergermasque, of the vintage of the ballet suite for orchestra, and therefore not representative. So it happened that Liszt was the impressionist of the evening.

There was atmosphere and illusion in the two concert Etudes, "Forest Voices" and "Dance of the Gnomes," enough to lift them from the category of mere display pieces in which the limitations of the technicians have caused them to be listed, for these many years, and to restore to them their true poetic significance. Only superlative virtuosity could thus disguise their difficulties.

It was a program without a sonata, which, from an artist of Rachmaninoff's standing, is like a concert by a famous symphony orchestra without a symphony. Does this mean that Rachmaninoff, too, has adopted a showman's estimate of the American public?

Out of sincere love for a great instrument and its literature, I hope not. The public needs to hear the great sonatas of Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt, especially the two of Liszt and the last four of Beethoven, which therefore become an obligation for those artists who can play them.

The Bach-Italian Concerto stood, presumably, in place of a sonata, to glitter faintly in the harpsichord idiom of the first and last movements, and to sing exquisitely above the "fixed idea" of the second movement.

There was, of course, a Chopin group, the F major Nocturne, discovering more authority than poetry; the A flat Impromptu, dazzling by its velocity; the C sharp minor Mazurka, one of those perfect realizations of mood, rhythm, and color that have the force of a revelation, and the C sharp minor Scherzo displaying an amazing dynamic range.

The Debussy suite he played for what it is—charming salon music, and he substituted his G major Prelude for the Etude announced. His encores included

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Donahue and Eddie LeBaron, sat back for the Big Moment. Miss Barrett fluttered her lily-white hands and swished her presumably lily-white torso, but Miss Barrett did not recite the Great Satire. Instead, still smiling wanly, she sent by liveried page boy the complete script of the satire for the reporter to read!

David Selsnick's new importation, Antonina Nowicka, of Poland, had something of a troublesome debate with her fiance who is here from Warsaw. Miss Nowicka is perturbed because Mr. Selsnick is seriously contemplating changing her name to something which will fit into cinema page headlines and captions. Miss Nowicka's fiance is all for the idea—even though the girl protests that if her name was good enough to bring her stardom in Poland, it should be good enough for America. Miss Nowicka's fiance's moniker is Adolph Beril Berlinerblau!

Mrs. Vivian Wooley-Hart, of London, who owns a spacious island in the Bermuda, is social-whirling in Manhattan currently. Mrs. Wooley Hyphen Hart was in unhyphenated Woolworth's the other afternoon. She inspected various nickel and dime trinkets. The reason a few of the salesgirls looked as if they might faint at any second was not because they were overworked. It was because from a finger of one hand of Mrs. Wooley-Hart blazed a diamond almost as large as the Woolworth fortune and from the finger of the other hand sparkled an emerald wide as the Atlantic. From Mrs. Wooley-Hart's wrists and arms dripped emeralds and rubies. It is estimated that the jewelry which this former American girl carries around with her is valued at more than a million.

Social Bill Plankinton, sportsman and amateur camera expert, will probably shear his spearhead beard some day this week—after carrying the burden 18 months. He grew it originally in a wager with Bobby LeBranché—it had something to