

A SNAPP of MUSIQUE

An audience filled with young men and young women students at Indiana University, an audience that also had a generous scattering of Indianapolis folk and presumably concert-goers from other towns, listened to Sergei Rachmaninoff play a recital, Wednesday night in the gymnasium at Bloomington. As before, when Kreisler played, the listeners were enthusiastic, and seemed obviously disappointed when the pianist announced that he could play no more encores, because he had to catch a train.

This business of being a world-famous artist is apparently not an unalloyed pleasure. At any rate, Rachmaninoff looked tired, and he played as if he were tired. There was, of course, that astonishing technic which does not diminish in excellence. And there were some very fine moments in Bach's Italian Concerto, when every evidence of mastery was revealed in tone quality and in phrasing. There were, too, many dazzling moments in the Liszt "Dance of the Gnomes."

But much of the playing was matter-of-fact, and matter-of-fact playing is not what one expects from Rachmaninoff. This does not mean that the music was so perfunctory that it gave little pleasure. From all except a very few pianists, indeed, what one heard would have seemed brilliant and alive. But Rachmaninoff belongs with the very great artists, and one is unfair enough always to expect very great art from these chosen few. Like everyone else, they have to rely wholly on their technical skill and their sure knowledge of the music in order to present it at all. This was one of those times. One missed the extra sensitiveness, the extra subtlety, the extra "inspiration," if you will.

Even so, Rachmaninoff is one of the rare pianists of the older school who plays in the grand manner. There are power and sweep in his measures and there is an electrifying spark in his bravura. Weariness can not hide those essential qualities. Weariness can only subdue that essence which no one can explain but which everyone calls genius.

The program contained music by Liszt, Bach, Chopin and Debussy. It also contained the pianist's own C-sharp Minor Prelude, which brought forth the usual storm of applause. Maybe it's because the composer plays it better than anyone else.

W. W.