

**WORLD-FAMED  
PIANIST****Rachmaninoff at  
Theatre Royal**

By HAROLD R. WHITE,

"Irish Independent" Music Critic.

The last of the season's Celebrity Concerts at the Theatre Royal proved to be the most attractive. The audience was the largest and most enthusiastic I have seen for some years.

To musicians the programme was particularly interesting, for few artists have a keener sense of programme making than Rachmaninoff, who gave us Bach, Chopin, and Liszt in a choice selection.

The organ Fantasia and Fugue in G minor is probably the finest transcription Liszt has given us, and what struck me about Rachmaninoff's treatment of it was that one felt it was not an imitation of the organ, but pure piano music. Organists may consider the Fantasia lacks the massiveness of the original, but the player was not aiming to produce the grand effects of diapasons, mixtures and reeds, but sought to capture the serene beauty of the more reflective passages, which almost suggested a nocturne.

**THE FUGUE.**

Again, the speed of the fugue had none of the dignity imparted to it by such organists as Atkins, Perkins, and Peace, who took it at a more leisurely pace. But then it must be remembered in a cathedral or concert hall, with their reverberating qualities, much of the detail would be lost.

Rachmaninoff tripped along cheerily, and even in the great points of climax the piano was not urged to do more than it was capable of doing. The pedal entry at the end did not thunder along, but had all the suggestion of power one could desire. The player got all his effects by subtle contrasts rather than by sheer dynamic force.

**A COMPARISON.**

I am tempted to draw a comparison between the player and Cortot in the performance of the Sonata in D minor (Beethoven), but two such individual performers might give different readings of such a work, according to the mood of the moment. Rachmaninoff never stresses the dramatic content of the opening movement, and yet one feels the reserve power of his playing all through. He causes single notes to sing out without allowing us to be conscious of the mechanics of the instrument, and his treatment of the restful recitative had all the exquisite beauty of a song. It seemed to be a setting of a poem.

**QUALITY OF A HARP.**

In the slow movement, too, we had that sweeping arpeggio figure which decorates the theme, given with all the dulcet quality of a harp, and the finale, kept within the bounds suggested by the term *Allegretto*, never lost its shapely rhythm, the usual fault in playing this movement. And here, again, it was by the player's infallible sense of colour contrast.

One could realise by this time we would have a Chopin player of rare equalities. Serious but not gloomy, in the Polonaise in C minor, and serenely beautiful in his melody over a whispering arpeggio accompaniment in the Nocturne in D flat (which he substituted for the F major), Rachmaninoff was in his most alluring vein.

**TOO FAST.**

I felt the Impromptu in A flat too fast for the rhythm of the triplets, and there were too many sudden changes in tempo in the second section, to make it convincing and satisfying; but the Scherzo, especially in the ethereal treatment of the decorative material of the Chorale, was a masterpiece.

As a composer Rachmaninoff was represented by three studies, in which he did not indulge in any modern mannerisms of discordant harmony. I once asked Esposito what he thought of a certain modern English composer's music. Trying a piece over, he said: "If you took out all the wrong notes, it would be quite commonplace."

Now, there is nothing of that kind about Rachmaninoff's music. He is always picturesque and always musical, as his playing of these delightful pieces proved.

**LISZT WORKS.**

I was impressed greatly with the recitalist's interpretation of the Liszt works and transcriptions, notably the Sonetto del Petrarca, treated with such lyrical charm, and the suggestive performance of the Spinning chorus from Wagner's "Flying Dutchman," in which the underlying movement of the spinning wheels was so delicately handled.

Rachmaninoff played as his first encore piece his famous Prelude in C sharp minor. I was afraid of that, but I suppose he thought it better, in the words of the film actors, "to get it over with." He also gave us another Liszt transcription and Chopin's Valse in A flat. Readers may have noticed that I have not discussed Rachmaninoff's technique. I never thought of it.