

RUSSIAN RETAINS MASTERY OF PIANO

Rachmaninoff Shows Time
Has Not Dulled Dexterity

BY HERBERT ELWELL

Sergei Rachmaninoff appeared in recital at Public Music Hall last night. The renowned Russian master did not fall below his usual record either in drawing a capacity audience or in winning its complete approval. Time has not dulled his digital dexterity, the cleanness of his rapid passage work or his rhythmic precision. The natural beauty of his phrasing remains unaltered. And his playing, always distinguished, retains all of those attributes of pleasant restraint, ease and evenness which have long given it marked individuality.

His program, except for a couple of Lisztian lollypops at the end, was not a showy one. But for that matter, Rachmaninoff is not, and never has been, a showy pianist. His tonal etching is gray and subdued and sober. It partakes of moonlit melancholy and lurks in soft shadows. And for this reason, perhaps, the happy melodiousness of Schubert's Impromptu and Rondo never seemed to attain anything more optimistic than a wistful smile. Something of the playful charm also of the Beethoven Sonata, whose movements are marked "Farewell, Absence and Return," was cast over with a pallid hue that bordered occasionally on dullness. Yet it was scrupulously carved with irreproachable musicianship, as were the Bach Toccata and Rameau Variations which preceded it.

Dashes Off Preludes

More directly and spontaneously communicative were the twelve Chopin Preludes which assumed a richer character, possibly because of some Slavic affinity between the moody Pole and the pensive Russian, possibly because the latter warmed to his task with more spirit in the last half of his program. At any rate they were dashed off with adroitness and fluency that made them a special delight.

Only one of Rachmaninoff's own compositions was included, the G Major Prelude. The tinsel elegance of the Liszt "Sonnetto del Petrarca" and Tarantella "Venice and Naples," supplied the element of virtuosic glamour at the end that had been almost non-existent in the program until then. The recital, managed by Elmer A. Wiener, was sponsored by the Sweet Briar Alumnae of Cleveland.