

## Piano Recital

# Rachmaninoff Plays Superbly

By ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN

Today Sergei Rachmaninoff stands at the pinnacle of his gigantic career. His recital last night at the Opera House demonstrated that at this moment we are privileged to witness a kind of pianistic kingship that in future years will be enshrined in the mythology of music as one of the colossal and incredible achievements of the great old times, much as the performances of Liszt are now regarded.

For Rachmaninoff, despite his pessimism regarding the present state of music and his almost total reliance on the literature of the past, is one of the four or five very great lords of the interpretative realm, so far as the piano is concerned. He has held that enviable position for long, but, if the recollection of past recitals can be relied on, his art has ripened even further and more gloriously in recent years. One recalls Rachmaninoff mannerisms, especially a clinging, hyper-romantic rubato, that was beautiful when he exploited it, but the playing is still more beautiful now that it is less in evidence.

### EVENING'S HIGH POINT

For at least one member of last night's audience the high point of the evening came with Beethoven's sonata called "Farewell, Absence and Return," which was given the most superlative performance these ears have ever heard. The work is short and comparatively small in scope, yet Rachmaninoff's wonderful touch and incomparable shading and sensitivity made it ring with the lyric eloquence of "Fidelio" and the dynamic power of the eighth symphony. But there was no exaggeration, no thunderous punching of sonorities. It always remained within its limited frame, but that frame became a window into vast and tremendous landscapes of the spirit.

The evening began with variations by Rameau, crisp, lace-like patterns of objective tone, perfectly woven. The Bach toccata in E minor was also a matter of pattern, but was wonderfully suffused with the romantic spirit as well, as if to indicate what musicians so often forget—that Bach is one of the forefathers both of Chopin and Debussy.

The second half was out-and-out romanticism, beginning with Rachmaninoff's own lovely G major prelude, and going on to a dozen of Chopin and two of Liszt's reports on his years of pilgrimage. The Chopin was magnificently done, but the climax here was in Liszt's tremendous "Tarantella," done with hair-raising mastery of its innumerable technical impossibilities, with huge orchestral tone and liveliness of spirit.

### INNUMERABLE ENCORES

But no matter how big or how fast or how loud or how powerful, one always felt the reserve behind it, and the subtleties at the other end of the scale were never for the slightest moment neglected. For Rachmaninoff never splashes, and never seems even to recognize the temptation to over-draw or over-reach.

Naturally, there were innumerable encores, beginning with Chopin, an arrangement of the "Spinning Song" from "The Flying Dutchman," and the inevitable C sharp minor prelude.

Perhaps the best news to be reported of the evening's doings is that Rachmaninoff will give a second recital at the Opera House Sunday afternoon, presenting the Bach Italian concerto, the Beethoven sonata Opus III, and much Chopin and Liszt.