

Rachmaninoff Given Thunderous Ovation

By HEINZ BERGGRUEN

Rachmaninoff, who was heard in his second recital of this season at the Opera House yesterday afternoon, harvested the same stormy ovations that followed last Friday's concert and the hundreds or thousands of performance that he has given previously in his successful and brilliant career.

To review a concert by Rachmaninoff and to start out with criticism and reservations is probably as undesirable as to report a young and unknown artist's debut with unrestricted enthusiasm. However, the feelings of overwhelming greatness, as far as his playing is concerned, was not left with this reviewer. It seemed to me that the artist's technical mastery almost prevented him from recreating the ultimate in the works' spiritual depth.

GREAT VIRTUOSITY

This impression was particularly strong in regard to Rachmaninoff's interpretation of Beethoven. He played Beethoven's last sonata (Opus 111) with unsurpassable virtuosity. But he did not probe the full implication of the work; there was that constant and perfect technical brilliance in his playing that overshadowed the more profound tones of desperation and extraordinary violence which characterize this great and difficult work of the deaf master. Rachmaninoff played it almost like an etude. Under his fingers the work was projected on a musical screen that left out the third dimension.

Bach's Italian concerto was presented with a singular clear and lively agility in the first and third movements. Debussy's "Suite Bergamesque" was also a perfect achievement in technique and subtlety. But the "Claire de Lune" somehow should be more lyrical and more elusive than it sounded in the solid interpretation of Rachmaninoff.

ADMIRABLE ART

The second part included, besides one of his own compositions, "Etude-Tableau," pieces by Chopin and Liszt. And here, where it was more a matter of elaborate technique and fluidity than anywhere else, Rachmaninoff's playing became, in its way, admirable art. In a frenetic tempo that stood in a peculiar contrast to the almost complete immobility of his body, he gleaned the

phrases of restlessness and musical virtuosity created by the romantics of the last century. Here his playing was grandiose and noble, unforced and yet determined. The notes are no problem to Rachmaninoff.

Is it necessary to say that he played, as his last encore, his prelude in C sharp minor? He is supposed to have remarked once that his only conception of heaven is a place where this prelude would not be performed. The concert public, apparently, does not agree with him. In its enthusiasm about the work the audience was as undefatigable as the composer's elastic hands were on the keyboard.