

Fans Accord Pianist High Tribute

By RICHARD D. SAUNDERS

The popularity of Sergei Rachmaninoff was attested by the enthusiastic audience which filled the Philharmonic Auditorium last night for the first of the Russian pianist's two scheduled concerts under Behymer management. The musical status of some in the audience was equally revealed by applause in wrong places and adulation accorded the hackneyed c-sharp minor Prelude, as a final encore.

Rachmaninoff's pianism suggests a finely cut diamond, polished to perfection, brilliant and sparkling, yet extremely hard. An inward glow is there, but of a type to inspire admiration, not affection. A superlative technician, Rachmaninoff played with the phenomenal virtuosity that is his greatest asset, with every dynamic shading calculated to a nicety.

As usual, Rachmaninoff offered a program which would have been no novelty half a century ago. It included two of his own Preludes, but these were equally of the 19th Century in musical concept, if not in date of composition.

Rameau "Variations" opened the concert, enunciated at first with suitably incisive delicacy, but eventually developed by the pianist to a degree of dynamic force better suited to individual display than adherence to the compositional era. An e-minor Bach "Toccat" was delivered with beautiful finesse.

The Beethoven Sonata, Op. 81-a, surnamed "Farewell, Absence and Return," the composer's sole excursion into program music in his sonata series, was given a brilliant reading, its thematic developments expounded with admirable clarity. Two Schubert items, an "Impromptu" and a "Rondo," were done with

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Rachmaninoff's Genius Accorded

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crystalline purity of expression.

Twelve Chopin Preludes were pianistically but not poetically expressed. Rachmaninoff has the elegance appropriate to Chopin, and abundant gracefulness, but not graciousness. His own G-major Prelude, with its singing melody sounding above a quietly moving background, won emphatic plaudits.

The final group was of two Liszt selections, the lovely "Sonnetto del Petrarca" and the showy "Taran-tella."

A different program is announced for the pianist's second concert, Saturday afternoon in the Philharmonic Auditorium.