

Gloom of Early Morning Disperses Before Time for Concert Tonight

BY O. B. KEELER

You may pronounce it approximately as spelled, without frills—Rachmaninoff, with the accent on the “man.” Which reminds me of something I was told sixteen years ago by Big Swede, John Goldstrom, newspaper man and musical critic, and (at the nonce) a top sergeant at Camp Gordon.

We were talking about Sergei Rachmaninoff, who was to be heard the following evening. I never had heard Rachmainoff. Mr. Goldstrom had. He said:

“When that big Russian is in the humor, he can tuck that Steinway under his chin, and play it like a violin!”

I attended Mr. Rachmaninoff’s concert the next evening. Mr. Goldstrom was correct. And I may suggest further that I, personally, never have heard Mr. Rachmaninoff play when he was not, as specified by Mr. Goldstrom, “in the humor.”

More Chopin, Please

Mr. Rachmaninoff plays Thursday evening, at the City Auditorium. I shall be among those present. To others prospectively attending, I would commend Mr. Goldstrom’s estimate. There is no other pianist in the world who can quite match this man for a perfectly and absolutely businesslike command of the piano. I have been told that Mr. Rachmaninoff considers

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KEELER INTERVIEWS RACHMANINOFF, GREAT PIANIST

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Mr. Josef Hofmann the greatest living pianist. To this I have one addition to suggest.

If Mr. Rachmaninoff will adopt a small suggestion I was bold enough to make, through the medium of a regular musical critic, and add to the Chopin already on his program the late Mr. Chopin's Valse in C-Sharp Minor, we shall all have a pretty little basis of comparison, or, shall we better call it, contrast?

Anyway, I know they can both play that little waltz. And I always liked it quite as well as anything Mr. Hofmann does. I mean, he does it especially expensively. Now for Mr. Rachmaninoff—but if you are there, you may hear it, yourself.

The Big Russian—as the English love to put it, the Great Man! Here's six feet two when he stands up straight, which he does not often do before noon.

Oh, These Mornings
"In the mornings," said Mr. Rachmaninoff in his apartment at the Biltmore Hotel, "I am—well, pessimistic. I think one of your American newspaper editors had something to say about that."

So do I. It was Marie Henry Waterson, Marie Henry said:
"No gentleman has any right to feel well before noon."

Some way, I have an idea it was from a different genesis; but the result may be the same. And Sergei Rachmaninoff is a gentleman of old Russia, born in Novgorod in 1873, educated in St. Petersburg and Moscow before ever they changed their names to Leningrad and—well, Moscow still is Moscow; but not the same.

Sergei Rachmaninoff sat at a small table or desk in his apartment at the Biltmore, and smoked a cigarette, and then another one, and was beginning on a third when I departed, leaving him in the hands of his friends, who were asking him questions.

He had declined, politely but firmly, to be photographed at the Steinway, which occupied about one-half of his sitting room.

"Too many pictures at the piano," he said. I could understand this. At the same time, I found out something curious about this piano, and about all the pianos which serve as practice tees for the Great Man.

Shuffler on the Fwedes
"He always has a piano-tuner with him," said Mr. C. W. Spalding, who manages the expeditions. "Rather, a piano expert. He not only tunes the pianos, but more especially he places extra pieces of felt in such position that Mr. Rachmaninoff can play his exercises at full speed, and not annoy the nerves of other guests in the hotel."

I like that. I suppose some guests would be annoyed if Rosa Ponselle should spring some little aria, such as "Birds Without Number," in the apartment next door. Anyway, Mr. Rachmaninoff always is provided with a piano sufficiently muffled to permit his exercises at full poundage, without more than a gentle tinkling pervading the circumambient atmosphere.

I inquired if Mr. Rachmaninoff ever rehearsed the numbers on his impending concert program, while exercising. No, indeed. Only exercises. Finger exercises. Every day. Two or three hours.

So I took a look at Mr. Rachmaninoff's hands, and had a photograph made of one of them. It was astounding. They both were astounding. I asked him if he played golf. He smiled and said no.

"I am not a sportsman of any kind," he said, not regretfully. "I drive a motor car, a little. Not much."

Hands Tell You a Lot
Well, well—and what a pair of hands he has, for golf! The only hands I remember seeing which compared with Mr. Rachmaninoff's, for golfing purposes—that is, in golfing design—were attached to Harry Vardon, the Old Master, and Bobby Jones, the Young Master.

Broad, thick, apparently heavy, but flexible as velvet and strong as Russian iron—the ring-finger is longer and apparently larger than the index finger; and the so-called little finger is nearly the same size as the others. . . . I always notice hands.

This comes from thirty years of being mixed up in athletics. I never yet have seen a great athletic competitor without a great pair of hands. . . . They say, in sports, that the competitor is as good as his legs. This goes for ball players and boxers, certainly. Not for pianists.

Hands really do tell you a lot. . . . I noticed more than anything else in an audience with the Pope at Rome, that he had a great pair of hands. . . . In his youth, he was a mountain climber.

Mr. Rachmaninoff smokes a lot; he smokes cigarettes. This also may destroy some illusions. Enrico Caruso smoked five-inch Turkish cigarettes; fifty to sixty a day. I suppose eventually it would have ruined his throat. . . .

Mr. Rachmaninoff smokes a good many cigarettes a day, in a tiny, slender amber holder. Formerly, he smoked a Russian type of cigarette. I think it was Mr. Kipling who said the Russians were the greatest cigarette blenders in the world, but it was Mr. Rachmaninoff's daughter who rolled his cigarettes, of tobacco grown in Asia Minor. Until lately. He now smokes—well, I suppose it's not ethical to give the brand; and yet we don't mind saying what kind of piano the Great Man plays upon. Anyway, it's a cigarette called Sano, and it's supposed to be de-nicotinized. . . . He says it seems a bit easier on the nerves; I mean, he tells Mr. Spalding that. He didn't tell me that. And his nerves, certainly appeared all right, Thursday morning, in spite of the fact that the sitting room was full of interviewers, and it was before noon.

As I said in Paragraph 1, his name is pronounced Rachmaninoff, with the accent on the "man."

He plays Thursday evening, at the City Auditorium. And (as the Big Swede from Pittsburgh said, so many years ago) you will see a man at the piano—a man, who, being in the minor, can pick that Steinway up and tuck it under his chin, and play it like a violin.