

RACHMANINOFF'S ART ASCETIC ROMANTICISM

Packed "Gods" Asked No
Popular Concessions—Chopin
Was Favorite

Rachmaninoff's recital at Massey Hall last night was a tribute to musical Toronto as well as to the Russian virtuoso.

There was not the slightest concession to popular or hot polloi appeal; not the slightest hint of the showman's blandishments; no frills; no stagecraft; no assisting artists; no stunts.

Just the great bare stage, the grand piano dwarfed in the centre by its bare vastness. Just these—and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

It was enough. The hall was comfortably filled. The second balcony, the "gods," was packed. The two hours passed like a dream for them. They insisted on numerous curtain appearances. They insisted on—and were graciously presented with—three encores. The applause at times was thunderous.

Rachmaninoff's grave dignity is almost ascetic. He is an Adolphe Menjou turned monk. There is something of the military in his straight figure, his slightly grizzled close crop of hair.

His slight smile is a very human one and his worn face that of a philosopher.

Those who go to hear him with preconceptions of Russian music and Russian realism are in for some surprises. The melancholy of the race is evident in nearly all Rachmaninoff's interpretations, but it is the romantic melancholy of Chopin. One looked in vain on the program, one listened in vain in the encores, for the brutal barbarities of Bartok or the scintillating impressions of the French moderns. There was nothing more ultra-modern than Strauss's Waltz.

If appreciation could be judged by applause, it was the Chopin numbers that went straight to the heart of the audience. The other numbers interested them, the Fantasia and the Scherzo enraptured them. Rachmaninoff's own études and prelude seemed to point to Chopin as his own master-source of inspiration. He interpreted Chopin as a loving artist does his own father artist. In the Fantasia one heard all the obvious effects that a competent pianist brings out, plus all "the little more, and how much it is" of superb technical mastery and whole-hearted understanding of the work. He lingered over the beautiful slow passages of the Fantasia as though to extract from them every morsel of romantic sweetness. He sped through the thrilling enveloping runs so as to concentrate their effects in an overwhelming manner. In the blend of sublime chords with the playful carillon runs in of the Scherzo he seemed to alternate the pipe organ with the Aeolian harp.

He broke the program in half, and each prelude was in the nature of a quiet preparation for more ambitious things, a preparation both for himself and the audience. The Bach-Buzoni choral preludes were, in turn, simple and involved, wistful and militant. In the Liszt sonata there was opportunity for an exhibition of virtuosity, the pyrotechnics of the piano, growing later into a more reminiscent and meditative mood that had more meat and less meaningless "sound and fury" in it. Medtner's Fairy Tale seemed to be a stranger. His own Tableaux were satisfying without achieving the supreme thrill.

In response to the importunities of the audience, he gave three encores. Last of all he played the Prelude in C Sharp Minor, the "Bells of Moscow," and they went home happy.