

Rachmaninoff Stirs Audience With Monumental Playing

By MALCOLM THURBURN

The greatest performance of the season given by one of the greatest pianists of our day created an immense enthusiasm in the audience which completely filled the Lobero theatre yesterday evening. Nearly two hundred people were turned away unable to gain entrance.

Rachmaninoff is not only master of his instrument, he is a profound and serious musician. Whatever he says, even should it not be understood, is to be received as the word of authority. In his art, however, he does more than charm away all evil humors—he lifts the mind to a height from which it can look over the trivialities of life to the far radiances which endure. Simple and outwardly impassive, he reproduces again and again those complex passionate experiences which he communicates with such ardor to his listener. Despite his quietness and unhurried movements, his mien unconsciously conveys an air of subtle triumph. But he is no less logical than forceful, and can set forth with admirable calm his own invincible arguments.

The Beethoven Sonata, opus 109, belongs to the final period of the master's work, and, though not to be compared in magnificence to the two following Sonatas 110 and 111, it is nevertheless a composition of great imaginative beauty. The form is free, more a fantasia than a Sonata. The opening movement vacillates between two opposed subjects. The second is a short, swift interlude—but it is in the final theme with variations that the consummate invention, so daring in Beethoven's last works, is to be appreciated. Of the variations, number five is a marvel of polyphonic writing, quite in the manner of Bach. The sixth is masterly in its increasing rhythms. Beginning with simple leisurely divisions of time, the rhythms gradually double up upon themselves, until when the divisions become too small, they turn into a series of trills. A harmony of

striking originality is to be noted in the eighth bars of Variations two and five. The playing of this fine work was remarkable for a romantic simplicity — especially beautiful was the long and gradual diminuendo in the final variation which leads into a repetition of the original theme.

The Papillons of Schumann were played with tender and illusive grace. These short episodes in dance form are linked together only by a poetical connection, for there is no musical connection. We are to imagine a masked ball, each fragment is a character from amongst the maskers, there are conversations of lovers, and finally "the noise of the carnival-night dies away. The church clock strikes six," and disengaging themselves from this ensemble of gracious and humorous situations, the maskers vanish away like a vision.

But it was in the Chopin Sonata that Rachmaninoff gave us the greatness of his imagination. This Sonata is a work of crystalline purity. The imperious opening, obviously inspired by the opening of Beethoven's Sonata 111, leads immediately into an intense and agitated mood giving the lie to Berlioz' sneer — "il se mourait toute sa vie." Under the hands of Rachmaninoff the scherzo takes on a sardonic temper: and the famous funeral march, barbaric, relentless and terrifying, becomes filled with images of those spectral lilies whose perfume is death whereof Lafcadio speaks. The final movement, a confusion of sighs hurrying over a bleak landscape, is a composition marvelous in its intensity and originality.

A number of shorter works from Ravel, Debussy, Scriabin, and three encores generously given, completed the program. The emphasis of the concert, however, rested upon the three first numbers, the Beethoven and Chopin Sonatas and the Papillons of Schumann. In the playing of these we see a creator of monumental forms, and Rachmaninoff proves himself to be one of the great masters of the day.