

## RACHMANINOFF IN SUPERB RECITAL

Master Pianist's Playing Example of What Instrument Can Be Made to Express

### SUPREME MUSICIANSHIP

Constructive Side of Artist's Interpretive Powers Showed Rare Ability to Avoid Usual Virtuosity

The musicianship of Sergei Rachmaninoff seems to grow more majestic, more mellow and more finished each time that one hears him. His recital at the St. Denis Theatre last night was a revelation of what the piano can be made to express under the hands of a master who is willing to sacrifice a magnificent technical equipment to this musicianship, and further, who is able to strip his playing of every trink of virtuosity, all sensationalism, all spectacular efforts to propound a story and, to rely on nothing but his sense of form, his powers of construction and his innate feeling for music as a language of the emotions unalloyed to any suggestions of dramatic effect.

Mr. Rachmaninoff is a true classic. His formal sense is Greek in its beautiful symmetry and wondrous balance. His constructive powers are Gothic like those of the architects of the great medieval cathedrals. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the principal number on his programme, the B Flat Minor Sonata of Chopin. It is usually the custom to read drama into this music such as the strife of the first two movements, the tragedy of the Funeral March. But there was no episodic weaving of scenes into tone in Mr. Rachmaninoff's interpretation last night. It was a magnificent display of music, pure and unalloyed. The third movement was an integral part of the sonata; a movement in solemn march time rather than a "Funeral March."

The Chopin sonata has been heard in Montreal four times this season, but Mr. Rachmaninoff's interpretation was utterly different from any of the others. It was not lyrical, it was not dramatic, it was rather the work of a builder in tone, an architectonic, to use James Munk's expression. Each melody was fitted into the grand whole after the manner of the stones in a Roman archway. One had a feeling at the finish, not of wrought-up emotion or of tragic hopelessness, but of the kind of warm satisfaction that is received by prolonged contemplation of such painting and sculpture as Da Vinci's "St. Anne of the Rocks" or Michelangelo's "David." Which leads one to the realization that Mr. Rachmaninoff has yet another gift of the gods, that of performing the musical equivalent of painting a picture that does not tell a story.

What is said above about the Chopin work can be said with equal force of the other numbers on the programme. The Beethoven Sonata in F Sharp major, opus 78, was the first offering. This is one of the composer's shortest sonatas, having only two movements. Mr. Rachmaninoff is a Beethoven player par excellence. The opening four-bar prelude proved this. It just sung itself into the allegro which followed. In the latter the rapid ornamentative passages were played with a feather-fingering delicacy, being beautifully balanced and delicately contrasted with the melody which formed the principal subject. It was in this sonata and in the Schumann Noveltie which followed it that Mr. Rachmaninoff's famous left hand was most prominent.

In the Schumann Noveltie (F Sharp Minor, opus 31) there was little trace of the thick, heavy German romanticism. On the contrary it rather took more of the clarity and lightness of the Beethoven sonata which preceded it. The typical Rachmaninoff "snap" was powerfully used in playing the theme of the second section. The interpretation had a broad and regal sweep which made the music sound much greater than it really is. The remainder of the programme consisted of six Etudes Opus 39.

Mr. Rachmaninoff's own compositions, of which the first in F Minor and the fourth in B Flat Minor were the most interesting from the point of view of composition. The fifth in C Sharp Minor was more modernistic than the others, making copious use of unresolved discords. The Tausig arrangement of Strauss' "Tales of Vienna Woods" Waltz owed the fact that it did not impress one as "movie" music to Mr. Rachmaninoff's matchless musicianship. One feels that he could make anything sound like a classic.

The pianist was, as usual, extremely generous with encores. First came Chopin's Nocturne in B Flat again one was saved by the playing, then a Chopin Etude, then a Minuet from Bizet's L'Arlesienne Suite arranged for the piano, then the C Sharp Minor Prelude and finally an Etude by Ernst von Dohnanyi.

Special is granted