

Music

By FELIX DEYO

POST REFLECTIONS ON THE PIANISM OF RACHMANINOFF

SINCE Tuesday night last, when it was our recurring pleasure to listen to Sergei Rachmaninoff in his yearly piano recital in Brooklyn at the Academy of Music, we have now and again fallen into meditative moments—not the first—as to the source of this Russian's great power over the more or less musical multitude. His prestige and popularity, which recalls the erstwhile Paderewski furore, is enormous and indisputable. Even in the professional ranks, there are eminent musicians who regard Rachmaninoff as their ideal pianist.

We find ourselves always in a dual state of mind when hearing him; we are torn by spontaneous enthusiasm over his mastery of intricate mechanism—his especial brand of finger facility and its bearing on interpretative intentions, his method of approach to which is absorbing—yet do we deplore the frequent shock of an infelicitous chord or note of attack, one of the conspicuous flaws in his technical style. We are elated over his magnetic exposition of a Schumann novelette or a Chopin sonata.

• • •

BUT SILENTLY and for long we have borne our umbrage of dissent as to the place of this singularly engaging figure, among pianists of the past and present who have held the world at attention. To us it seems that Rachmaninoff the composer Russian militates against the complete identification with Schumann the German or Chopin the Pole, to take these concrete examples of composers of national fibre and distinct personality. The strength of himself as a composer limits the required submergence to another's dominance. The profundity of Beethoven, the essential Chopin, the "something" Schumann are never present as Rachmaninoff interprets. But how readily he absorbs and transmutes to his own use the wealth of material in Chopin's sonata—an electrifying product of his own personality is substituted. It dazzles our sober senses, but in the end, as aforesaid, we miss the essential tang of the real Chopin, or Schumann, or Beethoven, who seem beyond the ken of Rachmaninoff's Russian limitation. We find that Rachmaninoff is not in the class of such immortal interpreters as DePachmann, Paderewski, Rosenthal, Bauer, and a few others, also, if we mention the dead—Joseffy.

• • •