



MUSIC

By RUTH HOWELL

Rachmaninoff plays year's first recital in the most admired Rachmaninovian style and offers variations in variety

IT was a big day for admirers of Sergi Rachmaninoff yesterday. And who isn't? The great Russian pianist who usually does not come to us until late in the season, played the first recital of the fall at Constitution Hall yesterday afternoon, before an almost packed house.

He was his most Rachmaninovian, and the people loved it. He evidently, too, has had a good summer's rest, for he played a really difficult program, and then generously added four encores, breaking down the reserve of at least two seasons to include the famous prelude. And the people in the top row gradually moved down into the boxes, and their enthusiasm increased as he went on displaying his amazing ability.

It was a big day for variations, too, for after he had played one of the loveliest and least heard Beethoven sonatas, with skill and a more colorful perfection than usual, and then hinted that Gluck and Weber wrote charming piano music—he swung into three sets of musical variations that would practically annihilate any other pianist if he tried them all in one program.

First—and best—were Schumann's

"Etudes Symphoniques," their contrasting moods made evident, their exacting passages crystal clear, perhaps crisper and less romantic than you like them, but perfectly and beautifully played. There is probably no one who plays them with such ease and technical virtuosity as Rachmaninoff.

Treats an Old Theme

Then, on a theme of Corelli, the man who is also a great composer, showed that he too could vary. A simple theme, it would appeal to Rachmaninoff, and he used all the musical devices to build around it. Modern harmonies and figures were intermixed with the more classic forms of variation embellishment. There were, perhaps, too many variations. The piece grew long, boring—one—and the theme thickened so that even Corelli couldn't have found it. If the finale had been put in five minutes before, it would have been perfect. When it was finished, even Rachmaninoff looked a little disgusted.

Then there was a next to impossible Liszt etude, which Rachmaninoff, with all his skill, could not make beautiful; and then the more

lush-toned Tarantella, brilliant, show-off music like the other. There have been more delightful afternoons with Rachmaninoff, but none more brilliant.

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