

Music and Musicians

Reviews and News of Capital's Programs.

Rachmaninoff Plays In Recital Here.

RACHMANINOFF played the first concert of Mrs. Wilson Greene's philharmonic course yesterday afternoon to an audience that filled much more of Constitution Hall than the Philadelphia Orchestra concert of several weeks ago. Mrs. Hoover occupied the presidential box with a party of friends.

The composer-pianist has been here often before, but this is the first time that he has favored Washington with the first hearing of one of his own compositions, "Variations sur un Theme de Corelli." The theme of the early Italian master which Rachmaninoff chose is a simple one both melodically and harmonically, lending itself well therefore to the expanding form of theme and variations. In earlier times the methods used to vary a theme were mechanical ones, designed to exploit the technique of composer as well as interpreter. They hastened the tempo in intricate patterns, changed the mode from major to minor, embroidered the theme with a web of harmonic passage work or deepened it with a mass of heavy chords. All this Rachmaninoff does to the Corelli theme, and much more, with a decidedly modern flavor added—much more modern feeling, in fact, than has been heard here in any of his other compositions. Even his symphony played last year had a classic feeling. The essential spirit of the theme was taken through a series of emotional transformations which enlarged its scope and squeezed from it the last available shade of feeling. The composer's playing of his own work was nothing short of marvelous. His impassivity and restraint of emotion is suited to the form he adopted. His technique is, of course, flawless. Rather unusual was the tremendous climax of the next to last variation, followed by a comparatively simple slow finale.

The program opened with one of the later Beethoven "Sonatas, Opus 81." We would venture to suggest that Rachmaninoff would do well to leave Beethoven and Schumann off his programs. The first demands a virility and strength of emotion that Rachmaninoff cannot, or does

not, supply. His rendering of Beethoven is unusual, but not satisfying. The audience was left quite cold. One cannot help admiring the clarity of tone, the setting up of a dominant rhythm that proceeds inevitably and without haste, the enormous sense of line and the infusion of purely intellectual ideas. Every note has its place, and they are present in perfect relation to the whole, even to the most submerged fragment of a contrapuntal theme. And it is extremely beautiful. Rachmaninoff is no mere technician. But one must have more. Music is, in the last analysis, an appeal to the emotions, and one goes to have one's spirit carried away rather than to self-consciously admire.

The second group, which were played in reverse order, were more satisfying. The impersonal quality of the Weber "Moment Capriccioso" and the dainty Gluck-Pauer "Gavotte" demand a cool, patterned performance. The detachment of tones from each other while yet sustaining the line is one of Rachmaninoff's outstanding characteristics.

The Schumann "Etudes Symphoniques" may be subjected to the same criticism as the Beethoven. The technique and masterful conception of the whole was undeniably superb. But Schumann was a romantic of the most outstanding type. Everything he wrote had a strong personal flavor. His brilliance, especially marked here, nearly overshadowed the sentiment, yet again Rachmaninoff's interpretation left us unwarrantably cold.

The last half of the program, starting with the Corelli "Variations," was quite different. Rachmaninoff's "Liszt" is magnificent. There was appropriate brilliance in the "Etude Transcendente" and an almost unbelievable range in dynamic control, from tremendous fortes to whispered pianissimos. If the variety of tone quality is not great, the subtle shadings in volume compensate for it in "Liszt." Never do the terrific technical difficulties hurl themselves at the listener. Rachmaninoff is too fine a musician for that. His sense of beauty and balance is predominant.

Of the four encores the audience

was, of course, most delighted with the "C Sharp Minor Prelude." This piece is so much a part of the composer that there is perfect unity. None of the interruptions as a result of one composer interpreting another's work is present. We have so much combined in Rachmaninoff that it seems scarcely fair to complain that he has not everything.
D. C.

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