

RACHMANINOFF IN MASTERLY PIANO RECITAL

Empty Reaches of Auditorium
Fail to Abate His Supreme
Artistry

By WILLIAM WALKER TOND

Sergei Rachmaninoff, one of the most towering figures of the pianistic world played last night to the musical select of Shreveport—and his hearers responded with a fervid enthusiasm that was in gratifying contrast to the meagre numerical showing that was present to do honor to one of the greatest of present day musicians.

It was nothing short of a shame that a city the size of Shreveport, which can pour out tens of thousands to a sporting event or a motion picture, can muster only a corporal's guard, so to speak, to greet a world-renowned genius. However, Mr. Rachmaninoff did not permit the vacant upper reaches of the auditorium to abate in one whit his supreme artistry, and as the program progressed he seemed to take genuine pleasure in giving of his utmost in response to the enthusiasm which his marvelous art evoked.

Baffling Personality

Rachmaninoff, in addition to his super-powers as a piano virtuoso, and his rare gifts as a conductor and composer of symphonic works, chamber music, operas, songs and piano works is doubtless one of the most fascinating and, in a manner, baffling personalities in the present day musical world.

Utterly unassuming in manner, he is totally devoid of anything approaching stage "showmanship," which in itself piques the interest of his audience and makes his stupendous keyboard feats seem all the more overpowering by comparison.

A kindly, serious face, graven with lines indicative of a sensitive, deeply introspective nature, his countenance only occasionally lighted by a half smile in the moments when he is acknowledging the applause between numbers, Rachmaninoff seems to reserve, as far as possible, his strength for the tremendous technical feats he sets himself at the keyboard.

Discards Conventions

In the construction of last night's program Mr. Rachmaninoff tossed conventionalism to the winds, as far as usual stereotyped arrangement of numbers was concerned, beginning with a Chopin group which embraced Chopin's most monumental Ballade, the inspiration for which, it is claimed, Chopin found in a poem embodying one of the legends of ancient Lithuania. A nocturne, the lovely C sharp minor waltz, and the stunning Polonaise in A flat, given with tremendous verve, made up familiar numbers that brought joy to the hearts of every pianist present, and, as Rachmaninoff can be said without a doubt to be one of the greatest living exponents of Chopin, music students were indeed given a master lesson in a glowingly perfect interpretation of these exquisite piano gems.

That Rachmaninoff is equally as great an interpretative artist in the rarified classical atmosphere of Beethoven was fully proven in his masterly reading of the powerful Sonata Appassionata, one of the two greatest of Beethoven's piano sonatas, and that he does not hesitate to infuse into his Beethoven interpretations a vibrant warmth and electrical vitality is proof that he is too genuinely inspired an artist to be hampered by the puny shackles of pedantic traditionalism that so often render insipid the readings of less gifted artists.

An Unique Program

The remainder of his program was unique in that it was made up entirely of songs, taken from the romantic and classic repertory, and most of them familiar to the average music lover. The group also included one of Mr. Rachmaninoff's own compositions, "Daisies" a lovely little number that found instant favor with the audience. Chopin, Schubert, Schumann and Wagner were represented in the group which was concluded with the Liszt transcription of the Spinning Song from Wagner's "Flying Dutchman" glitteringly done at breathtaking pace under Rachmaninoff's marvelous fingers. Of course encores were demanded and the audience would not be satisfied till his world-famous "Bells of Moscow" Prelude in C sharp minor made its inevitable appearance. Just as Paderewski can never escape without playing his "Minuet in G," nor Kreisler without giving his beloved "Leibstueck."

It was a splendid program, wonderfully done, and a brilliant indication of what promises to be one of the finest musical seasons that Shreveport has ever known. Kreisler, John Charles Thomas and Hellets are already contracted for by Mrs. Allen, the Woman's Department club will present Jeanne Dussau, soprano, Wednesday night, and the Shreveport Civic symphony is already well launched upon its season series of 10 concerts, so if the citizens of Shreveport do not become thoroughly music-conscious in a big way by the time next spring arrives it will certainly not be for lack of ample opportunity.