

RUSSIAN PIANIST CHARMS AUDIENCE OF MUSIC LOVERS

With the first soft notes of, Chopin's Third Ballade, his opening number, Sergei Rachmaninoff last evening captured his audience, and immediately convinced them of his mastery of the piano. Every note was as clear-cut and distinct as a silhouette.

While the noted composer and pianist handled the heavy, sonorous compositions with masterful technique, he appeared at his best in the softer chords, playing them with a tenderness that made the music live.

Tall and slender, the 59-year-old Russian artist displayed marked stage presence. Apparently quiet and reserved almost to the point of timidity, he nevertheless was obviously the dominant personality in the Senior High school auditorium, almost filled by the more than 1,000 persons in his audience. Prior to each number he stopped, looked out over the sea of faces, and waited for complete silence. Then he played.

For two hours he played—effortless, unhurried. For two hours he held his hearers. At the end of more than one number, a deep intake of breath throughout the hall indicated the emotional tension of the crowd.

The first four numbers were Chopin's. The highly lyrical qualities of the first three of these—the opening Ballade, the Nocturne, and the Valse—were emphasized by the artist. Then came the contrast—the heavy, almost savage beats that characterize the Polonaise. And the audience applauded as one person.

The three numbers, however, which most captivated his hearers were Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata, Opus 57; Schubert's Serenade, as arranged by Liszt; and his own com-

position, the Prelude in C Sharp Minor. In the first movement of the Sonata Appassionata, particularly, he displayed his artistry by the deftness with which he brought out the striking contrasts; musicians present declared his rendition of the Serenade the most perfect they had ever heard; and when, as the first of the five encores demanded, he struck the opening chords of his Prelude, the audience interrupted with spontaneous applause.

The third group was made up of a group of songs, most of them light and airy: Dedication, Schumann-Liszt; Smugglers, Schumann-Tausig; Maiden's Prayer and The Return Home, Chopin-Lisza; Serenade, Schubert-Liszt; Brooklet, Schubert-Rachmaninoff; Daisies, Rachmaninoff; and Spinning Song, Wagner-Liszt.

The sole composition of his own on the regular program—Daisies—was in marked contrast to the Prelude. The latter, heavy, minor, typically Russian, he played with the strength it demanded; to Daisies, plaintive yet light, he brought the deft touch given only by skill plus deep feeling.

In an interlude, Howard Bement expressed the appreciation of Mrs. O. C. Hamilton, who sponsored the event, for the co-operation of various persons and concerns; voiced the appreciation of the crowd to Mrs. Hamilton for having brought the famous artist to Asheville; and announced that Friz Kreisler will appear in concert here on February 20.

Mrs. Hamilton herself today expressed her pleasure at the size and appreciation of the audience. "It was the most successful concert I have ever been connected with in Asheville," she declared.

Mr. Rachmaninoff leaves this afternoon at 5 o'clock for New York, where he makes his home.—W. J.

500 Attend