

Rachmaninoff Wins Favor of Huge Audience

Pianist Plays Program of Fantasies With Impeccable Art

BY MARJORY M. FISHER

Sergel Rachmaninoff, giant master of the keyboard, offered a unique program for the delight of an audience that outstretched the elasticity of the seating capacity of the War Memorial Opera House on Thursday night.

Looking for all the world like a Russian counterpart of the famous melancholy Dane, the very personification of tragedy, the pianist chose to carry his auditors into the realm of fantasy wherein imaginative and florid melodies reign unconfined by the more sturdy structures of strictly formal design.

He began with Scriabine's Sonata Fantaisie opus 19 and concluded with Liszt's Fantasia Quasi Sonata. Between the two extremes we heard the Haydn C major Fantaisie, Schumann's Phantasietuncke, "In the Night," "Whims" and "Fable," Chopin's Fantaisie and Beethoven's Sonata quasi una Fantasia in C sharp minor.

Ss vs. Bs

It was odd that the composer who claims to have no affinity with the moderns should begin with Scriabine—one of the three-Ss believed destined to supplant the famous 3 Bs of musical history. (At least, so certain modernists were wont to assert less than a decade ago.) And it was also odd to note how very conservative—almost classic—the Scriabine sounds today. Schoenberg and Stravinsky have also ceased to shock all but the ultra-conservative ears. And it was interesting to note that the sole representative of the S group and single representative of the Bs vied for first place in point of interest on Rachmaninoff's uniquely conceived and impeccably played program.

One never ceases to wonder how tones can be so caressing, and yet individual notes so crisp, as in the playing of Rachmaninoff. One encountered these typical characteristics in the Scriabine and in each succeeding number, and in the Beethoven they culminated in a rare sense of emotional power with a golden thread of melody silhouetted in graceful contour against a shimmering yet substantial tonal fabric.

Fine Perception

The florid Liszt score was also a brilliant example of shimmering ornamentation cast in musical tone, and it was a joy to find an interpreter capable of projecting the full musical substance of the Liszt without ever being blinded by the glamour or ensnared by the technicalities of its tinsel.

Interesting encores, some in modern idioms, added diversity of style to the program and no end of joy to the listeners. Rachmaninoff was generous, even to the point of showing how magnificently his own C Sharp minor Prelude can be played. It was an enchanting concert that he gave us, one conducive to relaxation and pure enjoyment. He plays in Oakland tonight. Perchance those who could not gain admittance on Thursday evening will join the ranks of commuters tonight. If so, they will be well repaid.