

Russian Music Master Holds Local Audience Captivated

Sergei Rachmaninoff Rises to Heights in His Recital Here; Choice of Program Is Outstanding With Composer's Dexterity.

BY CHARLES WHITE.

Listening for a whole evening to one instrument sometimes presents difficulties to even the most seasoned concert goers, but Sergei Vassilievich Rachmaninoff last night at the Masonic Auditorium made it a fascinating treat for his Muncie audience.

He is to be complimented for his choice of a program as much as for the earnest, precise and brilliant readings which he gave. Most musical visitors to Muncie underestimate their audience and get off lightly with semi-popular concerts. Rachmaninoff instead played a program that was as complete and variegated with regard to musical types and forms as any heard here.

He began with his own transcription of Bach's E-major Sonata, went to the Schubert Rondo in D-major, and then skipped a century and a half of Sonata history to the Chopin B-minor Sonata, opus 58. To the many music teachers and students who heard these two sonatas the comparison of forms was interesting.

After the brief Prelude in the Bach number the Gavotte announces a clear, simple melody which is repeated. The French gavotte form is a lively but dignified dance. Rachmaninoff described a court scene, full of grace and good humor.

Eyeing Light, Precise.

The audience could be seen carefully studying the position, finger technique and arm movement of the Russian master. He sits well back, leaning forward at an angle that looks almost difficult. One notices, however, that his shoulders, arms and wrists are relaxed. His touch is light and wonderfully precise; occasionally he displays surprising strength.

The Gigue (which really means nothing more than "jig") gave him an opportunity to show his amazing finger dexterity. It was especially noticed as an example of fingering with the right hand. After the loud, quick finale in this sonata the audience was enthusiastic in its applause. It settled down to an evening of rich entertainment.

To partisans of Schubert the composer-pianist gave everything that could be desired. Schubert himself was one of the most tragic of characters. During his short lifetime he received little recognition. The maddening, frustrated genius that inspired him was the object of cruel jokes among the musically elite of his time. He couldn't even get into the leading Vienna musical societies, and it was not until the Unfinished Symphony was played 40 years after his death that he came into his own. He was a tender, dreamy soul who never could lose faith in the world, and it was this noble and touching quality of his that Rachmaninoff achieved in his playing of the Rondo.

Achieves True Quality.

Schubert used to sit around in Viennese beer gardens and compose priceless little songs, writing them on wine cards, scraps of paper or anything that came handy. They achieved popularity for their lilting melodies, but there is in each one of them a certain vague, purely Schubertian sadness. The Rondo in D-major is a rather formal musical piece de resistance—but Rachmaninoff did not fail to give his audience the true, exquisitely touching quality of Schubert. Especially did he do so in the closing lines, which are somewhat similar to the ending of the great Unfinished. They seemed to drift into meaningfulness, in a pensive sorrow that completely moved the audience. The listeners were silent a moment, then they seemed to sigh as of one voice, and then they burst into explosive gratitude.

The Chopin Sonata in B-minor closed the first half of the program. Then, after the intermission, Rachmaninoff played three Chopin favorites. Outstanding among these was the Nocturne in F-sharp-major, a work which is perhaps the greatest Chopin nocturne and which is loved by every pianist. Many were familiar with his number from phonograph recordings, and thus it was a particular treat to hear it rendered "from the original."

There is a slow, thoughtful opening theme, which is restated. Then here comes one of the most beautiful passages in all music. It follows the restatement of the opening theme, and comes to a climax in a clear, bell-like note which is suspended for three beats before the composer comes back. This one

note veritably defies description, but those who have played the Chopin Nocturne always wait for it. The breathless loveliness of this note that seems to hover for a moment as if hesitating to return to reality was perfectly achieved.

His Really Perfect.

At the close of the Nocturne there is a passage which is rather difficult to hear but which is a master touch typical of Chopin. It is a high descending scale, played very lightly which Rachmaninoff brings down as a lingering harp-like overtone. This, too, was perfect—if it is not redundant to describe any Rachmaninoff interpretation as perfect.

Rachmaninoff preludes, especially the last one in G-minor, thrilled the audience. At first it is vigorous, powerful, manly; then comes a more moderate contrast, followed by a tremendous finale. Rachmaninoff is neither a piano-banger nor an acrobat, yet he displayed amazing force in this rendition.

Invitation to the Dance, (Weber-Tausig) and Scherzo from Midsummer Night's Dream, Mendelssohn-Rachmaninoff, ended the main program. The scherzo, Allegro vivace, G-Minor, 3-8, is an entracte after Act 1 of the Shakespeare play. Someone has said of this scherzo: "It discloses the fairy world of Titania and Oberon, with its chattering elves and their mischievous gambols, interrupted now and then by the griefs of the unfortunate and tormented lovers, and gradually dies away in airy lightness."

Encores were the C-sharp-minor Prelude, Rimsky-Korsakoff's Flight of the Bee, and Schumann's Smugglers Song.

Applaud First Chord.

All were well received. The audience had wondered whether the famous C-sharp-minor Prelude would be played this time, and when they finally got it some of them began applauding at the first chord. The Prelude, which has been played so much that it almost sounds like the Star Spangled Banner, seems to be a necessary signature to any Rachmaninoff concert, and he deserves the warmest thanks for going through with it.

Mr. Rachmaninoff was born in Onega, Russia, March 29, 1873. He began his studies at the age of four, under the direction of his mother. In 1882 he entered the Imperial Conservatory and from that time on his career was a succession of triumphs. He is today one of the two greatest composers. At the fall of the Czar, Rachmaninoff, a royalist, was forced to leave Russia and his estates were confiscated. He now lives in the United States.

CATHOLIC PRIESTS SENTENCED BY NAZIS

BERLIN, Dec. 2.—(AP)—Two Catholic priests were sentenced to imprisonment today for making remarks regarded as derogatory to the Nazi regime.

At Dortmund, the Reverend Father Brodessa was sentenced to five months for "insulting remarks" about Chancellor Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda and public enlightenment, to a class of students of religion.

A month's imprisonment was given the Reverend Father Stender at Nordhausen for words from the pulpit considered offensive to Nazis.

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