

Master Plays Piano Before Packed Hall

Sergei Rachmaninoff Gives Curiously Mixed Program at Bushnell Hall in Kellogg Course

BY T. H. PARKER.

Before a packed hall, including many students, Sergei Rachmaninoff, noted Russian pianist, appeared Sunday in the last but one of the Sunday afternoon concerts presented by Robert Kellogg in the Bushnell Memorial Hall.

The program consisted of: Moonlight Sonata, Beethoven; Tarantella, Chopin; Children's Corner Suite, Scriabin; Three Etudes Opus 10, Rachmaninoff; Sonata for Piano & Mandolin, Liszt; Variations on a Theme of Paganini, Liszt; Encore: Mazurka, Chopin; Hilariousque, Rachmaninoff; Prelude, Rachmaninoff.

In him came out of it the observation that "Le style est l'homme" is too trite to merit invoking it. On occasion, however, both the nature of the man and the temper of the style are so utterly pronounced in themselves, and their interdependence so completely revealed that the eponymy of the aphorism not only excuses the tiresome but even demands its repetition.

It is impossible not to see in Rachmaninoff the man and the musician a reflection of the far from easy material existence and the suffering as an artist that he has experienced. "To be an artist it is necessary to suffer," he has said, and in token of that suffering are the meditative, melancholic, impassioned and even grim scores of his program, and the post-impassioned, ringing from anguish to ironical humor with which he expresses them and which altogether make him the master of elegant pianism.

Divided Program.

Yesterday's program was a curious admixture of the pianist's own inclinations and his concessions to his audience. Nothing could have been more "Sunday afternoon" than the choice of composers and the choice of works. Just as when asked to guess a number between one and five, one inevitably selects "three," so if asked to name at once a Beethoven sonata, a Chopin nocturne and a Chopin Scherzo, one must inevitably answer "Moonlight," "F flat major," "C sharp minor."

On the other hand, all of these are quite elegant—even the humor of the Scherzo is rather grim, despite the tradition of the form. Certainly, too, there was nothing airy-fairy about the Etudes Tableaux, the Last Sonata, or the three encores. Here, we can only feel, were the color and temper of Rachmaninoff again.

Where does that leave the Debussy suite? Admittedly its inclusion and its interpretation were seen markedly elegant than the rest of the program. Yet could anyone say that his mood was sporty, which after all is what one more or less expects from a children's suite—or was it not instead positive like his own prayerful song for children who have departed from home?

Yet the pieces in the suite were played with such moving sensitiveness, such captivating delicacy, that the score proved to be one of the loveliest presentations on the program.

Some Distinctions.

The man is such a splendid virtuoso that it would be difficult to distinguish any technical supremacy of one piece over another in yesterday's playing. Certain pieces, however, did give him more opportunity than others to display his accomplishment. For their brilliance, the Tarantella, the Rhapsodie and his own compositions, were especially noteworthy.

At the same time, certain scores were more suited to the man's temperament, apparently than others, and there were distinctions in this direction. The opening Moonlight Variations, though firm and crisp, seemed a bit perfunctory in performance. There was, too, something of a lack in body of texture in the opening movement of the Moonlight Sonata which seemed rather dry while the closing movement might have been more brilliant if the left hand had been given more vigorous statement.

In addition to the Children's Suite, the joys of the program were the Nocturne, the Scherzo, the Etudes Tableaux and the Sonata, as well as the Rhapsodie already mentioned.

Into these compositions, the temper of the pianist poured a wealth of brooding color. The Nocturne was filled with poignancy, meditative and uplifting. The Scherzo was an embodiment of fierce grim humor. The Etudes pulsed with somber, vehement passion, sometimes anguish and often fury. The Sonata was simply Petrarchian, to make use of the obvious adjective—given exquisite peace rising to exaltation, filled with calm dignity, restrained but vigorous, untroubled in mood and in the melodic line of its composition.

Into these scores, Rachmaninoff put his spirit, not as into a confining mould, but rather as a form around which the piece itself was moulded. Yet he did not alter them so much as breathe into them in interpretation the mood of their creation. They lent themselves finely to the temper, the peculiar temper of the pianist and thus he could not help but give them his best.

One Criticism.

Of the program as a whole, or of its playing, there could be but one general criticism, and that is that the tone was not always as warm and singing as one might wish. It was wonderfully crisp and firm and vital, and staid with fine sweep of phrasing. But where one waited sometimes to hear a warm lingering tone either of note or line, none came sufficiently rich to be satisfying. This was not true of every piece by any means, but of the playing as a whole, it does seem to apply.

The audience seemed especially restless yesterday and inordinately afflicted by seasonal distempers of one kind or another. The latter was excusable, but the continual rustling of programs, the hedging about in seats the host of persons to be seated in the pauses between the first numbers, were markedly unpleasant. Mr. Rachmaninoff was visibly impatient at times with these interruptions and at moments seemed hampered noticeably in his playing.

T. H. P.