

Master of Piano Impresses Large Audience With Sense Of Power in Local Program

Tall, rugged, as Slavic as his name, Sergei Rachmaninoff, who opened the East Church concert course with a piano recital in the Civic auditorium Monday night, impressed the large audience with a sense of power, of complete mastery, and impenetrable reserve.

In a way, he is tremendous. There seems nothing in the entire realm of piano literature which offers the least difficulty to him. He can weave a multiplicity of themes into intricate but clearly-outlined pattern, those enormous, supple, elastic hands seeming to accomplish the impossible.

Playing Is Vivid.

His playing is effortless and his tone can be of shimmering, gossamer fragility or of deep, vibrant sonority, but it always is vividly, richly musical.

At a Rachmaninoff recital there is not that sense of intimacy and accord which so often exists between artist and audience. He is remote, detached, completely immersed in the music he is creating, for his playing not only is interpretative, but it also is creative. Whether he follows traditions or uses his own judgment in the matter of interpretation he gives sense of dignity and authority.

The Bach-Tausig "Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor," which opened the program, was superbly played. The Beethoven "Sonata, Op. 10, No. 5," with its ingratiating melodic material and interesting thematic development, was given almost reverential treatment by Rachmaninoff.

In the Chopin "Polonaise" Rachmaninoff revealed the composer in

his heroic, virile mood—the greater Chopin. The "Nocturne," "Mazurka" and the dazzling "Tarentelle" were divested of the sentimentality which too frequently seeps into the interpretations of the Polish romanticist. This group, for some reason, was programmed without the opus numbers or the key.

Presents Own Compositions.

Rachmaninoff, who has made important contributions to the literature of the piano, played three of his own compositions, "Prelude," "Moment Musicale" and a short, colorful "Oriental Sketch" in which he shows originality of invention and musical charm. They may present technical difficulties, but the most complicated score sounds simple enough under Rachmaninoff's magic and effortless playing.

At the hands of the average pianist, even of some artists, Liszt becomes just a medium of virtuosity, but Rachmaninoff gets underneath the embellishments, and brings forth the beauty. He voiced a beautiful singing melody in the "Sonetto del Petrarca." The "Dance of the Gnomes," vividly visualized a fairy frolic, and he gave a demonstration as to how the "Rhapsody No. II" should be played.

The storms of applause at the conclusion of the program brought Rachmaninoff back to the piano. He played his familiar, "Prelude in C Sharp Minor," following it with his own piano arrangement of Kreisler's "Liebesfreud" a brilliant piano setting for Kreisler's flowing melody based on an old Vienna waltz.

M. E. R.