

RACHMANINOFF'S PROGRAM CHARMS

Distinguished Pianist's Facile Fingers. Play With Reserve.

BY HERBERT ELWELL.

After an absence of two years, the distinguished composer-pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff, returned to Cleveland last night to be greeted by a large and appreciative audience at Public Music Hall. This was the first recital in the Cleveland Concert Course under the direction of Mrs. Emil Brudno and the auspices of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Listeners had scarcely more than found their seats when the tall, slender Russian promptly strolled on to the stage. Slightly stooped and appearing, as always, a little fatigued, not to say bored, the veteran pianist seated himself at his instrument and waited for silence.

In his bearing, with all its suggestion of lassitude and unconcern, one senses dignity and composure—the presence of a person who, having known the world's adulation and seen much of its strivings and bickerings, has withdrawn from it all, pronounced it vain and consoled himself with the Elysium of his fancy where fading memories mingle with mild and gentle imaginings.

Never Complete Abandon.

His playing is and always has been highly individual. About it is the pale cast of sweet melancholy. Suffused as it is with romantic sentiment, one wonders why it never completely abandons itself to the ecstasy of the moment. There is in it always a strange reserve, particularly noticeable in the tonal quality, which ranges from firm percussive effects to a sort of sugary prettiness. Never displeasing, it nevertheless remains negative and devoid of high lights.

This moving about in the shadows is characteristic but hard to reconcile with the intense emotional urge that lies buried somewhere in the pianist's interpretations. They are habitually subdued, reminding one of a person who has taken refuge in an ivory tower, one who says you may see so much and no more, one who protects his innermost thoughts by a polished exterior and a mechanism so perfectly controlled that you feel he can turn it on or off with the greatest ease, one whose detachment is as great as his apparent sensitivity.

The music to which this curious temperament lent the most satisfying illumination was in the Chopin group and such numbers as the sombre "Funerailles" of Liszt and the pianist's own prelude in G sharp minor. In items such as his "Moment Musical" and "Oriental Sketch," or Liszt's "Dance of the Gnomes," there was that neat and metronomic rhythmic propulsion which carries you along with zest and freedom—a facile kind of playing, mobile and authoritative but which again shuts you out somehow from the inner substance.

Surprising poetic touches turned up in the Brahms G minor Ballade. But when similar tenderness entered the Beethoven Sonata in D major it gave queer twists to this school-room classic. The rubato toward the end of the exposition became extravagant. The lack of accentuation in the Minuet made it dull and pedantic, and the other movements suffered from a conception that seemed far from Beethoven as we have come to understand him from the hands of the greatest Beethoven interpreters.

On the whole, however, this was the most interesting and most distinguished program musically that Rachmaninoff has presented here for some time. It opened with the Tausig arrangement of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor.