

Music

By Herman Wise

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

In perfect mood and apparently refreshed by a long summer's rest, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Russian composer-pianist, gave his annual recital before an audience of approximately 5,000 persons in Masonic Auditorium Monday night. It was one of the artist's most successful Detroit appearances.

Perhaps because the virtuoso will not return here until 1937 or 1938, there was more sentiment than usual at this concert. Rachmaninoff has long been one of the public's pianistic idols. Monday night his pedestal was reared even higher.

There are pianists whom musicians admire more than Rachmaninoff. They are those who play with a more poetic touch, with sharper subtlety. There is no one, however, who performs with greater artistic force, with more majestic sweep than Rachmaninoff. These may be the secrets of his unusual popularity. He thrills his listeners with an exhibition of power, with crashing chords that resound through the house and with a lightning technique that leaves his admirers breathless.

Program Found Popular

It is the way of the shrewd concert artist, and Rachmaninoff is easily among the most competent. He is a veteran, learned in the business of giving the people what they pay to hear. He never disappoints them. For this reason, he is always certain to play before a capacity audience.

Unquestionably Rachmaninoff is a great artist. Many consider him more important as a composer than as a pianist. Yet if he can continue to excite huge gatherings with his playing every time he appears, his place on the platform cannot be denied him. At the keyboard he is the embodiment of vitality. He recreates wonders with the music, and does as much, perhaps, to make concert piano-playing as truly appreciated as any other living performer.

Rachmaninoff builds fortresses. His Chopin is read with the same eagerness and boundless enthusiasm as his Beethoven, Liszt and Brahms. His immense strength is but rarely checked, as in the Largo of the Beethoven Sonata, Op. 10, No. 2, one of the choicest bits on the program. Here he played as if he were saying an endless farewell, with tearless eyes and heavy heart. It was beautiful, as fine a contribution as the artist offered all evening.

Compared with 1933 Program

The program was somewhat less severe than last year's. Throughout, it was far more artistically played, more deeply appreciated.

The Tausig arrangement of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor was the opener. It was followed by the Beethoven. Then came the Brahms Ballade in G minor and a group by Chopin. These included a Tarantelle, a Mazurka and the C-sharp minor Scherzo. Most impressive of the Chopin works was the Mazurka, performed with moving tenderness.

Modest and retiring though Rachmaninoff is, he had been prevailed upon to include a group of his own compositions. They were all brief numbers—a Prelude, Moment Musical, and an Oriental Sketch. Each won distinct favor, but hardly as much as the composer-pianist's famous C-sharp minor Prelude, the first of several encores.

Proof that Rachmaninoff was in the pleasantest of moods was the fact that he played the latter Prelude immediately at the close of the printed program.

He has been quoted as having said that the C-sharp minor Prelude has caused him more annoyance than any composition he has ever penned. The work has literally been played to death, yet no Rachmaninoff concert is felt to be complete unless the world-known Prelude is included.

Performance of Liszt Hailed

Generally, the artist plays the composition only after it is apparent that the audience will not go home until it has heard the piece. If Rachmaninoff can finish his evening without having to perform the composition, it is said he has no regrets. This has happened but very few times.

The concluding group was devoted to the music of Liszt—"Funeral March," "Danse of the Gnomes" and the Rhapsodie, No. 11. Because of his individualism and almost brute strength, no one is better equipped to play Liszt than Rachmaninoff. These are works for the showmen among virtuosi—compositions which, for one reason or another, many concert pianists do not include in their programs. Rachmaninoff not only plays much of the music of the great Hungarian composer in public, but in his performance of it provides the listener with an unforgettable experience.

All in all, it was an outstanding concert. Rachmaninoff, in his tours to other parts of the world during the next three or four years, may know that whenever he chooses to return to Detroit he will still be a pianistic hero—an artistic giant whom thousands will be anxiously waiting to hear.