

# CROWD APPLAUDS RACHMANINOFF RECITAL

By Paul S. Nathan

At the height of his great powers, Sergei Rachmaninoff returned to Oakland last night and, in the face of operatic competition across the bay, drew a throng of enthusiasts to the Auditorium theater.

His was a reception to warm the heart of any artist. Playing with decorous restraint, making no obeisance toward the gallery, Rachmaninoff wins his auditors through sincerity and complete mastery of his instrument. One feels his attitude to be as uncompromising as his technique is irreproachable: there is an air of take-me-or-leave-me about this pianist; he is performing according to the rigid laws of his own aesthetic conscience. And one takes him—gratefully.

If you seek for other pianists to compare him with, there are none. Gieseking deserves to stand beside him, but not because of any similarity. When you have heard Rachmaninoff, even such men as Horowitz, Iturbi, Lhevinne and such a distinguished lady as Myra Hess seem to cede first place.

Last evening's program opened with a brilliant reading of the Bach-Tausig Toccata and Fugue in D minor, certainly one of the most stupendous works in organ or piano literature. The many voices sang, the quickly shifting chords and runs glittered like crystal: there was about it all a majesty and grandeur of spirit that made it memorable.

And in Beethoven's D major sonata, Op. 10, No. 3, one could realize how cunningly Rachmaninoff conceals the mechanics of his playing, giving only the warmth and gracious charm of the music. Noteworthy was the minuet, a dignified dance that evoked the full flavor of courtliness.

Even to this reviewer, no fervent admirer of Chopin, the Chopin group held interest. The Scherzo in B minor glowed with flurried passion, and the Ballade in A flat showed the wide range of the pianist's technique and emotion.

Two of Rachmaninoff's own preludes—one in G, one in G sharp minor—followed intermission. These were pleasant and exquisitely played. A concluding triptych of Liszt served as an exhibit of prowess. The Ballade, Valse Impromptu and Rhapsodie, No. 11, sounded a good deal more significant than they actually are—a tribute to the artist's abilities, if not to his choice of program.

Among the encores—and these were eagerly demanded—Rachmaninoff's much maligned Prelude in C sharp minor caused most excitement. This prelude has been played to death; but when the composer plays it, you begin to see why.