

Rachmaninoff Is Majestic In Recital at Auditorium

By ALEXANDER FRIED

It felt strange to be back in the Civic Auditorium for concert music last night. Sergei Rachmaninoff was appearing in the old hall because the Memorial Opera House is occupied just now with opera.

In a moment the Russian pianist made his surroundings a minor matter. His audience was large enough to reach into distant balconies. The mood of his masterly playing and that Slavic personality of his, so singularly morose and majestic, filled the great house.

There is no eccentricity of temperament upon which a reviewer may conveniently seize in description of a Rachmaninoff recital. Justly balanced in his performances are a power held easily in reserve, a sensibility of mature dignity, and a skill that ranges grandly and intricately over the keyboard.

DEXTERITY PERFECT

Mozart's D major Sonata, poised within a small classic frame, he played with sparkling delicacy. His dexterity was perfect. He remained always the servant of sentiment.

Rachmaninoff brought the evening to a climax early. In the Chopin B flat minor Sonata he contrasted beautifully the pathos of simple song and the thunder of romantic bravura. Here was a performance that engraved itself in memory in vast and subtle strokes.

The rhythm of the "Scherzo" movement rattled drum-like. The

"Funeral March" seemed measured by the fateful stroke of somber bells. The "Finale" roared out a tempest at once furious and titanically under control.

ENJOYABLE PROGRAM

In the second half of the program every item in itself was enjoyable. Taken together these items were too much a light miscellany.

Fineness of spirit in Rachmaninoff's performance enhanced the value of a ballad-like Rubinstein "Barcarolle." Borodin's "Scherzo" was merely deft entertainment.

The Kreisler-Rachmaninoff "Liebesleid" and the Strauss-Tausig "One Lives But Once" dealt with an identical effect. They dressed sweet waltz melodies in brilliant pianistic improvisation.

Of two "Preludes" of Rachmaninoff himself, one was exhilarating in its quickness, the other spoke gravely a persuasive lyric feeling.

More worthy than all this excellent though secondary music were a "Poeme" and an "Etude" of Scriabin. The latter, familiar, harks back with personality of its own to Chopin. The "Poeme" was treasurable for its fragile freshness, its lucidity, and its nostalgia. To think, by the way, that Scriabin a generation ago was considered modernist!

Encores continued the miscellany of Rachmaninoff's offerings. One was his C sharp minor "Prelude," which he hates, the last of them? It was.