

AUDIENCE STANDS TO APPLAUD WORK OF RACHMANINOFF

Famous Pianist Plays New Composition of His Own With Symphony.

BY REED BYNDS.

A measure of excitement such as seldom attends the concerts of the Symphony Orchestra was evident yesterday afternoon when Sergei Rachmaninoff was presented as soloist with the orchestra in the Municipal Auditorium. It was with eager anticipation that his austere person was awaited. A feeling of intense attention stole through the hall as he played. And his artistry received



Sergei Rachmaninoff.

applause of major proportions, groups in the audience standing and some cheering as he bowed, lending substance to the impression that all the to-do meant something more than just an audience begging for an encore it did not get.

Not only was Rachmaninoff as pianist on the program; he was there as composer, too, and the work presented had the novelty of being new—altogether new to St. Louis, and new to the world except for two readings, in Washington and Baltimore. The manuscript was completed last August 24.

Work of Exceptional Interest.

It had values other than newness, however, to recommend it. Although it probably would be stretching probability to say that it will ever come to be as important as the composer's Concerto in C Minor or that it will ever replace any of the classical standbys in its field, it was nevertheless a work of exceptional interest—in its originality, its sound musicianship, and its sheer beauty.

The work is a cycle of twenty-four variations on a Paganini theme, the one employed by Brahms in his much-played Variations for Piano, Opus 35. In addition, Rachmaninoff has used for a piano passage in one of the most interesting variations a melody from the "Dies Ira" which the composer also used in his tone poem, "The Island of the Dead."

So much for the underlying idea. The development of this idea was of greater importance. The variations were each of an ingeniousness sufficient to make them musically interesting and they were fused together so as to make an organic unity.

Piano a Part of Orchestra.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the "Rhapsodie on a Theme of Paganini" was the use of the solo instrument not as a separate unit complementing the orchestra, but as an integral part of the orchestra. The piano was used as it is the voice in Wagnerian opera, in contrast to Italian opera.

The tones of the piano now and again jutted into the wave of sound from the orchestra, then subsided into the general flow. There was little display for display's sake, no lengthy cadenzas, to engage the vanity of the soloist. He was part of a larger whole.

But that is not to say that Rachmaninoff was not indubitably the lion of the day. Speaking of the question as to whether composers should play their own works, Rachmaninoff has somewhere said he feels they should, for they know the music more intimately than any other, and that their works have in fact become a part of them.

Never at Better Advantage.

This seemed the case yesterday; Rachmaninoff has never been heard to better advantage as performer. The sharpness of his touch, his flawless pedaling and complete assurance, were manifest in no less degree than his sweep of phrase and vast wealth of tonal nuance.

The work was all the more successful because of the complete cooperation of the orchestra. Vladimir Golschmann, the conductor, evidenced complete understanding of the composer's intention, with the result that the soloist and orchestra were always in accord. This rapprochement was almost phenomenal, considering the newness of the work to the conductor.

Golschmann also cast exactly the right moods in the eight Russian folk songs transcribed for orchestra by Lidoff. Each of the episodic chain—varying in character through religious, fanciful, humorous and dance expressions—was charming in itself and together they formed a fitting prelude to the Rachmaninoff.

The orchestra also played the Tchaikowsky Fifth Symphony. On it the conductor bestowed his resources with great extravagance.

The program will be repeated at 8:30 p. m. today.