

Rachmaninoff Plays With Symphony His Newest Composition

Soloist Provides Climax to Brilliant Concert
With Opus Revealing Master's Under-
standing of Piano and Its Resources.

By HARRY R. BURKE.

St. Louis yesterday had the distinction of hearing for the first time anywhere in a regular symphonic season Sergie Rachmaninoff's newest work for piano and orchestra, his "Rapsodie on a Theme of Paganini" Opus 43, with the composer as its soloist. It is a work so brilliant, so important, that memory of it leaves a mere reviewer almost at want for words; precisely as it left the audience which in the intermission at the Municipal Auditorium yesterday afternoon walked out gasping in its thrills, finding difficulty in expressing its own enthusiastic emotion.

Ninety men had collaborated in that presentation—Rachmaninoff, Vladimir Golschmann, who gave him a superb accompaniment, and the 88 members of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. It was one of those occasions when the complement of players is but the extension of the genius of conductor and composer, for Golschmann's orchestra was splendidly responsive in a work which is astonishingly difficult.

Theme From Paganini.

Rachmaninoff has taken a theme from Paganini—a theme which was used by Brahms in his piano variations. Upon that theme he has constructed two dozen variations, each of them is of intrinsic musical interest. Each of them reveals a master's invention in the treatment of a melody. But they reveal, as well, a master's understanding of the pianoforte and its resources, and a master's understanding of the orchestra. Its very difficulties are born of this informed musicianship. There are big constructive dimensions to the work.

It is a Gothic structure Rachmaninoff has raised; one in its imaginative comprehension comparable to a work of Bach. But it is essentially a modern work—modern in its rhythms and its accents, modern in the kaleidoscopic combinations of its tonal colorations. Yet there are gargoyles—curious and colorful accents—anachronistic in the conventional sense, timeless, one believes, in their human significance. There are the clangs and the dissonances of today. But there is an undying beauty of melody, and there is a high-spirited movement rather than a brooding introspective mood such as is popularly associated with the composer's name.

Rachmaninoff's newest work is far from being a concerto for piano and orchestra. Writing for himself, the composer has made the solo instrument but one of the many instruments in a virtuosic ensemble. In the form of a theme with variations he has built, like many other masters a towering edifice of tone.

Thundering Power.

Of Rachmaninoff, the soloist,

what can be said that is not repetition? His clean pianism, his dazzling velocity, his thundering power, his subtle appreciation of tonal nuances as the web of melody passes from solo instrument to the orchestral choirs, and back again—all these have been remarked before. As has his Russian-born love for great chiming bell-like tone. Yesterday these were all in evidence again. Rachmaninoff was his unperturbed and imperturbable self. Appreciation could scarcely say more.

Mr. Golschmann had lead up to the Rachmaninoff work with one of the most notable of all lyric groups for orchestral ensemble—the Eight Russian Folk Songs of Liadoff. Each of those eight masterpieces in miniature, were they discussed, demands more space than is available to all. His was a splendid reading, musically, informed by the spirit of melody, evoking a splendid response from his ensemble. Then the young St. Louis conductor achieved the impossible with his first presentation in St. Louis of the Tschalkowsky Symphony No. 5 in E minor.

Climax to Concert.

With that work he built a climax to the most glorious concert this reviewer has experienced in a dozen St. Louis years. He piled Pellion on Ossa. An audience which had thrilled with its enthusiasm over the Rachmaninoff masterpiece found the Tschalkowsky not less exciting. The singing of the strings in that Polish folk-song which is the first movement's chief theme; the beauty of the effects worked out by the woodwind and horns in that movement and in the following romanza; the dramatic effectiveness of Golschmann's reading of the second movement; the sensuous lyricism of the waltz movement, and the spirit of wild abandon infused into its climax; the inexorable tread of Destiny in the opening of the finale, and the beautiful singing of the full orchestra in the final climactic was developed—these are memorable in many years of concert-going. It was a reading which disclosed a full comprehension of the symphony's significance, which was worked out with a remarkable skill in developing the inner voices, a reading highly emotional, but never swept from intellectual moorings by the access of its emotion.

And it was a reading which Sergei Rachmaninoff, himself, could praise as splendid; for the soloist had retired into the auditorium yesterday and with Mme. Rachmaninoff was in the audience for the final number, which he cordially appreciated.

The program will be repeated again at 8:30 o'clock this evening.

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