

## Music

By

George Harris

For the first concert of this season's artist series of the Musicians' Club of Richmond, which took place last night in the Jefferson Auditorium, there appeared one of the most important musicians Richmond has had the honor of welcoming. He was Sergo Rachmaninoff, who came to us last night as a famous pianist, but who is known throughout the musical world as one of the great composers of our time. This greatness is known to many people, particularly those of limited musical experience by the Prelude in C Sharp Minor, which, by the way, we heard last night as it ought to be played.

Mr. Rachmaninoff is also the composer of great symphonic works, piano concertos, chamber music and innumerable songs, in all of which he has followed certain trends of the Russian school of composition, which has its own peculiar elements of individuality and inspiration. Although he has developed these special traits of the Russians, he has kept in a somewhat modern harmonic scheme classical elements and always the most scholarly workmanship.

I feel that these facts have a great deal to do with the way Mr. Rachmaninoff plays the piano. A composer, if he has the pianistic gift, has a deep insight into the creative process, and therefore has an understanding of composers' meanings that other pianists may lack. And it seemed evident last night that the interpretations we heard were the ideal ones—the ones that would have thrilled the composers whose works were played.

This interpretive power put the emphasis on meaning more than on pianistic effect. In the Sonata by Chopin, for an instance, one has heard perhaps more velvety tone and more sentiment, but in Mr. Rachmaninoff's hands it acquired more of the unity and continuity that are the essential elements of the sonata form and spirit. This, particularly in the first movement, and in the following two showed an unusual sense of dramatic contrasts, which lifted them above the character of show pieces.

The opening number was a little-known composition by Beethoven—a set of 32 variations on a theme. Sets of variations have dangers because of their frequent pauses and their frequent beginnings in the same key. In this case it was different, as the theme and each variation is exceedingly brief and each variation leads to the next without pause.

Played as it was last night by this superb interpreter, each variation seemed an emotional step that led logically to the next, this process developing to a height almost equal to a Chopin Ballade. And in this Mr. Rachmaninoff showed his power of interesting us at every moment, emphasizing the vital things and leading our attention and interest forward as if he were telling us a story. Three short sonatas by Scarlatti gave us in the same classical mood something slightly more brilliant and fascinating to the ear.

The second half of the program was made up, except for one number at the end, of music by Russians. Two pieces by Scriabin, written before he had developed a special strange idiom of his own, reminded us of Chopin and Liszt at their most effective, and the Scherzo of Borodin, that great individualist of the Russian school, stood out as one of the most brilliant and effective numbers.

An etude by the pianist himself showed him to us at his most powerful in conception of idea and in its execution. We seemed to have before us great forces of nature, relentless but not hostile, expressed in a way that brought amazing effects out of the piano. This powerful performance ended with a dazzling piece by Doh-