

# Rachmaninoff Looks So Sad but Plays With Real Gusto

Old Master Gives Brilliant Concert and Offers Delightfully Unusual Music

By RUTH HOWELL

The saddest Russian of them all—that's Rachmaninoff, the old master, who played, somberly but still superlatively, last night in Constitution Hall. Nobody looks as if he disliked concerts more, and yet few play them better than this tall, solemn-faced pianist, with the clipped hair and the bored manner.

He looks as if he hated the music, the audience, the effort of coming on the stage; even the tapestries; but when he finally gets to the piano, he seems to prefer playing the music to getting up and walking off. He attacks the program with a vigor and dispatch that belie his appearance, and certainly that hesitant walk had no relation to the tempo with which he tackled big music last night.

If he has relinquished any of the sustained brilliance that years ago put him far out in front of any other pianist, he has lost none of the facility; none of the ability to mold a long piece into a great and unified whole, and certainly none of the superb lyric quality of his playing.

## FAMOUS MUSIC

He was in better than usual form last night, and his playing gained steadily thruout the program. His amazing left hand and that architectural sense stood him in good stead in his restrained and mature reading of the Beethoven Thirty-two Variations; the crispness of his tone found its most delightful medium in the Scarlatti sonatas; and he swept thru the Chopin sonata, now with singing beauty, now with impetuous speed and a vital brilliance.

One scarcely thinks of Rachmaninoff as playing pieces like gems, but that in fact best describes his playing of the Scriabin poem, the Medtner

Fairy Tale and the Borodin Scherzo. He offered a delightfully unhackneyed program, one that looked long but was over in no time, ending with a dashing performance of the Dohnanyi Caprice.

## GIVES THE WINK

Then, believe it or not, the sad and dignified Russian, who had raised annoyed brows and glared at late-comers and too-soon applauders, went so far as to distinctly wink—yes, wink. Don't tell, but he even smiled backstage at the handful of worshipers who came back to see him at close range. Smiled — but never said a word.

The wink, tho, might well have meant "Yes, I know you want that old prelude, but I'm not going to play it until I get good and ready." (Editor's note: My! How he must hate that piece by now.) Anyway, he kept the audience waiting while he played four other encores, all honeys; one was the Bumble Bee (very good on

the piano for a change), one Kreisler's "Liebeslied" in a slick arrangement—was it Rachmaninoff's? And the other two remain mysterious gems for the moment.

And then he played the PRELUDE, probably his 2000th demonstration of how it Should Be Done.

We get our first whack at important Soviet music tomorrow when the National Symphony plays Shostakovich's First Symphony at its 4:45 concert. This is a first Washington performance, and one of the few in the country so far.

Shostakovich is modern Russia's brightest musical star, the youngster who wrote last year's most sensational opera, and whose musical writing is hailed as the most vital symphonic work being brought out by young composers, excepting perhaps, only that of Alban Berg.

People are anticipating an important and interesting concert. And if you don't like Shostakovich, there are the "Rosenkavalier" waltzes.

## Swooping Toques

Felt toques for winter are swooped up to a tapering peak and pierced by a quill thrust aslant thru the top. Black accented by a vivid Kelly green is the favorite combination, tho purple and dull yellow accents are also used.

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