

Sergei Rachmaninoff Is Modest Artist But Has a Real Saving Sense of Humor Will Be Heard Tonight at Auditorium



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF.

Drawn for The Chronicle by R. L. Mayeur of Houston from a photograph.

If Sergei Rachmaninoff should lay claim to the title of "Most Modest Pianist Extant," The Chronicle interviewer who talked with him Monday morning would be the last person in the world to dispute the claim. But Rachmaninoff would be the last to lay claim to any title. It is more likely that he would accept with the utmost diffidence any honor laid at his feet or any laurel wreaths woven for his brow. If Rachmaninoff used analogies, he would most likely declare that laurel wreaths were not becoming to his "style of beauty," that the wreath rested awkward on his close-cropped hair and that it made him feel uncomfortable.

For Rachmaninoff has a saving sense of humor. His appreciation of an amusing situation twinkles up into his kindly gray eyes and touches with gentle hand the wrinkles about his mouth. The fact that appears so somber, even brooding, in repose, becomes the animated countenance of a man keenly intellectual, conducted in the language of many nations brother to all mankind through the universal language he speaks in his music.

Interviewing Rachmaninoff, even though he is courteous itself in his reception of a stranger, resolves itself into a quizzing match, in which the pianist is ready to answer without evasion any question, but volunteers nothing. This reluctance to talk, one soon observes, is not an unkind avoidance of his fellows, but a shrinking from the glare of publicity. So cordial is his hospitality, that the green upholstered setting of a private car reception room recedes into the background of one's consciousness and Rachmaninoff is the host, deferential to the wishes of a guest, however obscure that guest may be.

The tall, slightly stooping figure is almost majestic in its calm poise, the poise of great strength. He makes no superfluous movement of body, and he speaks slowly and carefully, his English grammatically perfect, although he sometimes pauses for just the right word. His grave now has quite the manner of the truly distinguished foreigner and he can bend over the head of a plain American woman with the same deference of manner as that with which he would greet a courtier or lady of that imperial regime of which he has just parted before coming to America.

The conversation, guided by the interviewer with casual readiness, led itself into a discussion of present day composers, who there have been but few great women composers. Rachmaninoff related the two daughters of his musical atmosphere since Rachmaninoff's first visit 18 years ago, and the extent of the virtuoso's present tour.

Doesn't know Russia Today. Rachmaninoff stands alone, so far as his interviewer knows, as being a Russian in America who frankly admits he knows nothing about what is going on in Russia or of what has transpired there since he left.

"What do you think of the modern Russian music—I mean the music being composed there now, not that of 18 or 20 years ago?" "I don't know what they are doing there—since anyone knows?" "Which of the Russian composers of the present generation do you most admire?" "There is just one—Mogor. He is really great. He has written for both piano and for orchestra. His songs are set to Russian and German poetry."

Then says in America knows his music—present in concert programs. He is not known over here. I play him. I know of no one else. "Are there any women composers of any note in Russia?" "No, with a reflective shake of the head and a smile. "Why are there no great women composers?" Rachmaninoff's eyes registered as if he was on safe ground. Here, he thought heaven, was no feminist. He could proceed.

"I don't know, I wonder why myself. Russia is not different from other countries in that. Then he caught himself up with a few, one I recall." "Oh, I believe in France they have a few, one I recall." "Do you think her music worth while?" he was asked. The slow, amused smile that is Rachmaninoff's crinkled the corners of his mouth and glistened in his eyes. He said nothing.

Oh, go ahead and say what you please. We in America don't think she is great, either." "I'm very glad you don't. It speaks well for your musical taste," he replied.

Symphony Based on "The Belles." Asked about his latest compositions, Rachmaninoff mentioned his third symphony, "The Belles," based on Edgar Allan Poe's poem of that title. It has been produced by Shostakovich, conductor of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, by the late Max Zach of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and by Sir Henry Wood in London.

The English feel very kindly toward the Russians and their music, do they not?" he was asked. "All the world feels kindly toward the Russians of today is a matter of individual opinion. But they all love the Russian music when they hear it."

The Composer's Family. The talk veered to the composer's family. He explained that his two daughters are in school in New York—the elder, aged 18, in Columbia University, and the younger, aged 14, in a private school. Both are musical, he said, "but busy, very busy. They won't work," he added, "but they are musical; yes, I should say very musical."

"And your wife is a musician?" "Oh, yes, she is a graduate of the Conservatory in Moscow." "You have only two children?" "Only two."

"Are you glad they are girls?" "For the first and only time in the whole interview Rachmaninoff evinced a real, real pride, in something concerning himself. "I'd say very glad they are girls," he said with a sincere ring in his voice.

"They are a great comfort to me, more obedient than boys would be, and so much more easy to educate—more easy to raise than boys."

But he refused to say whether or not they are handsome, saying he had a parent's natural partiality of judgment and admitting his pride in his daughters.

Fourth Season in America. Rachmaninoff comes to Houston from New Orleans, where he gave a concert, and goes from here to Dallas, then to Tulsa, then on through the Middle West. He is in his fourth season in America and finds with strong conviction, on the difference he observed in the America of today and the America of 18 years ago when he came to this country for the first visit. The people everywhere, he said, are more appreciative of good music, better educated musically and more true of what they like and do not like, than they were 18 years ago.

He has observed that this is true of the West, the South, the Middle West and the Atlantic seaboard, as well as of New York and Chicago, which are regarded as centers of musical interest.

Rachmaninoff came to America for his second visit in the autumn of 1913 and was presented immediately to the public in New York recitals, followed by a long and triumphant tour, his present tour will keep him "on the road" until April.

He then goes to London for two concerts and immediately thereafter returns to America, an evidence of the high regard in which he holds the American people.

"Are you of the way of becoming an American citizen, then?" "No, no! I am a Russian, just as you, I presume, are an American. It is not likely I would wish to be a citizen of any country. I have not taken out papers. I can never return. And I like your country—like America in every way. But I am a Russian and I am always the friend of America, but I do not see why I should relinquish my own citizenship. That has nothing to do with me."

Rachmaninoff arrived in Houston

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/1198049699/>

Monday morning at 7:35 in his private car "Chicago," which was shunted to a siding in the Southern Pacific yard, near the exit.

He plays tonight at the City Auditorium, under the direction of Edna W. Saunders, who considers Rachmaninoff one of the biggest, if not the biggest, musical attraction she has ever presented in Houston.

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