

Richard the 2d's Almenak

SERGE RACHMANINOFF has reached that level in popularity where both the lady of the loggiette and the lady of the apartment go to hear him. When there is such a union, one can safely contend that an artist has arrived.

How much of the applause is for the man, how much for the artistry, and how much for the precise, thunderous rush of those slim fingers up and down the keyboard, is difficult to say, but Warren Lee, sitting disconsolately in the wings, was disappointed. Not a string on the piano hurried under the pounding.

Warren holds what seemed to us a unique job. He is the official tuner. Night after night as the Russian gives breath to Bach and Chopin and the rest, Warren sits in the wings—waiting.

He followed the tall Rachmaninoff through the stage door of Orchestra hall the other night, a small, nervous fellow.

"Is that joke?" we asked, we being on a hunt for the manager of the tour.

"No, that's the tuner, been with him for years," rejoined a stage-hand.

"Does he have to carry one along?"

"Sky. When these fellows get through beating a piano, it needs to be tuned. I'll tell the world," said the s. h. "And this tuner just sits there crying his heart out if one of the wires doesn't break."

WARREN, we were told, arrives with the special piano along with the Russian, and from the arrival until game-time he sits in judgment of the keys, changing the "a" as in cat to the "a" as in cadence, and then changing it back again until he has what he thinks is the finest, mellifluous "a" possible.

A concert performer thinks as much of his own instrument as a ball-player thinks of an old patched glove. None other will do. Gabilowitch, for example, wanted to go over some scales the other day. There was one make of piano on the stage. Would he use it? Not he. Another piano of the manufacture he swears by had to be dragged to the stage before the practice could go forward.

TO RUSSIA musicianship is not a thing to be acquired by mail or buying a Vic, or practicing when there isn't anything else to do.

If you wish to get into one of the state conservatories, you devote four years exclusively to technique. This requirement is based on the belief that musical intelligence is valueless if the hands are unable to function. After the four-year drill comes examination, and failing that you return to another year of technique.

If one passes the examination, the next two years are spent at theory and composition. Then another examination. If successful in this, you are permitted to start the four-year course in the conservatory with a six-year background. Rachmaninoff is a product of this thoroughness.

He is also a chip of the old block, or of several blocks. Sliott, his cousin, was a pupil of Liszt; his wife is a graduate of Moscow conservatory and there is a little bonbon on his program and called "Touka do W. H." which is so named because Wastler, Rachmaninoff's father, conceived it.

Once on a time Rachmaninoff was rich. The Rachmaninoff lands stretched across upon acres. Only recently his daughter was graduated by Yassar, married a Russian prince and now is living in Munich.

Pezanias killed the musician's fields and got a little pop-eyed on that fertilizer that is much like a caraway seed and is peculiar to Russia. It contains some property poison, and peasants in the old days who nibbled at the seed during the day were content to lie down in the share's tracks and sleep the night under the sky.

Rachmaninoff himself recalled the time when he was 13 years old and tried out a handful of the smothering seeds.

"I didn't come to for two days," he laughed.

A TAXICAB driver in Kansas City a few weeks ago was driving the pianist and his manager back to the hotel after a concert. Half way back, he opened the window and spoke to the virtuoso.

"You are Rachmaninoff?" he asked.

The pianist nodded.

A stream of Russian poured out of the taxi-man.

"Back home they would kiss your feet if you played as you did tonight," he said. And he talked on and on. At the hotel he abandoned his taxicab and walked into the lobby. Rachmaninoff walked over to a lounge and the two sat there talking of Russia for a half hour.

Another taxicab driver took the pianist to the station the next morning.

"You know that fellow you were with last night?" he asked. "Know who he is? He's the Russian Carno. Once every year the Keith theater here lets him go on in his driver's uniform and sing a whole week. He's good, too. You ought to hear him. We drivers sit in the gallery and give him the razz, but he is good. You ought to have had him sing for you last night. Boy, if he only had you to play his accompaniments!"

A NYHOW, Rachmaninoff, night.