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RACHMANINOF A PROLIFIC AND INTELECTUAL COMPOSER

Is Greatest Among Romanticists of Modern Russian School, Says Mrs. J. O. Cameron in Brilliant Paper.

A brilliant resume of the life and works of the great pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff, was given by Mrs. J. O. Cameron before an interested audience at the Victoria Conservatory of Music recently. The appearance of the great Russian pianist in Victoria on Monday evening last, adds interest to the paper, and those who had the privilege of hearing him, as well as the many students of music who are familiar with his famous "Prelude," will find much of value in it, for which reason it is reproduced in full below.

MODERN SCHOOL

"To understand more fully and to appreciate modern Russian music—and the same thing might apply to that of any country—we must know something of the history of its music in an earlier period; something of the surroundings and influences that led up to the compositions of what is known as the 'Modern Russian School" of which Rachmaninoff is one of the best known exponents. Music as we now know it is the youngest of the arts. It is the universal language of the human race, "the art spiritual." The word music is derived from the Greek and meant originally all the arts. It was not until the Christian era that it was used to designate the tonal art alone.

The history of Russian music may be divided into four periods, and includes all the music that has sprung up on Russian soil or that has been written by Russian composers from Glinka to Rachmaninoff.

RUSSIA AND MUSIC

The historical development of Russian music is the story of the different influences affecting her destinies as a nation. Russia had her periods of vigorous national spirit; centuries of semi-exclusion; and her days of cosmopolitanism, or being influenced from many sources. The first or primitive period of Russian music goes back to the sixth century, when the Slavic tribes, the Wends, were said to have taken great pleasure in their music either at home or in their wanderings. The second, or Byzantine period, saw the highest development of the primitive folk-song period of Russian music in the reign of Vladimir the first Christian prince of Russia.

THE PEASANT'S "SAGA"

In the "Transition period," the influx of foreign culture into Russia began. Following European fashion court choirs and orchestras came into vogue. In Russia, music as an art is of comparatively recent date. In fact, it goes back only as far as 1836, when Glinka and Dargornvirsky laid the solid foundation upon which the modern school of Russian music rests. From the earliest history of Russia there had existed a literature which needed no printer and which reached its greatest height in the sixteenth century. This was the literature which had been kept alive on the lips of the people and in the memory of the peasants. These people had their lyric poetry, their marriage songs, rural dance songs, funeral dirges, hymns for Christmas, Easter, and the feasts of St. George and St. John, hymns in which they celebrate the death of Winter, the birth of Spring, and the harvest. There were epic or narrative songs, which told of the wonderful deeds of their mythical heroes such as "the conqueror of the gigantic dragon Tougavine,"—"the navigator of the falcon ship, whom an enchantress caused to descend alive into the tomb," "Stepanovitch who crossed the Dneiper at one leap of his horse," "Maria the white swan who belonged to the cycle of bird-women."

ROMANCE AND IMAGINATION

There were religious verses sung by blind singers going from village to village. There were wonderful stories told by the peasants of "Helen the Fair" of the adventures of "Ivan, son of the King," "Gedinovitch, the warrior-musician released by a ruse of his wife from the prisons of Vladimir." These things are of interest for two reasons: they show the romantic imaginative side of the Russian people who are great idealists, and to show that in Russia as elsewhere vocal music preceded instrumental by many years. Russia is such a wide country, so much of it undeveloped and untouched by modern commerce; the influences that affect its music are so varied that there is a world of folk-music to be found there. There are songs that are melancholy, some that are Oriental in character. The Russian has his labor songs, prison songs, his songs of play and of death. One that is widely known is the song of the bargemen of the Volga. We can sense in its rhythm the pull on the ropes and the resignation of those who have toiled and suffered for years. "The Scarlet Sarafan" is written in the folk-style and is a story of the mother who tells her child that now she is old and gray she sits and weaves the scarlet sarafan for memory's sake and for the love of joys she knew when she was young. (The sarafan is a shawl like garment worn by peasant women.)

"MERRY ANDREWS"

In the very early days in Russia there were bands of minstrels, "Merry Andrews" the Russians called them, who composed and sang the old songs and kept them alive. There were two classes of these wandering musicians; those who sang and played the primitive Russian harp, and those who not only sang, but did other things—like juggling—to amuse the people. The descendants of these wandering minstrels became in time the poets, orchestral musicians and regular actors of the country. It was these minstrels or gleemen who kept alive the spirit of the folk-song through centuries of Christian persecution.

If I have given considerable time to the folk-music of Russia it is because Rachmaninoff himself has spoken so emphatically upon the relation of the peasant melodies to the enduring music of any country. In the eighteenth century, 1725 to be exact, during the reign of Elizabeth, the first Italian opera was given in Russia. This event and date are important as they mark the beginning of a long period of Italian influence which lasted for over a century.

FOLK-SONGS IN OPERA

It was during this time too that Araja, an Italian composer, began using the folk songs in operas, so that for the first time instrumental music was used to develop these songs. Believing you might be interesting in hearing something about the primitive Russian musical instruments, I will touch briefly on the most important. The "gusli" was like a horizontal harp; the "Dombra" a kind of guitar, and the "balalaika" a triangular long-necked instrument having two or sometime three strings. Then there were several wind instruments, one of them resembling the bagpipes, and percussion instruments corresponding to the tambourine, kettle-drum, and cymbals, which were made of wood. Most of these are still used in the country places in Russia, and their origin is as obscure as that of the folk-songs themselves.

MUSICAL RENAISSANCE

About 1775, in the reign of Catherine the Great, music was introduced into girls' schools and a troupe of Russian singers was organized to sing music written to Russian words. The modern period of Russian music illustrates clearly the fact that Russia's intellectual and artistic development reflects the general course of her social and political history. By her victory over Napoleon in 1812, the impulse of nationalism felt in Russia found free expression in the field of music as well as in science, art and literature. Not only was the opera more fully developed, but orchestral music received greater attention. The great composers from Bach to Beethoven were introduced to Russian audiences by the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra founded in 1802. In 1836 Glinka wrote his opera "Life for the Czar," which is said to be a masterpiece, and which was so decidedly Russian as to stand out entirely apart from anything which had been produced up to that time.

A UNIQUE OPERA

Contemporary with Glinka was another composer, Dargonwirtsky who, among other things, wrote an opera called "The Stone Guest." The words were by Pushkin, who is still considered Russia's greatest man of letters. The opera was unique in that the composer, Dargonwirtsky wrote it without omitting a single word of the poem. Between the time of Glinka and the men who make up what is known as the cosmopolitan school, the most outstanding names are those of Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Borodine, and Moussorgsky, who is best known perhaps by his opera "Boris Godounow," and Rimsky-Korsakoff, who has given us many beautiful and imaginative compositions. Among his thirteen operas the scene of the festival of Spring in "The Snow Maiden" is said to be one of the most beautiful in all operas.

The two names that stand for opposite forms of musical composition in our own day are Scriabine, who died in 1915, and Igor Stravinsky, who has been a guest-conductor in the Eastern cities of the United States this season. Scriabine was an experimenter in music and a mystic. His music was so closely allied with color that he even had a color keyboard made.

FUTURISTIC STYLE

Igor Stravinsky, on the other hand, is decidely 'futuristic," in his writings. A man of extraordinary talent he has composed among other things, "The Fire-Bird," "Petrouchka" and many other works that have been presented by Russian ballet. Between these two extremists, a sort of balance well stands Rachmaninoff,—the man who represents to us the genius of Russia and of whom Josef Hofman has said "Rachmaninoff! The man whose art I feel is as pure as gold! The sincere artist, equally admired by musicians and public. A great composer, a most remarkable pianist and orchestra leader. A tireless worker, a severe critic of his own work, hence a really great man."

RACHMANINOFF'S HISTORY

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born on March 20, 1873, on his mother's estate in the province of Novgorod. He spent his childhood in the seclusion of country life in the real heart of Russia, in the same part of the country in which Rimsky-Korsakoff lived. He was the son of rich parents belonging to the old Russian nobility. They had intended sending their son to one of the expensive exclusive schools, but financial losses forced them to send him to a less aristocratic school. He had developed, when very young, a remarkable musical talent, which he perhaps inherited from his grandfather, who had been a great lover of music and a brilliant pianist; but who could not owing to the customs of the day take up music professionally; although he had appeared in various charity concerts. Thanks to the musical traditions existing in the family, Rachmaninoff did not have any opposition to overcome in developing his vocation. When he entered the Petrograd Conservatory at the age of nine he attracted universal attention and became the pride and hope of that institution. His healthy and rich temperament prevent him from becoming a child-prodigy and has carried him in normal way towards the heights in his art.

STUDIED WITH SILOTI

When Rachmaninoff was twelve years of age, his cousin, A. I. Siloti, who had just finished his musical education under Liszt, advised his young cousin to develop his musical talents still further and following his advice, Rachmaninoff went to study with Nicolai Zvierier, professor of the Moscow Conservatory, who invited the boy to live with him in his own house. Later on, in the same year, Siloti recommended his cousin to Liszt, who agreed to accept Rachmaninoff among his pupils from the beginning of the Autumn of 1886. During the Summer, however, Liszt died and Rachmaninoff went on with his studies with Zvierier.

In 1887, Siloti became a professor in the Moscow Conservatory and Rachmaninof entered his master class. He finished his studies with brilliant success. His accomplishments as a pianist did not satisfy the young musician who had in him pronounced creative ability. For this reason he had done serious work in musical theory with Tanieff and Arensky. After graduating from the Conservatory as a pianist, young Rachmaninoff remained there for another year and gave his opera "Aleko" which was successfully performed in April 1892 at the Grand Theatre of Moscow. This success so encouraged the young musician that he decided to devote all of his time to composition. During the Summer of 1893, in the quiet seclusion of country life he finished many compositions. Six songs, the first "Suite for two pianos, a violin piece, and an orchestral phantasy "The Rock," also a choral work called "The Prayers of the Ever Watchful Mother of God." This composition, I believe, has not been published.

MANY COMPOSITIONS

Among his other works are two piano concertos, two piano suites, one sonata for piano and cello, a fantasia and capriccio for orchestra, two symphonies, three opera, one symphonic poem, five choral works, forty-five pieces for piano and over one hundred songs besides his preludes, variations on a theme of Chopin's etudes, six choruses for female voices, a hundred choruses for mixed voices, a cantata "Spring" for chorus, baritone solo and orchestra, two groups of six songs each, and one of twelve songs, and "Fate"—written to Beethoven's fifth symphony. Felix Borowski in speaking of Rachmaninoff said that "among the living masters of composition there are but few who possess as he possesses, so high an ideal combined with so generous a measure of inspiration.—It is much to be able to set down musical ideas with absolute certainty with the brain that has obeyed the dictation of the mind, but it is finer to be possessed of ideas that are as noble as they are fine."

TCHAIKOVSKY'S DEATH

In the Fall of 1893 Rachmaninoff received an engagement to conduct his opera "Aleko" in Gieff, when unexpectedly the sudden death of Tchaikovsky occurred. This was a great blow to all of musical Russia but especially so to Rachmaninoff. Tchaikovsky represented to him not only the national ideal, but he was personally very near and dear to him. Ever since young Rachmaninoff's arrival in Moscow Tchaikovsky had taken a great interest in the boy and had watched his development with very real sympathy. He had attended many of the stage rehearsals of Rachmaninoff's first operatic works, and had given him advice and help in every detail to make it a success.

Harold Bauer quotes Rachmaninoff as having once said to him that he loved everything Tchaikovsky had ever written and adds "I doubt if any single phrase could better illustrate the character, the tendencies, the modesty and generosity of the distinguished composer who has endeared himself to all of us." Under the impression of his heavy loss—both artistic and personal—Rachmaninoff composed his "Trio Elegiaque" dedicated to Tchaikovsky. This work was followed by a series of piano pieces and an orchestra capriccio on gypsy themes which won the decided approval of Rimsky-Korosakoff.

HIS FIRST SYMPHONY

In the Summer of 1896 his first symphony was completed and performed at one of the Russian Symphony concerts. This was not a pronounced success, and it seemed to the young composer that it had been an utter failure. It reacted very strongly upon the sensitive nature of the composer who in lack of confidence and extreme sensitiveness was much like two of his great predecessors—Glinka and Tchaikovsky, (Glinka spoke of himself as a mimosa, or sensitive plant that closes her leaves at the touch.)

EARLY ILLNESS

After having shown so many signs of creative genius, for three years Rachmaninoff had to give up composition and for part of the time was under the care of a physician. During that time however he was busy in various ways, appearing as pianist, conductor, or in conjunction with musical concerts, a work for which he seemed particularly fitted. In this direction he received great help from S. V. Manontoff, who at that time had his own opera company in Moscow. Besides enquiring in this way so much necessary routine Rachmaninoff became acquainted with the small group of highly talented artists of different types who gathered around Manontoff. Theodor Chaliapin was just beginning his career and Rachmaninoff becoming intensely interested in the brilliant talent of the young singer, gave proof of his time and talent to further Chaliapin's musical development.

LONDON APPEARANCE

After finishing his season with Manontoff, Rachmaninoff went to London in 1897 where he appeared successfully as pianist, composer and conductor, performing his orchestral phantasy "The Rock." With the beginning of the twentieth century Rachmaninoff took up his work of composition again. Between the years of 1901 and 1906 he wrote his well known song "Fate" to Beethoven's second symphony, his second piano concerto, the second suite for two pianos, a cello-sonata, the choral cantata "Springtime," twelve songs, Opus 21, his skill and talent. In 1904 and 1905 he became first conductor of the Moscow Imperial Grand Opera Company and this position gave him an opportunity of leading the best works of many composers. In 1906 Rachmaninoff wrote his "Second Symphony" and his first "Piano-Sonata."

"THE ISLAND OF DEATH"

In 1907 he wrote his "Symphonic Poem," "The Island of Death." This was inspired by Boecklin's painting and in his composition he creates the impression of the painting, even to one viewing the picture. It is slow and dirge-like all the way through but with powerful dramatic effects, the brass instruments keeping the heavy rhythm throughout. Frederick A. Stock, in writing of Rachmaninoff, says: "Not many composers of our day have won within a comparatively short time so much well-deserved success, and not many works of contemporary composers have been heralded with such spontaneous acclaim as those of the composer of the C Sharp Minor Prelude, the E Minor Symphony, The Isle of Death and a great many more equally important works. Wonderful sweep of imagination, sturdy rhythm, and remarkable force are the chief characteristics of Rachmaninoff's music. This, combined with an unusual gift for pure melody such as we find in the haunting tone poem "The Isle of Death," place Rachmaninoff among the foremost of modern composers and as the greatest among the romanticists of the modern Russian school.

His music impresses me, not only as the mature product of a highly intellectual nature, but most of all as the utterance of a great soul, one which strives to convey the most inward thoughts man can feel, not for himself, but for the happiness, or more often the sufferings of mankind." It seems almost a pity that the "C Sharp Minor Prelude" is played so much to the exclusion of his other many wonderful melodies. This Prelude is one of Siberian gloom, and some find in it the despair of Russian convicts marching to their doom. In sharp contrast is the "Prelude in G Minor." Barbaric in character, of powerful rhythm, it opens with a defiant motive in effective contrast with an air of melting Slavic beauty. The "Concert No. 2 in C Minor," played last month in the East by Henri Deering is, according to the critic who wrote of it, "one of the finest works that has been written by a contemporary composer. It requires a poet as well as a technical wizard to play, and piano and orchestra are blended with amazing skill throughout."

SMALLER WORKS BEAUTIFUL

There are many smaller works worthy of close study, one of them, his "Melodie Op. 3, No. 3," being a very lovely composition and a good example of a singing tone against an elaborate harmonic background. One of the songs you will hear later on, "The Mirage," is an appealing little song suggesting in both words and music that ethereal vision seen miles and miles away by one traveling over a sandy desert country. "On distant seas an island floats, its smiling slope adorned with grasses," and again "Here faintest breath of zephyr sighs, here every tranquil smiles the isle, in dreamy languor sleeping."

The third symphony, which bears the sub-title "The Bells," the words by Edgar Allan Poe, shows the fullest development of Rachmaninoff's orchestral style. It appeared in 1912 and in the same year, the second "Piano Sonata" was composed. When the big war started, Rachmaninoff made a concert tour through all Russia, giving concerts for the soldiers and victims of the war.

TRAGEDY OF 1917

Among other things written about this time were a "Vesper Service," a complete revision of the "First Piano Concerto," a new set of songs; and studies for the piano.

The tragical events which happened in Russia in 1917, forced the composer to leave his native land in December, 1917. Exiled as he was from Russia, where he had reached his fullest artistic development, Rachmaninoff must be regarded as a kind of musical ambassador to remind the world what it owes to Russian music. As a real Russian and a great-hearted man he cannot help feeling keenly the misfortune of his homeland.

MEDTNER PRAISED

In an interview" given some years ago, he said: "If a composer is unable to make melodies which command the right to endure he has little reason to proceed with his studies in musical composition. It is for this reason that the great composers of the past have shown such intimate respect for the peasant melodies of their respective countries." Rachmaninoff has little use for the musical "futurists," but cautions us not to confuse "modern" with the "futuristic." He speaks with regret of the fact that the works of Medtner, which he says are so delightfully fresh and modern, are not better known in the country, and that Medtner is recognized already in Russia as having taken a place among the immortals.

May I, in bringing this long paper to a close, give another tribute to Rachmaninoff from the pen of Harold Bauer, and one also from Josef Hofmann: "I believe Rachmaninoff is intolerant of one thing alone—insincerity. Were he less the magnificent musician than he is, had he attained success in only a few instances instead of having produced masterpieces in every branch of art, he would still afford a noble example to all his colleagues in his unswerving and uncompromising devotion to an ideal." "And what a fascinating personality in private life! Simple, unassuming, truthful and generous. Yet behind the gentle man there comes out at times the playful devilry of a giant. Such is the man and artist, Sergei Rachmaninoff. May a long life permit him to work on in his realm to the delight of his numberless admirers."

CANADA'S 1925 ESTIMATES SHOWN IN THIS SUMMARY

Ottawa, Feb. 28.—Following is a tabular summary of the estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1926, as tabled in the House of Commons by Hon. Lucien Cannon, Acting Minister of Finance:

Service	Total for 1925-26	Total for 1924-25	
Interest on public debt, including sinking fund	$131,883,174.87	$134,258,371.69	$2,375,196.82 dec.
Charges of management	921,050.00	998,050.00	77,000.00 dec.
Civil Government	11,208,569.66	11,379,085.96	170,516.30 dec.
Administration of Justice	2,165,000.00	2,200,700.01	35,700.01 dec.
Penitentiaries	1,650,000.00	1,651,000.00	1,100.00 dec.
Legislation	2,288,863.75	2,378,713.75	89,850.00 dec.
Agriculture	5,857,000.00	5,960,500.00	103,500.00 dec.
Immigration and Colonization	3,092,000.00	3,800,000.00	708,000.00 dec.
Health	641,200.00	676,200.00	35,000.00 dec.
Pensions	25,202,475.82	24,122,978.17	1,080,297.65 inc.
Superannuation	1,539,000.00	1,252,500.00	286,500.00 inc.
National Defence	12,293,685.42	12,056,465.42	243,220.00 inc.
Railways and Canals income	1,312,859.00	1,231,329.00	81,530.00 inc.
Public Works—income	12,862,645.30	13,811,962.54	949,316.84 dec.
Mail subsidies and steamship subventions	1,103,716.66	1,106,216.66	2,500.00 dec.
Ocean and river service	2,530,000.00	2,530,000.00	Unchanged
Lighthouse and coast service	2,658,200.00	2,654,500.00	16,300.00 dec.
Scientific institutions	1,018,240.00	1,101,844.00	83,824.00 dec.
Steamboat inspection	119,210.00	119,210.00	Unchanged
Fisheries	1,616,000.00	1,616,000.00	Unchanged
Subsidies to Provinces	12,542,653.28	12,375,153.28	167,500.00 inc.
Mines and geological survey	599,400.00	606,000.00	6,600.00 dec.
Labor	1,426,000.00	1,454,000.00	28,000.00 dec.
Public printing and stationery	163,500.00	172,500.00	9,000.00 dec.
Indians	3,611,946.02	3,658,488.05	46,542.03 dec.
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	2,024,872.00	2,025,672.00	800.00 dec.
Government of the Northwest Territories	352,000.00	378,000.00	26,000.00 dec.
Government of the Yukon Territory	190,000.00	190,000.00	Unchanged
Dominion Lands and Parks	3,763,146.00	3,828,734.53	65,588.53 dec.
Soldier Land Settlement	4,500,000.00	4,000,000.00	1,500,000.00 dec.
Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment	8,340,000.00	9,550,000.00	1,210,000.00 dec.
Miscellaneous	3,394,875.38	6,824,400.49	3,429,525.11 dec.
Customs and Excise	10,054,504.00	9,418,560.59	635,943.41 inc.
Railways and Canals—collection of revenue	2,257,000.00	2,267,000.00	10,000.00 dec.
Public Works—collection of revenue	1,077,270.00	1,113,370.00	36,100.00 dec.
Post Office	21,254,634.40	29,586,118.94	1,668,515.46 inc.
Trade and Commerce	3,942,995.00	4,749,760.47	806,855.47 dec.
Total consolidated revenue	221,449,597.16	229,086,305.57	7,636,704.81 dec.
Railways and Canals—capital	15,092,000.00	11,847,125.00	3,244,875.00 inc.
Public Works—capital	2,218,000.00	6,324,545.57	3,106,545.57 dec.
Public Works Capital—Marine Department	1,817,000.00	1,117,100.00	699,900.00 inc.
Total capital	20,127,000.00	19,288,570.57	838,429.43 inc.
Total consolidated revenue and capital	241,576,597.16	248,374,876.54	6,798,279.38 dec.
Adjustments of war claims	460,000.00	595,000.00	135,000.00 dec.
Grand total	$242,056,597.16	$248,969,876.54	$6,933,279.38 dec.

THE SIR JAMES DOUGLAS ESTATE.

THEN AND NOW

By "The Ferret"

Many of Victoria's residents have probably noticed a squat, stone slab bearing the following inscription:

"The tablet marks the spot on which the Governor's residence stood.

"Sir James Douglas, K.C.B., born 1803, died 1877; Governor of British Columbia 1858-1864; Governor of Vancouver Island 1851-1863."

The site of the first Governor's residence! Fifty or sixty years ago a fine house dominated this hillock, the only large house within many hundreds of miles perhaps. The fort was still standing when Sir James Douglas's house was first built, although it was pulled down soon afterwards.

The house, although built of logs, was of large proportions, and as far as present information can be relied upon, well furnished and decorated for pioneer days. It was the scene of many official ceremonies and large entertainments until the death of the Governor in 1877.

The estate was large and beautifully set out. Photographs show that it extended as far as the present course of Belleville Street, and enclosed much of the surrounding country. Large gardens surrounded the house with trees, shrubberies and shady walks. The present Elliot Street was then a private entrance road extending from Douglas Street to the gates of the estate. It was much the same in form as an English country road, bordered by white fences and shaded by overhanging trees. The entrance gates led into a fine driveway, passing amid lawns and flower beds to the main door.

Near the entrance gates stood a small log cottage built almost at the same time as the Governor's residence. This cottage, which still stands on Elliot Street, was the property of the late Dr. Helmcken, and is one of the oldest house standing in Victoria at the present day.

Built in the days when trains were unknown in Canada, and motor cars did not exist, it was almost as hazardous an undertaking as its larger neighbor. The logs for its construction had to be drawn by hand from the surrounding forests. It took much time and labor in those pioneer days to build houses, for besides the lack of really efficient workmen, tools were not as common or as well constructed as they are now.

Furniture was scarce and many had to be satisfied with rough chairs and tables, hastily thrown together. These houses were furnished with plain articles sent out from England, some of which may still be seen.

The Helmcken house is the only house still standing on the Douglas estate. The oldest portion, dating back to 1855, is built of logs and covered with white-painted shingles.

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