

MUSIC

By Richard Aldrich

Mr. Rachmaninoff's Recital.

There never was a less sensational or forth-putting pianist than Mr. Rachmaninoff. His appearances are infrequent, his programs conservative, his playing reticent to a degree. Yet the lovers of piano playing throng to hear him, as they did yesterday afternoon, filling Carnegie Hall to the last seat and last inch of standing room. They applauded discreetly and discriminatingly, by no means excitedly or even demonstratively; but stayed till the end and made him give encore upon encore after he had finished with the program. It is a curious and unexpected fascination that he exerts.

He began with it at once in his performance of Mozart's A major sonata, the one with the "Turkish" finale, in which his playing was in the true Mozart spirit, exquisite in outline and in the leading of the melodic curve, pellucid in tone, delicately colored and rhythmical. It had great charm. He even had the courage to put five of Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" on the program and justified it by his playing of them. Mendelssohn no longer seemed sentimental and saccharine under his hands, but simple, sunlit, heartfelt. And to the five he added one more, the "Spinning Song," so-called.

His playing of Chopin arouses more question. In the G minor "Ballade" and in the "Barcarole" there seemed a lack of the deepest poetical feeling, of warmth and of large utterance. Mr. Rachmaninoff's tone seemed to lack something in color. His very restrained pedaling dams the flooding of his tone with rich harmonics. Yet nothing could be more exquisite than the clear and finely chiseled outlines of these pieces, as though they were viewed through the wrong end of an opera glass. And there would frequently come into the reading passages of entrancing tenderness. Of such quality was his playing of the G flat waltz throughout and the waltz that he added to the list as an encore.

He gave a group of his own pieces: two "Etudes Tableaux," Opus 39, played for the first time; the Barcarolle, Opus 10. The "Etudes Tableaux" are marked, respectively, "Marche" and "Alia Marzia Funebre"; and both are music of the individual fibre that runs through so much of his music; original, but not extravagant, in harmonic quality; interesting, yet hardly on a first hearing deeply appealing. The "Barcarole," with its novel and ingenious figuration, an earlier composition, gave much pleasure.

Mr. Rachmaninoff ended his program with Liszt's "Rhapsodie Espagnole," a piece which exists both for the piano alone and for the piano with orchestral accompaniment. It is, in the solo version especially, of transcendent difficulty, and Mr. Rachmaninoff's performance of it was a remarkable technical achievement, of an accuracy and precision that were an unceasing marvel. Yet it was a musician's performance rather than a virtuoso's, and it almost seemed as if Mr. Rachmaninoff studied to conceal the brilliancy with which he might have dazzled his listeners and stirred them to audible emotions.

His long series of encores after the program included a piece of Tchaikovsky's, but mostly pieces of his own, ending inevitably in the key of C sharp minor.