

RICH AND VARIED TONE IN RECITAL BY RACHMANINOFF

Russian Pianist Produces Orchestral Effects—New Interpretation of Famous Prelude.

BY ERNEST E. COLVIN.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, known to St. Louis music lovers as the composer of the choral symphony, "The Bells," which was sung by the Parents Choral Society early in the winter and of the great symphony which was played by the orchestra, less than two weeks ago, gave his third local piano recital in as many years last night before an enthusiastic audience that filled the Odeon.

Counting his appearance here as symphony soloist last year, the recital gave concert-goers their fourth opportunity to hear this Russian, who is generally regarded as among the first two or three living pianists, and by some is accounted the greatest since the retirement of Paderewski.

Writers on musical topics sometimes refer to orchestral effects produced on the piano, by which they mean tremendous volume, shading into the softest of pianissimo; variety of tone-color by which the very timbre of the instrument seems to be changed; individualistic accent of notes and phrases by which an emotional appeal is created comparable only to that which results from the hearing of a symphony. This is the kind of playing with which Rachmaninoff favored his audience last night.

As one listened to his rich, but always melodious program, it seemed that the pianist was drawing from the instrument its ultimate possibilities in music. A leading pianist has explained that much of the varying tone quality which a player obtains is due to the ever changing accent with which he combines notes and chords, as well as to his touch and the skill of his pedaling. This was extremely evident in Rachmaninoff's playing last night.

Plays Own Prelude.

No Rachmaninoff concert would be complete without his own Prelude in C sharp minor. As he returned to the stage at the conclusion of his program to give an encore, some one in the gallery shouted, "Play your own prelude." Rachmaninoff nodded assent and as the applause of the audience almost drowned the opening bars, he began this composition known in every hamlet in which there is a piano.

It was the fourth time he has played the prelude in St. Louis, and it seemed that last night he got more out of it than ever before. Each time he has played it he has given it a different interpretation, and last night he presented it with an individuality, a contrast between the tremendous bell-like chords and the almost inaudible notes that made it as welcome as an entirely new composition.

Rachmaninoff began the concert with Mozart's ninth sonata. In the first movement, with its simple, but stately theme first played without embellishment, then played an octave higher, and then woven about with the most fascinating tonal threads, the listener noted the clear phrasing with which Rachmaninoff presented the work; the soft, prolonged measures at the end of each phrase, the pure tone of the instrument.

From the Mozart sonata Rachmaninoff went into Schumann's "Papillons," and then the first encore, Mendelssohn's "Hunting Song," in which one observed the pianist's great speed, the strength with which he struck the keys and the delicate diminuendo at the end.

The next programmed group consisted of four Chopin numbers, a ballade, the waltzes in E flat minor and G flat major, and a barcarolle. The first waltz was played with a joyfulness that contrasted with the almost melancholy spirit in which Rachmaninoff played a movement in the second waltz. In the latter one noted the extremely delicate touch of the pianist and the varying tone, and a feeling almost of sadness crept over the audience as he made of his instrument a voice of sentiment.

Plays Last Rhapsody.

Two of Rachmaninoff's own compositions followed—his "Polichinelle" and a barcarolle. The first of these was typically Russian, with its predominance of heavy bass tones and its great speed, shading off into a slow, stately movement.

The last programmed number was Liszt's "Spanish Rhapsody," the most dazzling selection of the night. Here was a heavy roll in the bass, alternating with a similar roll in the high notes; brilliant passage work; singing melody, played with the left hand, while the right hand drew about the air a vivid tonal picture; speed, clear and living timbre, and that haunting rhythm characteristic of Spanish music.

Pianists usually end their recitals with a Liszt rhapsody, and nothing he could have played would have fired the audience more than did the Spanish rhapsody with which Rachmaninoff closed his program last night. The audience refused to leave until he had played two encores—his own prelude and Chopin's waltz in C sharp minor.