

RUSSIAN PIANIST IN CONCERT HERE

The Sombre Rachmaninoff
Beyond The Comprehen-
sion of Many

Breathless, bewildered, overwhelmed, Sergei Vasilyevitch Rachmaninoff, Russian pianist and composer, led a thousand men and women through a program of piano music at the Auditorium last night, music that looked familiar on the printed sheet, but music that, as it flowed from under the powerful fingers of the Slav, became barbaric, weird and other-worldly.

Here and there the Russian eluded his audience altogether, left it wondering dazedly whether he had gone in the tempestuous storm of his music, but despite its bewilderment ready to pay him the tribute of their admiration. Sometimes the applause fell at unseasonal times, breaking in upon his moody performance when he had merely paused, with his long hands poised above the keys ready to crash again.

There is no romance in the gaunt, gray Russian. There is no blood or fanciful lightness in him. He is the embodiment of the stolid sombreness, the fantastic fatalism of his people that overshadows all the things that have come out of that country through the medium of Russian literature and Russian music.

There is nothing of the popular notion of how a pianist ought to look about him. Six feet tall, and more if his shoulders were not stooped over. His arms are long, and his wrists thick. His face is solemn, stolid, almost to austerity, and his eyes are at home in such a face. His hair, turning gray with his 49 years, is close cropped, and his scalp shows through. He is not a romantic figure.

He came out of the wings quietly, unhurriedly with no more concern for the thousand people who awaited him than if the house had been empty. He inclined his head slightly in recognition of the applause and sat down. His head bent forward over the keyboard, and for a moment his fingers wandered aimlessly over the keys. Then he leaned far backward, and the iron hands crashed down on the keyboard in the opening measures of the Thirteenth Sonata.

No less authority than the Encyclopedia Britannica vouches for the statement that Rachmaninoff is not an impressionist, that he plays as it is written in the books. But only the names of his pieces were familiar. Most of the audience were completely lost half way through the Sonata, and were not quite certain whether he was playing the last of it, or the beginning of the Invitation to the Dance.

Not until he was half way through the Chopin group did any considerable number gather up the thread again, and absolute certainty did not come until the thundering introduction to his own familiar Prelude in C Sharp Minor crashed through the great cavern of the auditorium. Then they rose to him, and applauded him until he was forced to come to the front of the stage and make acknowledgement of the tribute.

It is not so far from Poland to Russia, but it is a tremendous ways from Paderewski to Rachmaninoff. The lion-maned Pole can be light and airy and fanciful as well as thunder-toned and melancholy. The close-cropped Russian can be only morose and sombre. He knows not how to laugh and the piano was made for laughter. Genius he no doubt is. None can hear that solemn dirge of exile that his Prelude is and doubt it.

A people given easily to gaiety can give as easily the due admiration of this apostle of sorrow, can recognize and applaud the technical perfection of his playing, can be overwhelmed under the power of his relentless massing of sound, but no further can it go. Rachmaninoff and Russia are a thing beyond.