

RUSSIAN MASTER CHARMS AUDIENCE

Rare Intellect and Art of
Rachmaninoff Wins
Music Lovers.

BY R. B. MAYFIELD

Sergei Rachmaninoff wields a scalpel upon the compositions he performs. His music is at once a science and an art. The man's marvelous musical intellect lays bare the musculature and bony structure of the music, explains the interrelation of the several parts and lectures upon the meaning of each as if he were speaking before a class in anatomy. Hearing his Liszt and Grieg and Chopin, not even the least musical could misunderstand their meaning or fail to see each separate beauty thus pointed out and explained.

The explanations however quit the field of science and become pure art, for his is primarily the soul of a musician upon which nature has superposed the mental severity and precision of a mathematician and an analyst. At times his renderings seem almost indiscreet in their physical undressing of the compositions, for when a composer has had nothing to say—vide the Liszt "Tarantella"—Rachmaninoff does not gloat over or romanticize but holds up the cold facts to the light. When, on the other hand, as in the Chopin "Nocturne" Opus 27, the composer has put something of his very being, of his own soul suffering into his music, Rachmaninoff tells the listener the story and lets him feel the composer's true emotions.

Rachmaninoff's first New Orleans appearance Saturday night, in the second Philharmonic Society program of the season, was a magnet to draw to the Athenaeum the largest assembly that has heard a piano soloist here for some twenty years. It was to such a throng that the great Russian master made his appeal, winning all by his remarkable combination of intellectuality and technical powers.

His program was by no means an ideal one and in certain instances the composer-virtuoso seemed to be wasting his talents on material not worthy of them and of him. Doubtless he feared to overreach his public by giving them works of more elusive design, but it must be confessed that from the mighty Russian we would have been pleased to hear a rendering of some of his great countrymen, of Tchaikowsky, Borodine and Scriabin, of Rimsky Korsakof or even of Stravinsky. Still we must be thankful for Rachmaninoff's own C sharp minor prelude and for his perfectly charming "Polka" on a theme composed by his father, that was one of the evening's most fascinating numbers.

The artist began and ended his program with Liszt, his overture being the Second Ballade which was followed by a Ballade also by Grieg. It was particularly in his keen analysis of these two works that the pianist manifested the scientific spirit. One came away feeling one had been in the workshop and had seen Grieg and Liszt at work fitting together the components of those two compositions.

The Chopin group of four numbers was less scientific and more inspired, particularly inspired having been the "Nocturne." Other of the evening's delights were an "Etude" by Dohnanyi and Kreisler's "Liebesleid" which Rachmaninoff has transcribed in a masterly manner. The evening's programs carried an announcement of the return of Adrien Friche, New Orleans' very talented young violinist, who will be heard in concert Tuesday, January 24, after three years of study, two with Auer and a third in Paris.