

# CHANGING MOODS IN PIANO RECITAL BY RACHMANINOFF

Capacity Audience Hears Music That Expresses All Phases of Human Emotion.

BY ERNEST E. COLVIN.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, the Russian composer and pianist, gave a recital at the Odeon last night—but it was a new and a greater Rachmaninoff than the one who had played in St. Louis in previous years.

The difference was noticeable, not only in his playing, but in the very personality of the man. The Rachmaninoff of gloom seemed to have been merged into the bigger Rachmaninoff of changing moods and broad humanity.

The changing moods were expressed in his music, and every emotion of which the human heart is capable seemed last night to find expression. There was exaltation, there was sorrow; ardent hope and longing, benignity of soul and stormy anger.

And as the spell cast by the music grew on the audience, one almost lost sight of the technical qualities that are necessary to an interpretation of the masterpieces of piano literature, and became absorbed in the mental and emotional effects to create which the technical arts of the performer are but the means. Rachmaninoff, of course, has the qualities that must go with capable piano playing—control of tone, changing color, speed, delicate touch—but as he plays the listener finds himself constantly forgetting these marks of technique as he grasps the big message which music brings.

The man who reads Shakespeare may note the mastery of English and the sublime poetry, but he will be impressed more by the analysis of character and the dissecting of motives. He who listened to Rachmaninoff last night observed, of course, that he had technical skill, but he was more impressed with the fact that under his hands the piano became a tremendous interpreter of emotions, a portrayer of moods, a voice through which spoke the universal language of music.

### An Emotional Liszt.

He began his recital by introducing to the audience Liszt in an unusual guise. All are familiar with

the Liszt of the Hungarian rhapsodies, those great show pieces of virtuoso skill. Probably the majority in the audience—and it was the only capacity audience seen at a piano recital in St. Louis this season—had ever heard Liszt's great second ballade, with which Rachmaninoff began his program.

There was variety of mood in this, but that which stands out in the memory is the expression of longing which found utterance in the music. A 7-year-old child in the audience said, "It sounded like someone was crying." Could there be a better tribute to the art of Rachmaninoff than the words of this child, who heard in the ballade of Liszt the expression of an emotion which it could understand even as mature men and women found in the music an expression of the sorrows they have experienced in their own lives?

The pianist began this ballade with the greatest rumble of bass chords which this reviewer has ever heard. It had the majesty of an organ and the relentlessness of the roll of drums. What changing emotions in this ballade! What orchestral color! Lyric song leading into passages of tremendous staccato and changing again into song, expression speed plunging headlong into lovely melody, which finally sings of sorrow and of hope.

The Liszt ballade was followed by one of Grieg, and then as an encore there was Handel's "Harmonious Blacksmith," with its simple melody and beautiful variations.

Then the Chopin group. Here was the third ballade with its clear phrasing, its change of mood from the loftiest aspirations to the cheerfulness of a feast, its whispering tone to powerful climaxes; here was the D-flat nocturne, with its slow melody, its expressive lingering over each phrase, its sadness, its ardency.

After the nocturne came the waltz in D-flat major, called the "Minute Waltz" because a person who doesn't play it right can go through it in sixty seconds. This waltz was a pure delight, and, of course, had to be repeated. As a matter of curiosity, the pianist was timed when he repeated the number and it took him one minute and forty seconds to play it.

The Chopin group closed with the familiar but ever new scherzo in C-sharp minor. For the first time during the recital the piano spoke in angry tones. But the anger with which the opening chords sounded forth was merged into a song, woven about with delicatefiguration. In this number, perhaps, more than in

any other on the program, there was infinitude of shading and of emotional change.

The encore to the Chopin group was the waltz in A-flat, and then came Rachmaninoff's own etude in C-major, immense in conception, bigger in execution, majestic in its song, as flowing as a stream in its liquid notes. The pianist next played his own Polka de W. R., with its incisive phrasing, its delicate dance figure, its swift, jubilant melody, its finesse in the working out of diminuendos and ritardandos.

The last group included Dohnanyi's Etude Capriccio, played in some passages with terrific speed; Rachmaninoff's one arrangement of Kreisler's "Liebeslied"; and the melodious and impressive "Venezia e Napoli" of Liszt. This was marred by the over-enthusiasm of some in the audience who broke in with applause at the end of a lyrical pas-

age, but the error was pardonable if one takes into account the wonderful expression with which Rachmaninoff played it, the lingering over each phrase of the most songful passages, the smooth legato of the melody.

The program was finished, but the concert was not over. Twice the pianist was recalled, twice he played, but the audience wanted to hear his C-sharp minor prelude. A third time he was recalled and he played the prelude, which more than any other composition has given him world-wide fame. Again the audience recalled him and he played "Golliwog's Cakewalk" by Debussy. The other two encores were Tschahikowsky's "Troika and Train-eaux" and Rachmaninoff's arrangement of a minuet by Bizet.

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