

RACHMANINOFF BEAMS, SO DOES HIS PLAYING

Saturnine Russian Startles Audience by Smiling, His Genial Musical Mood.

By RICHARD L. STOKES.

At the conclusion of his first group of numbers, last night, at the Odéon, Sergi Rachmaninoff took his stand at the left of the platform to bow a salute to the audience, which filled the auditorium with its numbers and applause. Against a dusky curtain was etched the pianist's familiar figure, gaunt, shambling and bent; palely luminous shone his saturnine visage, and his close-cropped silver hair.

It became evident that some unwelcome convulsion was distorting the stiff countenance. The features struggled and writhed, in the process and both traces of an expression not yet to be named. Suddenly the marvel was accomplished; for the first time in his several appearances here the Russian's countenance was discomposed with a genuine of benignity, which spread until that smile melted into an authentic and incredible smile.

This apparition created nothing less than a sensation. Strangers stared speechless into the eyes of other strangers. Rachmaninoff well knew the thing was unheard of. Whispers of concern rustled about the hall. "What could have happened to the preeminent Slav? Had Schopenhauer been metamorphosed into Polonius?" Or was Rachmaninoff taking a leaf from the book of Alexander Siltov, whose jollity has been much contrasted of late with the morose temper of his famous first cousin?

Playing Is Genial and Human.

Whether the actor Rachmaninoff at last night glowed with a warmth, a geniality and an intimacy which made it human and winning beyond any of his previous performances here. In Chopin's D-flat Major waltz, said to describe George Sand's pet poppy chaise as it fell the pianist gave positively rough, not to say furious, and the new smile waxed broader than before as he yielded to the audience's demand for a repetition of the humorous bit.

It is also true that the pianist has never before in this city taken such extraordinary liberties with the text as the waltz referred to last night he proceeded, without the least authorization from Chopin, to add and subtract in the melody; he emphasized subordinate lines of counterpoint at various points and he added a few notes of which there is no hint in the score. Had Leo O'Connell's banter of such license the pianist in the house would be shocked for his heart's blood, Rachmaninoff, was cheered to the echo.

This is because the Russian, in every note, conveys an overpowering originality. He may alter the melody over with careless peddling he may not trouble himself to play all the notes as written. But in every bar one has the feeling that there is something new before his eyes an amazing feat of creation, apparently improvised, for the pianist, so far as one can remember, never plays the same piece twice in the same way.

What we hear is not so much Liszt and Chopin as a great scholar's impetuous marginalia, always eloquent and fascinating, upon Liszt and Chopin. Other commentators publish their editions of the masters, Rachmaninoff merely does his editing in public at the piano instead of the desk.

To the task of creative interpretation he brings a phenomenal command of the piano's dynamics, from the softest whisper to a gossamer veil of euphony which seems in its softness to float upon the air, and in its intricately firm and solid pianissimo, as ravishing as one as sense such airiness and rippling ease that the fingers do not appear much to stridle the keys as to swim above them and put them in motion by some fairy spell of magnetism.

Frugance wells from his tone; all the keen, rich and varied perfumes of sound are wafted from the garden of his keyboard. If Rachmaninoff's fluidness of technique is inferior to many pianists who might be named, it is because with him, as a "lowering composer" in his own thing, a means to an end and one quite accurate to his purpose, which is that of imposing his own ideas confidently upon the ideas of other men. What in lesser artists would be a gross impertinence becomes with him a brilliant exploit of concentration, between equal and equal.

Story-Telling in Music.

Major changes in the program, as first announced, revealed the pianist in an anecdotal mood, at the beginning of the evening. He played three ballads, a form of story-telling music, all of them widely different. There was Liszt's Second Ballad, impetuous and dramatically then came Grieg's Ballad, Op. 24, with its poetic imagery and its dance of will-o'-the-wisp rays and eaves and thirdly, Chopin's Tronienne Ballade, in A-flat Major, Op. 47—patriotic, poignant and ironic.

The other programmed numbers were Chopin's Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 27, No. 2; his Valse in F-flat Major, Op. 64, No. 1; and the same composer's mazurka and exalted Scherzo in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 10, by Rachmaninoff's own Etude in C Major and his intriguing "Polka de St. M.," so called because the composer was suggested by the name of his father, Vasily Rachmaninoff. Debussy's sublimely beautiful Etude, "Capriccio," Op. 28; Rachmaninoff's piano version of Brahms's familiar "Lullaby," so originally harmonized as to be barely recognizable, and Liszt's Italian

RETURN OF "DELUGE" "JUST ANOTHER STORM PI

Impression Left "Distinguished Failure" of Play, 4 Years Ago Was Not So Distinguished.

By Leased Wire From the New York Bureau of the Post-Dispatch.

NEW YORK, Jan. 28.—One night four and one-half years ago Arthur Hopkins produced "The Deluge," which Frank Allen had adapted from a Swedish drama by Henning Berger. The cordiality with which it was received by its first audience proved deceptive. Two weeks later the curtain had fallen for the last time and the theater was dark.

"The Deluge," however, had lasted long enough to win a reputation of a kind. It has been known ever since in the annals of the local stage as a "distinguished failure." So distinguished, indeed, did it seem to some, even in its quick demise, that Hopkins, far from discouraged, promised to give it another chance. That chance came last night at the Plymouth Theater.

Now, after a considerable lapse of time, and after watching last night's reiteration of the Scandinavian work, we are not sure that its first failure was "distinguished" after all. We surmise that there may have been reasons for the intention of the public other than the suffragette beat of those August nights. There may even be, for American audiences, at least, a fatal defect in a play which raised them in its second act to the heights of expectation and suspense, only to let them fall with a dull thud in the final act. To aggravate the dangerous relation of the closing episodes of the play, Hopkins last night permitted them to be acted with almost oppressive elaboration.

Story of the "Deluge."

It is the story of nine men and a woman marooned in a Mississippi River city during a cloudburst and storm. They believe that the river has overflowed the town and that they are about to meet their death. All have more or less unrequited passions. At first they are selfish, aggressive and hostile. Their common danger draws them together and softens their natures. They join in a "bond of love and brotherhood."

Meanwhile the tempest howls outside the bolted doors and iron-shutted windows. The lights go out. The telephone connection is severed. Twenty-four hours or more pass. Then the intruder, gruffly discover that all their fears have been from the outset groundless. The sun is shining outside. And straightway their characteristic weaknesses reappear and they revert to their former natures.

After the Storm.

With great skill Hopkins works up the suspense of these scenes of terror. His wind and rain machines speak volumes. But just because he is so adroit in giving Berger's drama its fearful, realistic background, its tedium becomes all the greater when the audience discovers that not only it but the characters as well have been loathed. Some sage has remarked that you cannot fool all the people all of the time. "This bit of wisdom may apply to "The Deluge," although it is also possible that you may fool some people some of the time.

The lack of substance in much of the middle division of the play was made more apparent by the slow tempo of the performance last night. But with one or two exceptions the newly organized company was excellent. Its defect lay in Kathleen MacDonnell, who, as Sadio, the woman refugee, could not make herself heard above the roar of the storm. She also gave a pallid performance of a role that Pauline Lord once made colorful and striking. Lester Longhart appeared as the tediously loquacious lawyer whose verbosity must have been an trying in his marooned associates as the storm itself. Very good performance by Robert E. O'Connor as the saloon keeper, Robert McVade as the promoter and Edward G. Robinson as a Swedish immigrant added to the interest of the reopening.

Body of F. F. Plumbridge Buried.

Thomas Percival Plumbridge, former manager of the Holland Building, who died in Los Angeles, Wednesday, was buried there today. He had lived in Los Angeles since June. He had been superintendent and an elder of the West Presbyterian Church here. The widow and four children survive.

Recital, "Venice a Napoli." As at Jarantoff's recital the other night, a section of the audience snatched into the middle of the Last work with applause, mistaking a rest for a double bar.

Again the C-Sharp Minor Prelude.

As a part of his amenity of mood, the pianist was very generous with the first was Handel's variations. The "Harmonious Blacksmith," played with a velocity and drama of which the composer in all probability never dreamed; another Chopin number; and, at the end, of four choruses in a row, with many of the audience gathered about the platform.

There were Tchaikowsky's setting of the "Fugue" from Bart's First L'Arlet; some Rameau, Rachmaninoff's own inevitable Prelude in C-Sharp Minor, in an interpretation different from any of the composer's preceding ones; and "The Golywog's Gigue" by Debussy.

Even then the gathering dispersed reluctantly; and the opinion was heard on all sides that this was not only the most successful appearance of Rachmaninoff ever made in St. Louis, but one of the most fascinating, thought-provoking and delightful recitals heard here in years.