

THE LYRIC

Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Last night's audience at the Lyric came within an ace of being grievously disappointed. The majority of its members had come with two set purposes—first, to see the man who wrote the C sharp minor prelude, and second, to hear him play it. Dvorak has his "Humoresque," Schumann his "Traumerei," Rubinstein his "Melody in F," Mendelssohn his "Spring Song" and Sergei his "Prelude."

After each group the applause was long and insistent. One could fairly hear the palms beating the message, "Give us the Prelude! Give us the Prelude!" But the evening had wended its melodious way and no prelude had been forthcoming. Then came the closing group, two etudes by Liszt, the one in E major, and "La Campanella." Not only had Paganini further embroidered upon 'Abbe Liszt's original excursions, but Busoni has taken the "Campanella" and subjected it to additional pyrotechnics. At its conclusion the merry clamor again set up in earnest. In answer to an applause that was rapidly becoming threatening, the long, stooped, bored Russian again seated himself at the piano. With the opening A and G sharp, the audience knew its pilgrimage had not been in vain, and a mighty outburst greeted the bold announcement of the C sharp. "The" Prelude at last!

The program opened with an "improvisation" of but meager interest by Nicolai Medtner, who swapped his early Brahmsian horse for the more cantankerous steed bearing the ultra-moderns and almost slipped into the stream of mediocrity in so doing. The overplayed Beethoven sonata, Opus 57 (usually dubbed the "Apassionata"), was next in line. The reading barked along classic lines, and we thought how vastly it differed from that more vividly imaginative, more profound reading we had heard it accorded when Paderewski included it on one of his farewell programs some years ago. Von Bulow cautioned against speeding the glorious *Andante* at the expense of the following *Allegro ma non troppo*. Rachmaninoff heeded the word of advice, although the second movement might have been retarded a trifle.

Treading upon the heels of a Chopin Nocturne and Valse came the B flat minor Sonata, op. 35. Schumann claimed that here "Chopin had bound together four of his wildest children." But what children! Every movement a highly wrought cameo of such exquisite beauty as almost to bewilder the beholder. Not a single thread to bind the quartet, but what of it? There was an irritability that marked the occasional entrance of the counter theme in the first movement, a smoldering resentment. A greater crescendo might have marked the opening bar of the Scherzo, but what grace, what airy charm! And then the lulling trio in G flat. From there back to the snappy little Scherzo, and then into the somber, forbidding *Marche Funebre*. A burst of song in the middle only to return to the insistent thump of the march and from there to the *Presto* taken at such a tempo as only the musical gods may dare.

Rachmaninoff's own "Melodie" (E flat) and "Serenade" (somewhat elaborated over the published version) shared honors with Moskowsky's "La Jongleuse," which appeared so deceptively simple as it rippled from the crouching pianist's fingers. To be sure, there were wrong notes, but they were good ones at that.

G. K.