

RACHMANINOFF THRILLS IN PIANO RECITAL HERE

Russian Pianist Accorded Reception Unsurpassed for Its Warmth.

By John George Harris.

Sergel Rachmaninoff, pianist, played at the City Auditorium last evening, the first artist to appear in Mrs. Wilson-Greene's series. This was the first time that the celebrated Russian pianist has played in Richmond, and it is fair to assume from his reception last evening that it will not be his last, for his audience was as enthusiastic as local audiences ever become when the country is not at war.

Such mastery of the keyboard! Such brilliance! Such command of the instrument! Many expressions like these spring to the lips when one contemplates last night's recital. Chopin played with a master-touch, a real man's Chopin. There was no absence of delicacy in Mr. Rachmaninoff's playing, but, in addition, there was a fire, bravura as none but a great artist can display. When Novas was here four years ago, one recalls the remarkable impression she made, as the outstanding favorite of that year. Rachmaninoff caused a similar sensation by his great playing last night.

Within the week we have heard Chopin given in recital, but no such Chopin as that of last night's concert. To illustrate in the March Funebre alone: Rachmaninoff colored it, contrasted its phrases, and accentuated its pathos to such a degree that one visualized an appropriate scene to accompany the music. It began quietly, then increased in volume until great fortissimo chords smote the ear; then came the lyrical, singing melody, exquisitely handled, then the solemn phrases again, first fortissimo, then receding until seemingly lost in the distance.

When have we heard Liszt's Campanella so brilliantly done? When has this piece de resistance of the great German concert artist been invested with such fire within local recollection? These are rhetorical questions, of course. They are not to be answered. The hackneyed prelude in C sharp minor—termed by the lamented James G. Huncker the "Schoolgirl's Delight"—took on a new meaning last night. We learned things about it which we never knew before, particularly in the accenting of the theme, which Rachmaninoff accomplished to a nicety.

The program last night began with a little-known composer—Medtner—then Beethoven's "Sonata Appassionata," Chopin's sonata, opus 35, heretofore alluded to, with a Nocturne and Valse by the same composer, Rachmaninoff's own prelude and serenade, a Moszkowski, and two Paganini-Liszt numbers. To these, the artist added the Chopin Valse in D flat major and a Valse by Tschalkowsky. The last named was given at the conclusion of the program, while the audience was sitting firmly in its place, determined—like Oliver Twist—to have "more."

Unlike the playing of many pianists we have heard, Mr. Rachmaninoff's art is not one wholly of technique, though he has that elusive quality in abundance. It goes beyond that; it is characterized by soundness of judgment, thoughtful insight and by undoubted poise. If Mrs. Wilson-Greene were bringing no other artist than Rachmaninoff to Richmond this season, she would have earned our undying gratitude by last night's concert.