

## RACHMANIOFF'S RECITAL

[By Bertram Taylor]

When Rachmaninoff plays the piano there is aroused once more a speculation as to the part that personality and character bear in the sum total of a man's art. Because when all is said and done, due account taken of technique, touch, phrasing, rhythm, structure—all those things which are so often enumerated as almost to have lost their meaning—there remains much to be accounted for. And whether it is called genius or the mysterious interplay of personal forces the truth is that the man is greater than his art.

This is true of just a few musicians and many are excluded who are splendid artists. But of Rachmaninoff, of Kreisler, of Paderewski, and of a few others it may be said that they encompass their art so completely and that what they give seems to come from a vast reserve of power. This power comes with maturity and as Rachmaninoff was not heard in the United States before his musical thought had matured it is difficult to imagine him as ever having been too young and too eager.

At the concert given Sunday at the Murat, under the direction of the Ona B. Talbot Fine Arts Enterprises, the same old story was told. The big audience was a foregone conclusion, as much to be counted on as the persistent calls for the C sharp minor Prelude. It was an audience not only of musicians, but including many who knew the pianist chiefly for having composed that unfortunate prelude. And he refused to play it. Just as Paderewski was haunted for years by his minuet, so Rachmaninoff is having a hard time laying his ghost, but he showed a firm determination Sunday and managed to have his own way without giving offense. He said in his dressing room that he had forgotten that prelude, but he might have said that he was trying to forget it. And perhaps some day he and his public will bury it completely in oblivion.

The program as a whole showed the same conventional choice and distaste for experiment that Mr. Rachmaninoff's programs usually show. It might have been a graduation recital, so many were the old war horses. But under this pianist's fingers those familiar things were touched with new strokes of beauty. Certainly Rachmaninoff again and again justifies his choice, for no one is more fitted to keep the worn old masterpieces alive than he. In these compositions, around each of which a whole set of traditions have grown

up he shows a singular and refreshing freedom. Just as a great poet, observing all the old rules of verse meter and rhyme, gives an impression of supreme ease in his medium, so Rachmaninoff displays a greater latitude in his interpretations than many a *vers libre* pianist, without smashing anything of importance.

In the liberties he permits himself with the score, liberties not sanctioned with bell and book, he justifies himself again. He is beautifully right in everything. He does, in all truth, re-create. The most important number in the list was the Chopin sonata, brilliantly and individually played. There was the sound of ringing iron in his tone for the *Marche funebre*, something sinister and implacable. The Consolatory interlude was most romantically interpreted. And a slow *diminuendo* gave the sense of long perspective.

There were two other Chopin compositions, a waltz and the F sharp nocturne, so often sentimentalized past endurance, and the D flat waltz, coming as an extra to round out the group. In all his playing of Chopin Rachmaninoff reveals the heroic quality of this greatest of piano composers, and makes the nice distinction that exists between romance and sentimentality.

The Liszt etude was an effect of broken phrases, not awkwardly broken, but as if each little group took fresh momentum from itself. Moskowski's "La Jongleuse" was a delight and a torment to those who have essayed its tricky mazes. There were Webber's "Rondo Brillante" and an improvisation by Medtner at the beginning of the list and further down two of the pianist's own compositions, a lovely melody, delicate of line, and his fascinating Serenade.

When the hour was verging on 5 his well-earned rest was still denied the tired performer, so loud were the transports of the audience. So he returned and played a Tchaikowsky waltz, Tausig's arrangement of a Schumann romance and his own "Bolichinelle." But before these extras were added the scheduled program came to a brilliant close with a well known arrangement of Strauss's "The Beautiful Blue Danube." It is one of the most delightful pieces of fireworks in piano literature, and imbedded in its brilliancies is an unforgettable and seductive tune. The beautiful hesitating rhythm that Rachmaninoff employs, so delicately done as to be almost imperceptible, and the gentle emergence of melody from its embroidered wrappings made it a splendid period to the program.