

RACHMANINOFF HISSED FOR REFUSING ENCORE

Faint Sibilations Heard When
Pianist Proves Obdurate at
Symphony Concert.

By RICHARD L. STOKES
THE welcome proper to a man of genius was lavished upon Sergei Rachmaninoff during yesterday afternoon's Symphony Orchestra concert at the Odeon. When that gaunt and ashen effigy came striding across the platform, the orchestra rose, and one of the largest audiences of the season thundered a greeting to the Russian pianist and composer.

He played his own Concerto No. 2, in C Minor, and each movement was capped with reverberating applause. On these occasions the soloist remained for some minutes slouching over the keyboard, as if plunged in a slough of slavish despond; then slowly he would uncoil his fabulous stature and unlimber an angular bow.

At the end came a cloudburst of handclapping. The performer slithered back and forth between the wings and the platform. The audience believed the customary farcical comedy was afoot—that in which a soloist mimes coy reluctance and diffident astonishment that anyone should desire an encore, and then plays an extra anxiously rehearsed just before the concert. The noise redoubled; feet clattered on the floor, and whistles shrilled not only from the balcony but from the sedate boxes.

After four recalls it suddenly became obvious that Mr. Rachmaninoff had not the slightest intention of giving an added number. The pianist shook hands with Concertmaster Gaudinoff and waved his fingers at the orchestra. Attendants began to close the piano. Then, here and there, sounded the sibilations of hisses. Mr. Ganz promptly concluded the incident by hastening to the dais and beginning Tchaikowsky's overture, "The Year 1812."

Dodging the Notorious Prelude.

The pianist explained later that it is this year's fashion—a mode which had not previously reached St. Louis—for soloists at symphony concerts to decline encores. There may have been an additional factor. Other soloists may choose such extras as please them, but when the public importunes Mr. Rachmaninoff it is demanding a specific piece. This is one of his own compositions, the Prelude in C-sharp Minor. But he detests that ubiquitous creation of his twentieth year with a peculiar aversion. It is a Frankenstein that hunts at his heels across oceans and continents. He can escape the monster only by giving no encores at all.

The composer played his C Minor Concerto with the St. Louis orchestra on Feb. 13 and 14, 1920, and once more interpreted it with an eloquence that conferred a specious air of greatness and profundity. It has neither, as a matter of fact, in form and structure it is as old-fashioned as Haydn, and gains its only piquancy by means of a Russian flavor in the themes. The performance was characterized by beautiful tone and vigorous technique; the cadenzas did not seem parades of virtuosity, but the soloist's searchingly thoughtful commentaries on the composition. Rachmaninoff took his usual liberties with his own works as written—this program, which will be repeated tonight, concludes the orchestra's regular season, and it will be heard for the last time at home until next November at tomorrow afternoon's popular concert. For his adieu to the Friday and Saturday audiences, Mr. Ganz chose an all-Russian program.

Glinka to Rachmaninoff.

With regard solely to dates, the program covered nearly a century of history. It began with the naive, tuneful and light-opera overture to "Ruslan and Ludmilla," by Michael Glinka, regarded as the founder of Russian national music. It proceeded through the Fifth Symphony of Tchaikowsky, and arrived at the present with the Rachmaninoff concerto. But Rachmaninoff has not merely passed through modern music unscathed; he has only faintly been touched by the nationalistic spirit of Russia. He is probably more classical than Glinka himself.

As for the orchestral part of the program, Mr. Ganz and his musicians played to admiration the first three movements of the Tchaikowsky symphony. The director's faculty for delicate and subtle workmanship was once more in evidence. We heard music of supple contours, melodies with slow precision of attack, crispness of release, fastidiousness of phrase and nuance, and above all, mellowness of tone. Rarely before have the brasses been handled so esthetically. Trumpets, trombones and tubas blended in organ-like richness. Perhaps in evading Charybdis, the director shaved Scylla in the fourth movement, which might have endured quite a voltage of adieu drama. This was also true of the "1812" overture. But on the whole, if the orchestra had played in this fashion all season, it would not have been censured with much severity in its technical aspect, but only for a want of spiritual flame. And, just as an acceptable standard is reached, the season must close.