

## ∴ Music ∴

### Rachmaninoff Recital; Carnegie Music Hall.

By HARVEY B. GAUL.

Rachmaninoff, that strange figure in modern history, came and played for us last night in Carnegie Music Hall before a capacity audience. He was that same sinister, saturnine Sergel who lounged and lurches across the stage of the last three seasons.

His playing had that same mordant, acid-like quality; pungent, biting, incisive, complete with staccati and flashing with a rapier-like glitter. He still has wrists of steel and he can thunder with the sharpness of a Thor. He dabs his damper pedal and if his sostenuto doesn't sing as he does the cantabile of the doppio-pedal lads, nevertheless he has certain lovely moments of legato. He still has his remarkable affinity for Felix Bartholdy, not only in program-making, but in composition.

The pamphleteers once ranked him with the "revolutionists," but in program making he is a mid-Victorian with revolution gone soviet. In every program we have heard of his there was nothing more modern than Liszt. To be sure there is always a number or two of his own composition, but they very often sound a la Rubinstein or heavily digested Schumann. Evidently his kith and kin of Moscow and Petrograd are to be left at home playing with Lenine and Trotzky. Such thin fellows and nebulous wights as Debussy and Ravel are not to be considered.

Thus it was that the brilliant expatriate gave us "Funerailles" and other fustian Lisztian works. In his opening number, as indeed in every number, he proved that he had a left hand that was the envy of the profession. The Bach English Suite, from prelude to Bourée, was a study in clean phrasing; come sequence, come fugato, it was all delineated as with a dry-point pencil.

Mendelssohn's "Variations Serieuses" we had before when Paderewski was here, and needless to say Rachmaninoff revitalized them. He gave them contrast, plus marvelous pianism.

It is questionable whether Chopin can stand the rigors of a Rachmaninoff winter. Somehow he leaves us cold with his Chopin. Possibly it is his exaggeration. He is not a rubato player, but he distinctly takes a more than poetic license with his phrase and tempi. To be sure, why shouldn't he, but then there are times when the rubber band stretches too far, as to-wit, the "Nocturne." That grand "Scherzo in C sharp minor," a very symphony of a scherzo, was given a tremendous reading. The chorale chanted and the embroideries rippled beautifully. It was one of the finest things he played.

Liszt's "Funerailles" was a pleasant-flowers obsequy, with an interment that was far from private. It was a funeral without a corpse, pictorial, flamboyant and none too exciting. It was done in a virtuosi fashion, with brass-band playing, fireworks and cannonading; quite like an Italian burial.

His own compositions were fascinating. Sibelius may have taught him to play, and Arensky to compose, but Schumann and Chopin taught him how to motivate his piano works. The first "Etude Tableau" was a genre picture of cross-rhythms. Highly conventionalized and prickly with octaves. The second etude was built upon a figure, or group of sixths and was in the main engrossing. His arrangement ad lib of Moussorgsky's song "Hopak" was a dashing scherzo; if you wish, a pair of peasants drunk with the vodka of Mendelssohn's "Spinning Song." •

The Brassia transcription of Wagner's "Fire Music" was one of the outstanding things on his program. It was pianistic and yet had certain orchestral quality.

For a concluding number Liszt's "Rhapsodie Espagnole" was octaved within an inch of its life. If the competition smacked more of Weimar than it did of Madrid, what matters it; it is a tour de force and after all a piano recital is a cliché thing and has to wind up in the usual manner.

Of all the pianists who come here Rachmaninoff is the only one who is always stimulating. It is to be hoped he comes every year.