

# MUSIC

By Babetta M. Becker

## Rachmaninoff, Revealer of Form and Content

It has been long indeed since "Bravo" has leaped through the concert hall, or the Lyric Theater. It has been equally long since an audience has kept itself seated at the end of a programme as though it were prepared for a good half hour more. Those two things came to pass last night when Rachmaninoff gave his initial programme here, and they came as a sincere tribute to one of the most distinguished composers and artists of this day.

The same commanding yet reserved appearance of Rachmaninoff transmits itself to all that he does. The restraint of his bearing is in his finely wrought music; the lurking play of expression over his face nuances itself in his tonal phrases. There is a beauty and balance about his playing that is Greek, a precision and exactness that is crystalline, but not hard, polished yet full of fire. The Bach English Suite was played in such wise the fabric of its prelude spun with clearly traceable threads, subject and answer patterned and designed so that the garment of the music formed itself into a whole. The fluent Bourree, the more stately Sarabande, were given their individual character, each so concisely presented that no doubt should have remained even in the minds of the untutored. In the Mendelssohn "Variation Serenades," Rachmaninoff again revealed his remarkable grasp of form and color and emotion. You do not hear Rachmaninoff so much as you sense the composer's feelings. Yet with a lesser artist, you might forever lose the quiver of that feeling. The range of emotional quality, the change of atmosphere with the change of rhythm were stirringly achieved. And that last breathless effect, when the chords melt into finality after a passage of stress, was unutterable. To hear is to believe, despite the fallibility of the senses. The two Chopin numbers brought other styles still pristine. The "Nocturne" was woven in outline like a poem, and the "Scherzo in C-sharp minor" presented that sharp almost enigmatic contrast which Chopin has wrought in this composition. As encore, Rachmaninoff gave a Chopin waltz one in A-flat, which is not so familiar as many in the collection.

To those who are usually at odds with Liszt because of his maligned "virtuosity," and sheer technicalism, the "Funerailles," must have been nothing short of a revelation. So death clarifieth. In 1819 seven Hungarian noblemen were condemned to be executed, and Liszt wrote the "Funerailles" as a death march, a requiem to the march of the cortege. It is a magnificent work in which the profoundly poetic Liszt finds habitation with the pianistic master, and is contained in the "Harmonies Poetiques et Religieuses." Heroes are celebrated, something vast and deep is encompassed in the reverberating march, in the resounding cymbals, in the mighty procession of condemned men. Rachmaninoff re-created with wonder and power and glory.

In one group was the audience taken to the composer realm of the artist. If it were proper—which it is not, of course—to say that the composer took liberties with his own music, one would say that he did so in the "Serenade," but those are liberties which are eagerly and happily granted. (The publishers should be more alert.) The arrangement of the Bizet "Minuet" and of Moussorgsky's "Hopak" colored vividly in rhythms of characteristic significance.

The Strauss-Lausig "Night Butterfly Waltz," brilliantly concluded the printed programme, which was generously lengthened by several encores, among them the expected "Prelude in C-sharp Minor." We once heard it said that Rachmaninoff did not take that composition in the favor with which the public has taken it; but he knew the audience well enough to know that that was what it wanted.

It is too bad that an evening is only an evening and that Rachmaninoff could not have given more of his own compositions. He did present a programme which cannot be accused of inanity or flaccidity—it was solidly substantiated and full of good pianistic meat.

An artist with such amazing fertility of technical power, a musician who comprehends the value and use of such power and who employs it for the lucid expose of the composer in hand—such is Rachmaninoff.

The recital was given under the auspices of Allan Welburn, and was by far one of the most important musical events of the current season.