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Rachmaninoff Recital.

By HARVEY B. GAUL.

Just as soon as some of us are convinced that a piano recital is a quillish thing, along comes Sergei Rachmaninoff to electrify us and shatter that belief. He does that every year and in so doing he unsettles what other pianists establish. He came last night to Carnegie Music Hall, this time with a more compelling program than is his wont, and he gave us new forms of phrasing and new lessons in technique.

There was the same astringent touch, the same acid etching of the phrase, the same biting, incisive staccato, and here and there, as in Chopin, a charming cantabile. He cares not for languors, but he has his humors. Singing tone is not his obsession, though he can evoke a pretty phrase, when he wishes it, but rather is it a study in accents and short and long crescendi. Never does he descend to the sentimental, which perhaps is one of the reasons he has such a large masculine following. His is precisely the temperament to play Bach; sharp, clean, meticulous, with an organist's regard for the subject and a pianist's desire for toccata-like passages.

This was evinced in the opening Bach numbers. By the way what an amazing transcription Liszt made of that A major fugue? Sometimes we think that Liszt may go down to the posterities as the master-transcriber. Whatever he transcribed belongs at once to the clavier, and this applies to the songs, operatic numbers and Bach works. Rachmaninoff gave the prelude a most thoughtful reading and the fugue was a fugue a la rigueur, lively and fascinating.

What might have been a rather arid sonata, and the Liszt B minor is none too engrossing, he made captivating through sheer pianism. There were many gorgeous octaves in the work and the embellishments, accentuations and scales were beyond reproach.

His Chopin was far from being traditional, but then his Chopin is never orthodox. One might say that he is a bravura player he makes so much of the accelerando and he certainly causes a tenuto to be eloquent. But is he a bravura player? Somehow that is not quite Rachmaninoff, as he is altogether too intellectual to fever a phrase just to make holiday. There was poetry and fine romance in the etude, and something wonderfully moving in that middle movement. The ballad was gorgeous with its highly contrasted passages. The C minor etude, which some of us think is Chopin laboring it a bit with the everlasting thundering left-handed chords and the spinning arpeggi, was a brilliant piece of playing.

In his own group the G major prelude had transient interest; the etude was brittle with its sparkling over-hand effects, and the closing prelude, a lovely canzona. For a final number good old Johann Strauss' waltz, "Kunstlerleben," set off with Godowsky pyrotechnics was used, and a magnificent job Godowsky made of it. He hung his pianistic arabesques on those haunting old tunes and he did much better with the waltz than the thousand-and-one arrangers have done with the Strauss' "Danube." Rachmaninoff gave it all the dash and pianola effects the work called for and the result was that 2,000 people remained in their seats and demanded encores. Truly Rachmaninoff is electric and the most seated listener in the world shakes off apathy when he snaps out his phrases.