

Rachmaninoff Denies His Prelude Is Imitation of Bells of Kremlin

By SOUTHWORTH ALDEN

The three crashing notes which open the famous Rachmaninoff Prelude in C Sharp Minor weren't written to imitate the bells of the Kremlin.

Nor does the Prelude have anything to do with the burning of Moscow.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, the famous Russian composer, reiterated these things to me after his concert at the People's church in St. Paul last night, which was attended by an important conclave of Twin City music lovers. The great Russian told me the same thing four years ago on his first visit here, but so many articles have appeared in the meantime, purporting to carry his own authority for a "program," that I was beginning to think he had succumbed to the inevitable.

But the tall Russian is firm. "It imitates nothing," he told me. "Not the bells of Moscow; nothing. I sat down at the piano, feeling rather melancholy, it is true, and these themes came to me. But there is no program."

Then Rachmaninoff leaned his spare figure against an upright piano which stood in his dressing room and wrote his signature into the programs of admirers who stood in line and refused to be denied.

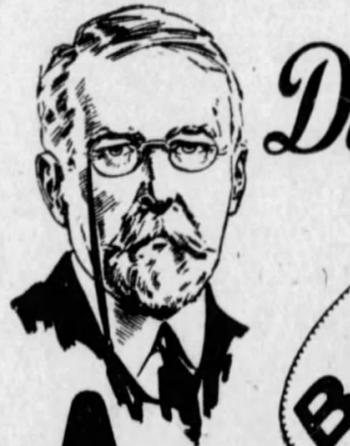
Beginning his recital with Beethoven's Variations in C Minor, the artist really reached his stride in the famous Sonata Appassionata by the same composer. Having recently heard Alexander Brailowsky give a most wonderful interpretation of this work, which seemed to bring out everything in it though played with a light and fluid touch, the Rachmaninoff attack seemed unbelievably loud. Naturally it was a tremendous and moving interpretation but the great Russian's powerful hands lay too heavily upon the keys; it was a glittering rather than a melting translation.

Quite on the contrary I liked Rachmaninoff's Chopin playing better than Brailowsky's, barring a few passages. Here Rachmaninoff infused his own strength into the music which was vibrantly beautiful. He played a Scherzo, an Etude and a Ballade. Chopin was not feminine, though most players approach his works as though they were too fine to be played with force. The Russian has no such fears; the result was a revelation.

It was, however, in his own pieces that the tall noble from Novogorod, rose to his full height, which is not meant to be a pun. He was just a bit weary of his own famous Prelude in C Sharp Minor, but could hardly help responding to the thrill of the audience which greeted it. Here his strength could be used without restraint and he looked and felt more at ease. The high water mark of the evening came in his own richly melodic Etude Tableau which revealed every facet of his marvelous technique as player and composer.

Following the popular "Artist's Life" by Strauss-Godowsky, Rachmaninoff found his audience unwilling to let him go and he played, among other things, a Chopin Waltz in A flat; "Wandering," Schubert-Liszt; "Kroika," by Tschalkowsky, and his own "Hopak."

Rachmaninoff is truly a dramatic figure, despite his prison-like haircut and his shuffling walk and slight stoop. He has a mighty strength and an inner power that hold you; in him



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are written the sadness and misery and the unsatisfied longing of his country. And if it were not that he can pour forth his soul through the medium of a Beethoven Sonata or one of his own preludes, I believe the inner turmoil would tear him asunder.
