

## RACHMANINOFF PLAYS MARVELOUS BEETHOVEN

Sonata Appassionata a Sensational Picture in a Program of Vivid Contrasts

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

Beethoven has never been so sensationally played here as by Rachmaninoff last night in the Sonata Appassionata. This work is familiar to thousands of people here, not least because it has been done about seven times in the Free Concerts. The Russian painted it in a wonderful light. With his vivid, search-lighting technique he explored every cranny of rhythm, every joint of melody, every base of harmony; and he made of this Sonata a startling Beethoven; not quite commonly traditional, but penetrative, reverent, profound: in the andante, mystic; in the first allegro, staccato and gleaming; in the finale tempestuous like the rush of icy waters down a sunlit canyon. Sticklers for conventional Beethoven may object to so much studied contrast, with so many sharply chiseled angles and polished curves, with such an accented syncopation in the variations of the andante and such scimitar-like strokes in the chords of the finale. But that is the picturization of the genius by another, and it was done with tremendous reverence, as a gigantic piece of poetic finesse of symphonic dimensions.

The Gluck Caprice and Air de Ballet with which he opened the program gave a peculiarly 18th century piquancy to the program, done with meticulous care and exquisite balance; like a miniature string orchestra with mutes. The Beethoven Variations were beautifully done, but for variety might have been omitted in favor of something more colorful. The Chopin Etude in E major was played with almost exasperating slow tempo against a very quick furioso for contrast, and the Ballade in A flat was a glorious triumph of color and pomp and joy with a rather tantalizing insistence on a slow beat in the two-note figure, like the dropping of water.

His own Prelude in C sharp minor—how hundreds of record "fans" there must have chuckled to see it once more on the program instead of being bandied for an encore. He played it as of course only he can do, with three gong-like fortissimos in the opening phrase, then a soft, slow, mystic progression, up to a clanging climax and down again decrescendo into a muffled finale. His Etude Tableau was a wonderful etching with the combined qualities of staccato Beethoven and melodious Chopin.

Then the great artist marred a wonderful program by tacking on the stupid, maundering Sonata de Petrarca of Liszt which was somewhat redeemed by the same composer's Polonaise, itself nothing much more than a martial sentence worked over and over into a fury of splendid noise. He played two Chopin Waltzes and possibly one of his own things for encores.