

# RACHMANINOFF PLAYS PERFECTIONIST ROLE

Famous Russian Pianist Is a  
Master Workman at  
the Keyboard

## CULTURED PASSION

In Beautifully-Built Program, He  
Displays Powers of Re-  
markable Allurement

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

Connoisseurs in search of a rival Mozart as a perfect workman pianist had better inquire the address of Mr. Sergei Rachmaninoff, care Steinway and Sons, New York. This long, lean Russian seems incapable of failing to give any fraction of a tone its just and poetic value, whether in chord, melody or rhythm. He is the consummate metricist to whom every note in a composition seems to be given its exact place in a diatonic solar system. Of course, he may choose to vary the pattern of any given piece from time to time, but that is the composer-pianist's prerogative.

There is very little but pure Slav in the looks of Rachmaninoff; scarcely an atom of the Slav in his playing. He has no vast undercurrent of melancholy. You cannot feel in his most wicked approach to an orgy or the saddest cadence that falls pellucidly from his fingers, any trace of Tostoyevsky or Gorky. He is technically almost pluperfect. And this would be less remarkable if he had not the sublime gift of poetic insight that alone makes any technique worth while.

He is the only pianist that ever improvised a trill here while waiting for late-comers to sit down; the only one that gives a prayerful rendering of God Save the King emerging from perfect silence; the only one that at intervals screws up and down his bench to suit the particular thing he intends to play.

### Began With Bach

He began with Bach. The prelude rippled into being as a wavelet is born from a breeze. It never lost its lovely figure. The Sarabande was the slowest dance that ever sounded from a piano; an almost dirgelike 3-4 rhythm, delicately and sombrely done. The Bourree was insignificant, except as a flood of ordered notes; better had he played the one that so many people know. He plays Bach with that subtle element known as tempo rubato, which the perfect Bachite of the old school disdained to do because he never knew how. It has become the fashion to play with Bach; and nobody should object when there are such brains behind it. But why was this Suite called English?

What is more to the point—what

was Mendelssohn driving at when he wrote the Variations Scieues? Paderewski and somebody else played these diversifications here when some experts thought them a revelation. I confess they seem to me only a brilliantly clever piece of lyric acrobatics that show off a pianist's skill without crediting him with a soul. Of course they were superbly played. Rachmaninoff seemed to take a sad joy in tickling every phrase into a nice ecstasy and in accentuating the sudden little eddying climaxes that were intended to befog the original theme.

### A Splendid Prelude.

But the piece was well chosen as a prelude to the Nocturne and Scherzo of Chopin. And it was here that the player reached his zenith. Rachmaninoff's Chopin may be cold and reserved and intellectual, but that is only to make sure that he is not carried away by feminism. The Nocturne—rather familiar, with the ethereal hymn that keeps coming back decked with all manner of intimate suggestions—seemed to come almost as a materialization at a seance. It took shape form a vapor of tone and built itself up into an apparition. Such legato could not be surpassed. Rachmaninoff has a knack of carrying one phrase on into another without demitting a vestige of the singing tone. His lyric method is wonderful. He studies the sentences as though he were speaking them to music. The Scherzo—the one with the solemnly affectionate theme that recurs all through with a varied investiture of arabesques in the top keys—seemed to be taken at a slow tempo. But Rachmaninoff can take liberties with tempo because he makes his liberties so interesting. He avoided any of the cloudy passions that seize so many pianists when they play Chopin. Perhaps he was rather introspective; certainly he was not romantic; he wanted tonal perfection, cantabiles, punctilious balance of notes in a chord,

impeccably molded rhythms, subtle nuances, not of passion, but of tone. And such tone, without a tear or a sigh.

After a brief interval he came back and played that conundrum known as the Funerailles of Liszt. Here was evident his care in building a program; from formal. Back to lyric, Mendelssohn; on with more color to Chopin; common to a real piece of fury in the funeral piece that was probably not meant for hearses and nodding plumes at all; mainly as a solemn stunt to display Liszt's enormous power at the keyboard. Dynamic, urgent, contrastive, without what is called architectonic at all, but cleverly full of sound and foam—it was all very easy to Rachmaninoff, who again declined to take more than an intellectual view of the composer except to make the piano thicken up with one.

### His Own Compositions.

His own pieces came next. What is an Etude Tableau at all? Nobody here perhaps knows. The composer did not need to know. He made them both interesting when he knew very well they never could become popular. They are pieces for high students and virtuosos; not horribly modern; not very melodic; but soundly made to be a delusion and a snare to any average pianist. Hopak by Moussirgsky, arranged by Rachmaninoff, another unknown, was so popular with its captivating dance and its trick of playing the same note rapidly and evenly with a finger of each hand that it had to be repeated.

And the finale came with more Liszt; the Spanish Rhapsody, which is just what its name implies; with blacksmith percussions in the base, fantastic fandangoes in the top keys, a tantrum of songs in the middle—and the pianist seeming to play two pianos at once. Even in this the player never relaxed his cool com-

mand of the dynamics; made his bass notes measure just so much energy and no more. Never the suspicion of an orgy. No, the pale Slav disdains that. He is powerful as the hammer of Thor, but never furious; delicate as a gossamer, but never without abiding vitality in his tone. He smites and strings the white beads in the sun. And by the perfection of a spiritualized technique he lifts the listener to a plane where tonal poetry and perfect form compel him to give the second and third encore in succession.

### MANICURIST IN FOOD WAREHOUSE

Dr. A. Middleton Hewat, medical officer of health for Fulham, said at the Institute of Hygiene, that he knew of a firm which employed several qualified manicurists to look after the hands of girls handling food.

### ISLE OF MAN'S OFFER.

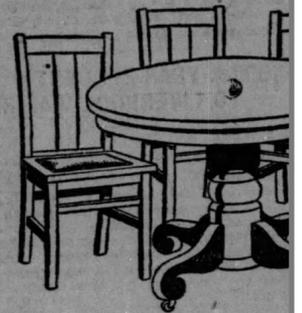
After three days' debate the Isle of Man Legislature has decided to offer £200,000 to the British government as a contribution to the war expenses, but that the money should not be raised by taxation of food.

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