

THE GENTLEMEN'S CONCERT

APPEARANCE OF M. RACHMANINOFF

It is difficult to imagine a more trying task for a composer than to interest an audience during the whole of one recital in a succession of pieces from his own pen. A programme of music by one composer, be he Beethoven, Schumann, or Chopin, is bound eventually to exercise on the listener a greater or lesser effect of lethargy, and yesterday afternoon's recital of his own works by Mr. Rachmaninoff was no exception to the rule. In this instance it was not possible to put down one's gradual decrease of interest to lack of temperament on the part of the composer-executant. Mr. Rachmaninoff has a most powerful personality, which shows itself continually in his music; but with this forcefulness and, if one may use the word, with this defiance, there goes a restlessness, a lack of placidity, which, by reason of its persistence, develops into a mannerism.

There are few really restful passages in the works given yesterday, and too much stress and turmoil, particularly when it comes in huge patches, points not so much to strength as to the hiding of weakness. We would not suggest that Mr. Rachmaninoff shows feebleness of invention or of executive power; it is rather the superabundance of energy which, both in his music and his playing, makes him appear somewhat one-sided. His technique is brilliant in the extreme and his tone-production remarkably even and clear. Perhaps this very ease and strength of execution is responsible for the difficulty and the wildly rhapsodic style which permeates all his work. The Sonata in B flat minor, a set of short pieces, and four Preludes were Mr. Rachmaninoff's contributions to the programme, and, although one has learned to expect from the Russian school a definite type of melody, in this case the thematic material was invariably individual. The style stands alone, and apart from an occasional rhythmic resemblance to Chopin, comparison with any other composer falls to the ground. The famous prelude was, naturally, included in the set of short pieces, and this Mr. Rachmaninoff played in a way which, by its pronounced and stately effect, must have astonished the audience.

The songs which Miss Esta d'Argo gave were particularly welcome in such a whirlwind of music. The rich quality of her voice made her singing of the more florid songs particularly telling. In two songs by Max Fiedler—a "Cradle Song" and "Die Musikantin"—her dramatic bent was displayed to fine advantage, and her singing of a set of Italian verses put to music by Wolf-Ferrari was shaded and tuned most effectively to the spirit of the words. Mr. R. J. Forbes played the accompaniments to the songs brilliantly, but with a degree of reticence which in some instances was, we thought, exaggerated.

A. H.