

Rachmaninoff, Russian Artist, in Piano Recital

A piano programme composed entirely of etudes was the very unusual offering of Sergei Rachmaninoff, the famous Russian pianist, who gave a recital last evening in Elmwood Music hall, this being the third concert in the Ellis series. It is ten or eleven years since this artist last appeared in this city, and during this period, half of which was one of terrible stress and storm for him, his artistic gain has been notable. It was noble and commanding art that Mr. Rachmaninoff revealed to his hearers last evening, and one marvelled that out of such years of horror could spring a growth of such ideal beauty. It is true that at his previous appearance in Buffalo Mr. Rachmaninoff was heard only in a concerto with orchestra, which did not afford the same opportunity as a recital for display of individuality, but it is indisputable that for tonal beauty, originality of treatment, and technical achievements, Mr. Rachmaninoff's playing last night far outranked his earlier performance.

The programme was so unique that it deserves complete record. It comprised two of Schumann's studies on Paganini Caprices; eight Chopin studies; five studies called Tableaux, by Rachmaninoff, a study each by Rubinstein and Scriabine, and three Liszt studies, Donce of the Gnomes, the one in D flat major and La Campanella. The Chopin group contained the studies known as the Black Key, the Butterfly, the Cello and the Aeolian Harp, as also the E major, the F major, No. 3 of opus 25, one in A minor and one in C minor. As a double encore following this group he played two of the Chopin waltzes.

Of the artist's own studies, the third one, a minor melody weaving through a filmy web of shimmering sound, pleased the most. It was a matter of course that at the end of his own group, Mr. Rachmaninoff should respond to the insistent applause with his popular Prelude in C sharp minor, to which he gave most interesting utterance, making the bass motive one of poignant, tragic appeal, rather than the stately clarion of many players. The Rubinstein study, an interlocking one for the two hands, was quite a novelty and very charming. The Scriabine composition was made lucid and effective by the pianist's clarity of performance and the manner in which he raised whatever melodic line there was into prominence, and the Liszt studies received dazlingly brilliant treatment. After his own Prelude Mr. Rachmaninoff added a lovely Barcarolle of his own, and his encore at the end of the programme was the Paderewski Minuet.

In the playing of these numbers, Mr. Rachmaninoff displayed splendid virtuosity, great individuality of interpretation and command of as exquisite a pianissimo touch as can be imagined. His muscles are of steel, but they are velvet tipped, and the loveliness of his soft passages is superlative. Certain compositions, such as the Black Key study and the Campanella, he took at breathless speed, yet never with loss of clearness. Very original was his playing of the Chopin A flat waltz, in which the upper tones, usually played as grace notes, he raised to a dignity of their own. Indeed, throughout the programme, the artist's unique interpretations held the attention and were a source of constant pleasure. A very large audience gave Mr. Rachmaninoff frequent proof of its absolute satisfaction with his wonderful playing.

M. M. H.