

Masterful Genius of Rachmaninoff Captures Hearers

Great Russian Pianist Scales Heights of Art in Local Program.

BY BERTRAM TAYLOR.

One of the few really great pianists of the world, one with whom many popular and brilliant exponents of the art of piano playing can not for a moment stand comparison, was heard yesterday afternoon at the Murat, where Sergei Rachmaninoff played under the direction of the Ona B. Talbot Fine Arts Association. The audience was a large one, but there should not have been one unoccupied chair nor a foot of standing room as a reproach to local music lovers. For not within easy recollection has a pianist so scaled the heights of his art as Rachmaninoff did yesterday.

Whether genius consists of the taking of infinite pains or not, this Russian pianist gave a fine exhibition yesterday of genius taking infinite pains. No detail was too small to be perfectly finished; no subtlety in interpretation left to chance or a stereotyped rendition that has worked out long years ago and left untouched by imagination and thought. This was the more amazing and noticeable because of the character of the program.

If there were any among yesterday's listeners who regretted the conservatism in the choice of the listed numbers, he must have abandoned his regret early in the afternoon. When considered in the light of interpretation the list was absolutely free from cliché.

In the first place, Mr. Rachmaninoff is a great master of style, which, of course, means that he is a cerebral artist. There is no limit apparently to his ability to step inside a composition and by that mental and emotional feat to make it live again. Take, for example, Mendelssohn's "Rondo Capriccioso," which figured on the program yesterday—a piece that has suffered shameful abuse at the hands of countless amateurs and players of mechanical instruments—and try to imagine what Rachmaninoff put into it to make it fresh and beautiful and even distinguished. There was something much more than virtuosity in the accurately delicate notes shaken like a spray from the finger tips, in the slow andante movement. There was romance in its worn score and a tender playfulness. And the Mozart "Variations," which appeared first on the program, was a marvel of clarity, subdued, seen in far perspective.

There are persons who are prone to judge a pianist by his playing Chopin,

of whom the present reviewer confesses to being one. In the light of this personal bias the Russian artist again proved himself of the greatest and the most understanding. There was nothing smearing in Rachmaninoff's Chopin, nothing of the facile so dear to many concert players. His rubato was perfectly in harmony with the surge and flow of that greater rhythm that governs the little changes from measure to measure.

This center group included the Ballade in F minor; a waltz and the B flat minor Scherzo. The last was heroic in proportion, the great climax all the more potent for the gentleness, the lyrical quality of the middle part, under the artist's fingers. moments of pure instrumental song. The Ballade, too, was slightly individualized and all its contrasting parts beautifully differentiated. The waltzes were delightfully sensuous and so rhythmic that they ravished the ear. A notable aspect of Rachmaninoff's playing of Chopin was his sparing use of the pedal, the manner in which he made a note sing by finger pressure alone. His use of the pedal was silver, but his abstention from it was golden.

Last on the program came Gounod's waltz from "Faust" arranged by Liszt. Again there was a contrast in moods in this display piece, the last place in the world to expect it. Stating the waltz theme in the most banal, brazen, hard, brilliant burlesque, the pianist it were a to moments of exquisite, quiet beauty and ended on a triumphantly pyrotechnical display of finger work. His fingering, by the way, is fascinating to watch. There is not a fraction of waste motion.

Of his own compositions only two were programmed, the familiar Prelude in C sharp minor and a waltz. This in C has haunted Rachmaninoff as Paderewski's minut pursued him wherever he went. The prelude has had a fatal popularity, but like the other pieces it sprang to life again under the beguiling fingers of its composer. Incidentally he played it according to popular conception, but much better than it has been heard before. The audience rose and made a demonstration after this number. The waltz proved itself a fascinating thing, intricate in harmonies, seductive in shape and rhythm.

Pictorial Melody.

Rachmaninoff writes for the piano wonderful pieces, intimate and pictorial and perfectly adapted for the instrument. The encores after this last group were all Rachmaninoff's own, a barcarolle that carried a strong suggestion of national feeling and another gay little waltz that might have come straight out of sophisticated Vienna. The other encores were in harmony with the general outlines of the program, Mendelssohn's "Spinning Song" after the first group and two Chopin waltzes after the Chopin group.

Perhaps the outstanding characteristics of this artist's playing after the nobility of his conceptions and his sense of style are his sincerity and taste. The emotion he arouses has

nothing cheap or unworthy about it because there is nothing cheap or mercenary in his art. There is endless reserve about him, and a depth of emotion that the dullest must perceive. He has no show window for the display of gaudy wares.

Yesterday's audience rose to heights of enthusiasm rarely evoked by a pianist. The sense of a great occasion brought Rachmaninoff's listeners to their feet and forward to the stage in an insistent demand for encores, a de-

mand which was granted as far as his physical powers permitted, though the clapping continued long after the final number.

The next concert in this series will take place Sunday afternoon, Feb. 1, when Mischa Levitzki will be heard in piano recital.

PERSHING AT CAMP FUNSTON.

CAMP FUNSTON, Kas., Jan. 11.—Gen. John J. Pershing arrived today for a



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