

## Serge Rachmaninoff, in Striking Recital, Enthuses Vast Crowd

Pianist, Not in Best Form,  
Most Gracious with His  
Encores.

BY RICHARD SPAMER

The Serge Rachmaninoff seen and heard by a capacity audience at the Mason last night was hardly the same man and artist that visited us two days ago and only a little while ago. Serious must have been the tribulation made on his general being by the illness which befell him in Washington recently. He came upon the stage last night unwounded by fatigue and with the shuffling gait of a convalescent. His repose approached the phase of lassitude which did not vanish until after he had depressed a number of keys and, gazing over the notes back into the string-teams had taken observation of the piano mechanical at work. It was his way of inducing silence and in lieu of the striking of several massive chords, the custom of eminent contemporaries.

Knowing well the condition he bespoke the indulgence of listeners, even in the program arrangement. Andes, rondos, morceaux, courteously entitled songs, and the like, abounded. In the place of dignity in the selections we had a Beethoven rondo and by way of anticipating popular demand, considerable Chopin, very properly some Rachmaninoff and beyond of a tour de force and programmed finale Liszt's reduction of the "Faust" Valse with Margarete's reply to her ruthless wooer neatly interposed.

The artist's performance was singularly scant in big pianism; yet however powerful an appeal his world-wide circling "Trelde" may have made, it is just a bit familiar by this time and the celebrated Chopin "Scherzo," while occasionally fervent enough, is no longer any grand recital's centerpiece.

Judging from the number of persons who had fetched along their Beethoven and Chopin scores and ostentatiously fussed over them and rustled the turning pages in vain effort to locate the place where Rachmaninoff was playing, one might have believed that he was giving a recital for advanced students of the pianoforte.

### A la Rachmaninoff.

Beethoven's Sonata, opus 21, opened the evening. It was the master with the interpreter's ad libitum excursions from the text and a darefree disregard of tradition. A crispness pervaded the staccato passages that Beethoven in his crustiest mood could never have imagined and there were roulades and trills that approached digital "travels." Evidently Rachmaninoff was playing with the score, albeit he had no score before him.

Passing from Beethoven to something indicative of the recitalist's mood, we had some truly delightful moments with Mendelssohn. The Rondo Capriccioso and the Spinneret were splendid locutions in Rachmaninoff's most wondrous style, causing professors, students, amateurs and music lovers actually to sit aghast. Not since the palmiest night of M. Godowski have we heard such flawless finger-mechanism. Closing our eyes there was risk of self-deception, positive risk of believing the wizard had slipped an electric battery or something or other into the piano and that the percussion was being produced by approved mechanical means. An impersonal quality pervaded this part of the presentation. It sounded for all the world as if Rachmaninoff was altogether concerned with the display of his finesse and that the history of the music, its place in art or the manner in which it is given by other great masters, did not matter at all to him.

He imparted a tempo and an accent to the Chopin F-minor Ballade so strange and at times weird as to defy description, to say nothing of comment. His encore numbers after this group were the popular D-flat and A-flat Valses.

Rachmaninoff's own Valse opus 10 and the unfamiliar waltz, subtitled Tableau, were mood-pictures with restrained Russian power and gloom. Lighter moments intervened in the extra numbers of his own, the Barcarolle and the sylph-like locution of the Polka de W. R.

With his group of pieces Rachmaninoff was able to arouse the audience to something like the Paderewski furor and the Prelude after the opening chord was greeted with a hearty racket, good to listen to and reminding of former and more consistently enthusiastic nights in the concert room.