

ORCHESTRA PLAYS BELLS SYMPHONY

Rachmaninoff's Great Work Presented for First Time in America

Poe's Verses Set to Singularly Vital and Vivid Score

The programme presented by the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Academy of Music, yesterday afternoon, before an audience so large as to crowd the house in very part, was out of the common in character and above the ordinary in interest, for besides the Rachmaninoff pianoforte concerto in D minor, No. 3, it included the same composer's symphony based on Edgar Allan Poe's poem of "The Bells," which had not previously been performed in America, and which proved to be an extremely vital, poignant and graphically illuminative work. It is described as a symphony and there is authority for that classification, but in the present case it is somewhat misleading, for this composition might more properly be called a cantata, in view of the circumstances that no less or even more prominence is attributed to the voices than to the instruments, and what one chiefly remembers is the singing of the soloists and especially of the chorus.

That, however, does not greatly matter. What does matter is that Rachmaninoff has set Poe's verses to a singularly vivid and vital score, a score which shows a high order of imaginative power and which expresses the sentiment of the poem with an admirable fitness and an appealing eloquence. If there were those who supposed that the bells themselves would be introduced as an outstanding element of the orchestration they found themselves mistaken. The opportunity which in this respect the verses offer has indeed been utilized, and as Dr. Stokowski in his informative commentary has remarked, "There is a sequence of bell sonorities in the symphony," but Rachmaninoff is too good and too true an artist to demand over-much upon adventurous instrumentalities for his effects, and the beauty, the value, the essential merit of this music consist in the creative skill and appreciative intelligence with which the inner and more recondite significances of the poem are apprehended, exhibited and emphasized.

In this symphony of Rachmaninoff's all the feeling with which Poe's lines are suffused, all the visions which in the receptive mind they invoke, all that there is of horror and dreadfulness which they conjure up, is suggested or portrayed, and to many a mind Rachmaninoff's wonderful music must have communicated a fresh idea and a new revelation of what the verses themselves comprise.

Capable Artists Assist

The symphony had the advantage of an extremely capable and sympathetic performance. Each of the three assisting artists, Miss Florence Hinkle, even though she was not in her best voice; Mr. Arthur Hackett, who delivered the tenor numbers with so much fluency and with such a finished diction, and Mr. Frederick Patton, the bass, whose singing possessed the important merit of clear enunciation, contributed a due share to the general enjoyment. It must also be said that a large part of the success achieved was due to the excellent work of the chorus, which had mastered the by no means easy music under the direction of Mr. Stephen S. Townsend and which, in the volume and quality of the tone it produced, in the spirit and precision of its attack, in the flexibility of its accentuations and in the consistency with which it adhered to the pitch, did credit to his instructions. No better chorus singing has been heard here for a long time, if ever, than that to which the audience listened at the Academy of Music yesterday afternoon. From time to time, as opportunity offered, the effects produced were so thrilling and electric as to be profoundly impressive. It is not necessary, but it is fitting to mention that Dr. Stokowski conducted the performance with his accustomed energy and magnetism and that his enthusiasm had a great deal to do with the splendid results produced.

The "Bells" symphony was the feature of the occasion, but not less noteworthy was the excellent performance by Rachmaninoff of his D minor concerto with which the concert opened. This is a noble work, full of emotion, rich in melody and most skilfully constructed, and it was played by Mr. Rachmaninoff with taste and delicacy and power, and with a technical ability which was never at a loss. It was a superb piece of work and the audience showed that it thought so by the heartiness of its applause and by the manner in which

it insisted upon the artist's reappear-
ing to bow his acknowledgements, for
there were not fewer than half a doz-
en recalls. The same programme will
be repeated tonight.