

Rachmoninoff's Work as Played by Himself Dazzles Big Audience

Symphony Matinee Crowd
Listens to Season's
Best Concert.

BY RICHARD SPAMER.

From year to year concert goers have observed that when, as now, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra season approaches its close, the betterment of our band's playing makes for some great musical moments. February and March have been the choice months in this relation, and when, as this week, one who may without laudation be called the world's foremost musician, is with us, giving us one of his own true masterpieces, the incentive of conductor and orchestra to rise to the occasion is easily traced in their work.

To Serge Rachmaninoff's presentment of his Concerto, No. 2 (C-minor), much of the brilliant success of yesterday's concert is due. Just as that composition, as performed by himself in cooperation with the orchestra, was one of almost perfect alignment of solo instrument with the ensemble apparatus, so, in like manner, the various choirs of the orchestra cohered better than ever before this season, and credit must be given here to the first violins which, throughout the afternoon, were as one perfect voice.

The violas, one of the conductor's most reliable coterics, manifested their usual dependability and violas and contrabassos were never heard in uncertain utterance. Even the timid second violins needed but little supervision to keep them in concert pitch. If the reeds, thin and thick, wavered at one critical moment, it is to be remembered that they are temperamental sound producers. As for the brasses, they had little more than emphasis for their part of the work, and the same may be said of the percussion.

A larger battery of tympani would have been able to bring the Schumann Symphony (No. 2 C-major), to a more impressive conclusion.

It was in the opening number, Brahms' "Tragic" Overture, opus 81, that the first violins caught the attention of the large audience. Brahms, genius of absolute music, nowhere displays his absolutism more than in this work, which must be played as written because it affords neither conductor nor players any choice of interpretation and, to use a pet political phrase, the fiddles "are held to a strict accountability."

It was a fine sight to see some fifty of them bowing in unison, as occurs several times in the rendition of the Brahms. Similar moments came in the Schumann, the somewhat too extended sostenuto assai of which is more than ordinarily difficult.

For the violins the adagio, perhaps Schumann's finest expression, was the epoch-making interval. This is one of the sentences that conductors rehearse, no matter how often or how long, until they feel sure that further improvement is impossible. According to that sense, the orchestra performed it and this contributed much toward the ovation tendered them at the close after a most facile essay of the allegro molto vivace, in bravura style.

Mr. Rachmaninoff's appearance was the signal for thunderous welcoming which, in comparison with the ovation at the conclusion of his work, was only half audible. Electric waves of ecstasy seemed to sweep over the Odeon when the concerto was finished. Three recalls each louder than the last brought forward the composer and when he struck the first chords of his world encircling prelude the house raised another joyous acclaim.

Briefly referring to Rachmaninoff's second concerto for piano and orchestra: It is without doubt the greatest composition of its class and kind in the last twenty years. We doubt whether painstaking comparison with any of these predecessors would reveal so much of true music-quality in all the shades of the term's meaning as this entirely great work. None of them has so complete a grasp of the possibilities of conjunctive pianistic and orchestral expression. And the fault is not Rachmaninoff's if no other artist will ever be able to play it as he himself plays it.