

Rachmaninoff Attracts Large Concert Crowd

BY JAMES H. ROGERS.

A wonderful exposition of the attributes that make piano playing a joy to the listener and a perfect medium of expression for the performer was set forth by Sergei Rachmaninoff last night in the Grays armory before an audience that filled the hall to the last seat.

All the remembered virtues of the Russian pianist's performance of last season were again in evidence. Again there was revealed his mastery of modulated tone, of round phrase; and with it an all-encompassing technical facility that was but the servant of an enlightened and enlightening musical intelligence.

Scintillating octaves and staccatos, the warm and pliant voicing of melody—these and, as well, the impact of massive chords and the surge of crescendo to telling climax were means to an end, and this end was the unfolding of a musical thought. Never was player more intent on the message to be proclaimed; never was one more self-effacing and less concerned with the pomp and vanities of virtuosoic display.

But withal Mr. Rachmaninoff is a highly subjective player. He has ideas of his own as to interpretation, and cares little for tradition. It is the reaction of the music upon his own perceptions that he imparts to his hearers, who are naturally free to accept or reject the validity of his preachments.

Mr. Rachmaninoff's Chopin playing is, for example, quite different from that of other great exponents of the Polish master's works. It is not to be rated above the readings of Paderewski and de Pachmann, certainly. It has its own qualities. These include a certain courtly grace, exquisite refinement of style, occasional caprices of rhythm that do recall de Pachmann (the G flat waltz was an instance), and frequent flashes of dazzling brilliancy. We have never heard either the G minor ballade or the "Barcarolle" so beautifully played.

Fortunate were we to hear such playing as this. A bit more fortunate had Mr. Rachmaninoff chosen to spend less time on music that savors so strongly of the classroom—and the classroom of an earlier day, at that.

A Mozart sonata, followed by six Mendelssohn songs without words, with a seventh as encore piece—how many pianists can hold the attention of their hearers through such a list? Mr. Rachmaninoff did this, and much more. He stirred his audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

The Mozart sonata (the one in A major with the Turkish rondo) was, indeed, marvelously played. It was as though, for a space, the piano had given way to a harpsichord. The lightness and deftness of Mr. Rachmaninoff's touch were almost past belief. And in the Mendelssohn pieces his touch was equally remarkable, though here, in contrast, largely by reason of its luscious singing quality.

Mr. Rachmaninoff played a few of his own compositions. Not enough of them for our own pleasure, nor, we are sure, for that of our fellow auditors. There is today no composer of music for the piano so versatile, so gifted, so imaginative. Most of the others are echoes of Debussy. A musician of the highest distinction, and a superb pianist as well, is this unassuming Russian.

He was tumultuously applauded. We may rest assured that his itinerary will always include an annual recital here.

It would be hard to name a pianist who has more completely won the favor of our music lovers.