

Review:

KURIER WARSZAWSKI 1908-03-28 (orig.: Polish)

Warsaw, concert date: March 27, 1908

As it turned out, this news spoke the truth: Rachmaninoff truly possesses an outstanding talent that may guarantee him worldwide fame in the future. Two of his works performed yesterday justify this prophecy: the Symphony in E minor and the Piano Suite in C major. And especially the symphony. This beautiful work is characterized by healthy musical ideas, forms framed in healthy frames. Everything here breathes health. The themes are both dramatically and lyrically tuned, sweeping in their drawing, and exquisite in their ornamentation; and the harmonies are fresh, abounding in dissonances, but not in pointless dissonances; and the classical forms of the individual movements of the symphony, modernistically expanded, but not marred by superfluous episodes, intermezzos, or parentheses; and finally, the colorful, brilliant instrumentation and the exceptionally rich polyphony, so clear in its arrangement that, listening to this symphony for the first time, it is easy to follow each voice, independently developed by the composer, even though, as happened quite often, the composer led a considerable number of such voices simultaneously. It is precisely this wholesomeness of the work's thought that clearly demonstrates Mr. Rachmaninoff's exceptional abilities. Today, he is still under the influence of Tchaikovsky, but there is no reason to doubt that the young composer will soon be able to free himself from this influence. Among the symphony's negative aspects, it is worth noting: the excessive use of harmonic effects based on a constant note [Orgelpunkt], and the monotony of tone; of the symphony's four movements, two are in the key of E, and two in A (both in major and minor). The most beautiful movement is the first allegro and the fiery finale, the least interesting adagio, which contains more good work than inspiration.

The suite is not lacking in poetic panache and evidence of its author's incisive compositional temperament, but also in rhythmic and melodic uniformity. The composer himself conducted the symphony exquisitely; clearly, he possesses considerable talent as a conductor. Mr. Rachmaninoff also played the suite, together with Mr. Melcer. In addition to these works, the orchestra played two remarkable compositions by Lyadov and Mussorgsky. Two songs by Rachmaninoff were beautifully sung by Mrs. Korolewicz-Waydowa.

[Translation: (c) J. Falley]