

Review:

Arnhemsche courant 1908-12-08 (orig: Dutch)

An ovation, so spontaneous and warm which the composer and pianist Rachmaninoff yesterday experienced after the performance of his second piano concerto is an absolute rarity; it means even more that, at least regarding his pianistic performance, such reaction of the audience can't have been triggered by superficialities, especially at the occasion of a new concerto. Evidently, composition and playing must have been very imposing. But nobody will be surprised because the second concerto by the sensitive Russian composer is one of these modern works with enough qualities to be regarded as one of the best that has been heard here during the last years, and, like it was played yesterday, it has to be successful everywhere. The composer doesn't deny his nationality. The specific Russian music, known from works by Tchaikovsky and others, has also influenced this opus for a great deal, but it cannot be said of this concerto that beside honest and warmly felt fragments, there would be parts that are close to banality – as this is the case with almost all other Russian composers.

The concerto starts with heavily ascending chords – very promising and captivating, immediately positioning in the middle of noble thoughts, leading to a theme for strings, full of sentiment, played around by the piano. The whole work is full of melody. The first two parts are dominated by some melancholic tint, whose intensity drops a bit to half-shades, but the music gives the impression of honesty; it wells from the heart and speaks to the heart in a way that one keeps following the composer with increasing interest in the sound- and colour-rich exposition of his material and its interesting elaboration. Because this opus is rich in sound and colour, in the perfect balance of lights and shadows, in the tasteful equilibrium between piano and – interesting, melodious, full of temperament – orchestra, in the build-up of the parts blending into each other in a logical and easy to understand way. Rhythmic, deeply moved inside but also witty and brilliant – these are the most important characteristics of this music. At first hearing, there is once the impression that the composer drops an idea too quickly in order to move on to another one, and one element in the finale is a bit superfluous, but what is the meaning of these trifles with regard to the many great qualities of this music and to Rachmaninoff having given witness of his very great compositional talent and mastery. We could prove our appreciation with many examples and we can be sure that repeatedly listening or studying the score would reveal a lot more beauties than what we heard at this first audition. But what we heard was far enough to justify our admiration. We already mentioned the strong melodious character of the work, and where the melos clearly reveals the nationality of the creator, the more one remarks that the work doesn't become less interesting, not even in the Finale where the exposition is repeated. This is also thanks to the way in which orchestra and piano relate to each other: the pianist-composer didn't give the piano a predominant role and in several places it acts as a complement to the orchestra. But a complement that has a meaning for the soul of the music by offering relief and demanding even more attention for the sections where the piano does have the main role, where it prepares a mood or closes a period. Because of all this, the acquaintance with this concerto was a real pleasure, the music's melancholy didn't slacken the attention, the warm and sometimes passionate melodies let one sympathize with the mood of this noble art where the

sad gloomy and the merry have touched the soul. But Rachmaninoff is not just the composer of the large works: after the intermission he played three solo preludes: a simple “Lento” with an interesting harmonisation, beautiful in construction and mood; a “Tempo di minuetto” with an effective descending figure in the bass, a more agitated middle section and a very interesting postlude, and an “Alla Marcia”, a pithy rhythmic, lively composition with a Slavic centre part: all “genre pieces” proving his extraordinary talent and which can be a welcome alternation for pianists who still play encores that one hears all the time. The soloist was heavily applauded, inciting him to offer a small encore: the well-known Prelude op. 3, no. 2. Not only the composer but the pianist as well fully deserved the success. He certainly belongs to the top of the greats. Useless to mention the technical qualities of his playing: unlike vocalists, instrumentalists of today only appear on stage when they have reached a very high level of development. For Rachmaninoff, there are no difficulties: he marvellously played the very demanding concerto with technical perfection, a very rich touch, intimate poetry but also robust power. And how perfect his mastery of this work: he who wrote this moody music, who deeply felt this temperamental music and who performed it deeply moved inside but outwardly so perfectly calm. His simple appearance and performance was also reflected in his way of playing, but this was also majestic and extremely impressive.

After the concert, the artist transferred his success to the orchestra. Wonderful how Mengelberg and his orchestra have understood the composer’s intentions **after just one rehearsal** and have given a glowing rendition that even increased the impact of the work. A playing-together of which Rachmaninoff showed very pleased and entitled to unlimited admiration. (...)

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