

NEW MUSIC BY A RUSSIAN

NOTHING REVOLUTIONARY IN WORK BY RACHMANINOFF.

But His Third Pianoforte Concerto, as Played by the Composer With the New York Symphony Orchestra, Succeeds Because of Its Real Sincerity.

The latest European composer to entrust to an American conductor and orchestra the launching of an important musical work upon the uncertain tides of public appreciation is Sergei Rachmaninoff. This Russian visitor chose yesterday afternoon's concert of the New York Symphony Society, under Walter Damrosch's direction, for the initial performance of his third concerto for pianoforte, and he played the solo part himself.

The large audience at the New Theatre, which had already listened to Mozart's "Jupiter" symphony, and was afterward to hear two shorter pieces of orchestral music, received the concerto with attention and when it was finished there was hearty applause, which persisted until the composer had come forward half a dozen times to bow his thanks and gratification. Perhaps some auditors wanted to hear Mr. Rachmaninoff play his popular prelude in C sharp minor, but he did not do so. It was evident, however, that after making allowance for the ingratiating influence of the composer's personality there was genuine interest in this new music.

Perhaps the chief factor in this interest was the obvious sincerity and expressiveness of what Mr. Rachmaninoff had to say in the score. The concerto was too long and it lacked rhythmic and harmonic contrast between the two themes of the first movement and between the opening allegro and the second movement, which the composer has called an intermezzo. But in spite of these conditions and of the absence of digital display for its own sake, which usually wins easy and not very valuable applause, there was an influential quality in the work. Its opening theme, in D minor, is tinged with melancholy of the sort typical in late years of a good deal of Russian music. This is the melancholy of inactivity of what may be resignation or submission or distrust of one's own powers, and it does not rise, as did Tchaikowsky's, to the pitch of surging passion or high tragedy.

Russia's present-day composers have been charged before now with failing to reflect in their music the depth of the national feeling under the stress of recurrent periods of political and social unrest. Rachmaninoff has been looked to among the younger men as likeliest after Glazounoff to attain a broad nationalism of idea and expression. He has not done so in this concerto unless the outside world is laboring under a delusion as to what real Russia is. He has avoided, on the other hand, the artificial gaudiness of officialdom despite his recent elevation to an important post in the musical department of what is equivalent in St. Petersburg to a national bureau of the fine arts.

The new concerto then may be taken as a purely personal utterance of the composer, and it has at times the character of an impromptu, so unstudied and informal in its musical speech and so prone too to repetition. Rachmaninoff writes in modern orchestral language and he has been influenced, naturally enough, by Tchaikowsky, but he is not an extremist. His themes are clearly marked and are based upon harmonic progressions that have been generally accepted. The D minor melodic idea, to which reference has been made, is subjected to intelligible development, and so is the very Russian second theme. In the first movement there is a long passage for pianoforte alone, interrupted felicitously by a phrase sung successively by flute, oboe and horn, which gives rhythmic variety and one of the few opportunities for brilliant fingerwork. The intermezzo is sketchy and it leads without pause to the finale, which is a brisk allegro ending with a truly vigorous rush that strikes a note of breadth and power.

The same mood of honesty and simplicity and the single pursuit of musical beauty without desire to baffle or astonish, dominated Mr. Rachmaninoff's playing of his new concerto. The pianist's touch had the loving quality that holds something of the creative and his execution was sufficiently facile to meet his self-imposed test. Sound, reasonable music thus, though not a great or memorable proclamation. Mr. Damrosch and the orchestra played from the manuscript score, and their task, which was not too heavy, was performed with ease.

The Mozart symphony, which opened the programme, was played with clean cut precision, and its scale of tonal values was well chosen. Unfamiliar was the "Arioso," by Edouard Lalo, and a good example of its decorative kind. Chabrier's "Arioso Joyeux," bravely played, completed the afternoon's doings.

It is pleasant to record the marked improvement of the acoustic conditions, produced by boring in the stage with light walls and a ceiling, which sent the tone out into the auditorium instead of allowing it to be lost in the flies.