

THE THOMAS ORCHESTRA.

The presence of Sergei Vassilievitch Rachmaninoff as soloist with the Thomas orchestra was responsible for the presentation of an entire Russian program at yesterday's matinee. The results added luster to a fame that is being clouded by the passing vogue of certain German extremists, as well as by the taint of hysteria and artificiality that attaches to most of the Russians, notably to the foremost of the school, Tschalkowsky.

Mr. Rachmaninoff may congratulate himself that his music escapes that taint completely. He was represented generously on the program, for to him was accorded the exceptional honor of appearing as soloist in his own concerto and as visiting conductor of his symphonic poem, "The Island of the Dead." In both capacities Mr. Rachmaninoff earned the applause that the public bestowed with eager hands. His scores bear witness to his splendid knowledge of orchestral possibilities, and his mastery of the baton is equaled by his virtuosity as a pianist.

"The Island of the Dead" is written after the well known painting of the celebrated Swiss artist, Anton Boecklin, whose pictures, by the way, have been the source of inspiration for at least one other composer. The subject would suggest that Rachmaninoff shares the same unwholesome temperamental tendencies that are responsible for the shortcomings of most of his compatriots among the composers; but, while his symphonic poem is necessarily as somber in color as the picture that inspired it, it is so filled with fine musical inspiration, so alive with unique rhythmical interest, and so close knit in its musical structure that it can safely be classed as one of the significant novelties of the present season, and there have been few indeed. It owes its large measure of originality to its rhythmical life, which is much more than a clever exploitation of the unusual quintuple pulsation. Rachmaninoff shares in a measure that faculty of making the rhythmical pulse a magnetic force which has been the chiefest virtue of the great composers from Bach and Beethoven to Cesar Franck and Debussy. His melodic inspiration bears no hallmark of the midnight oil

such as clings ever to the creations of Richard Strauss, but finds its certain source in this pervading rhythmical life. The harmonic color which he applies from a lavish palette likewise serves to emphasize the rhythmical climaxes of the work; and very convincing climaxes they are. The waves of sound, that throb so certainly to the curious fivefold pulse, roll up to mighty heights around that stern and forbidding island that stands, inscrutable and yet serene, the symbol of that final mystery that dissolves all life's mysteries.

The Thomas orchestra has achieved no performance that surpassed the reading of this eloquent symphonic poem under the composer's direction. The exceptional responsiveness of this body of players has had no such convincing demonstration as was afforded by the certainty and sympathy with which they answered to his every intention. Seemingly the orchestra needs most to have the interest of the players constantly stimulated, and Mr. Rachmaninoff, as conductor and as soloist, possessed the necessary authority to accomplish this, for the accompaniment to the concerto was supplied with an accuracy and sympathy that left truly nothing to be desired. It is only just to add that the performance of concerto and symphonic poem alike brought fresh and convincing evidence of the fitness of concertmaster pro tem, Becker to be appointed to that position permanently.

Of the concerto it is not possible to speak in such glowing terms as the symphonic poem evoked. Yet, it is still a significant work, as modern piano concertos go. It, too, shares that rhythmical vitality which is the chiefest excellence of the orchestral composition which preceded it. It has an abundance of interesting thematic material and, save for one moment in the second movement, when the composer made the mistake of intrusting the melody to the piano in single tones unsupported by a harmonic background, and thereby unhappily contrasted the short lived tone of the piano with the beautiful sustinato of the woodwinds, it afforded a most effective exploita-

tion of pianistic device. Its one other fault would seem to lie in its undue length. It is not so long as some of the older piano concertos, but it exceeds the happy maximum of interest established by a much abused work, the Liszt E flat major concert, by some ten minutes. And ten minutes seem very long, indeed, in the duration of a piano concerto.

Mr. Rachmaninoff is a brilliant pianist. He possesses that sensitive control of tone which is the surest indication of pianistic mastery, and adds thereto a facility that made light work of the most inconsiderable difficulties of the work and a power and authority that can emanate only from a nature richly endowed with the spirit of music. In response to applause more spontaneous and insistent than the season has thus far witnessed at Thomas concerts, he gave as an encore his familiar C sharp minor prelude, to the manifest delight of the student element in the audience.

The program opened with Glazeunow's pompous and empty "Overture Solennelle," which was read accurately, if with a certain resignation and sense of inevitableness, by the orchestra. Inevitable is a word one may use advisedly in describing this somewhat trite number. It is the kind of music that follows such a well defined and obvious line that one is able to anticipate the conclusion before the premise is fully stated. If one add that the air of resignation that one thought to perceive in the manner of the players was no less certainly to be apprehended on the part of the hearers, the not momentous event is sufficiently chronicled.

Tschalkowsky's orchestral fantasia, "Francesca di Rimini," made effective close to the program, which will be repeated tonight.

GLENN DILLARD GUNN.

The Chicago String Quartet.

This morning at 11 o'clock the Chicago String quartet will present in the foyer of Orchestra hall, a program that will include the Schubert D minor and Mozart E flat major quartets and the Dvorak tertetto. The admission is to holders of season tickets only.