

## RACHMANINOFF AS CONDUCTOR

Russian Composer Directs First Performance Here of His "Isle of Death."

The ministrations of the Russian Symphony Orchestra continue to be features of certain Thursday nights of the musical season. Last evening the third concert of that organization in Carnegie Hall brought forth an audience of a larger size than usual, which might have been explained by the fact that Sergei Rachmaninoff, the Russian composer, who several times this season has appeared as a pianist, playing his own works, last night appeared for the first time in New York as a conductor, directing the first New York performance of his symphonic poem, "The Isle of Death."

This new composition was inspired by Arnold Boecklin's more or less celebrated picture of the same name, which hangs in the Leipzig Museum. Arnold Boecklin did for certain German galleries what Gustave Moreau has done for certain Parisian galleries, that is, filled them with distorted visions of a more than imaginative eye. However, this particular picture, which occasionally looms familiar in engraved copies from stationers' windows, depicts only an island with towering cliffs, fringed with majestic cypress trees. Near the shore is a boat bearing a bier, by which stands a white-robed figure.

Rachmaninoff's description in tones of this picture is more or less new. It was played for the first time in Moscow about a year ago, and has since been heard in Berlin and other Continental cities. It was played in Chicago in November, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of the composer, gave it a performance two months ago.

Russian music in general, and Rachmaninoff's music in particular, is weighted down with a melancholy, which seems to be racial in its insistence. It is but natural under the circumstances that this composer should turn with a sort of gruesome delight to so congenial a subject for his inspiration. His music in this instance is written more or less in the form of a funeral march, with a deep and insistent rhythm and figurations in the strings which seem to be intended to represent waves washing against the sides of the boat with its sad burden. However, beyond the aforesaid rhythm and a certain melancholic mood, unrelieved in its monotony, the content of the "tone poem" is not important.

The melodic outline is scarcely apparent, and there are neither strange harmonic combinations nor instrumental effects of sufficient interest to divert the ear. It was possibly the composer's intention to show that death is as empty as life. Under the inspiration of the composer's baton the band developed qualities of sonority and precision which it has hitherto given little evidence of possessing.

The programme ended with a performance of Rachmaninoff's second piano forte concerto, which he played himself. This is a work which is not worth such frequent performances as it has received this season, and not in any way comparable to Rachmaninoff's third concerto. The orchestra, under the direction of Mr. Altschuler, played Arensky's variations for strings on a theme by Tschalkowsky and Tschalkowsky's "Romeo and Juliet" fantasia.