

NEW RUSSIAN MUSIC HEARD.

Rachmaninoff's "Island of the Dead"
Conducted by Composer.

Sergei Rachmaninoff figured last night at the Russian Symphony Society's concert at Carnegie Hall as composer, conductor and pianist. He directed the first New York performance of his symphonic poem, "The Island of the Dead," and his announced duties included also the playing of the solo part in his second pianoforte concerto, already known here. The remainder of last night's programme comprised Tchaikowsky's fantasy overture, "Romeo and Juliet," and Arensky's variations for strings on the theme of a Tchaikowsky part song, "Christ when a Child a Garden Made." Modest Altschuler conducted everything but the new symphonic poem.

"The Island of the Dead," Rachmaninoff's latest work, was confessedly inspired by Arnold Boecklin's well known picture. The island in the painting rises abruptly from a calm sea under a windless sky. The solemn stillness of the place is enhanced by sombre cypress trees. A boat approaches the harbor, bearing a coffin, beside which stands a figure in white robes. The remoteness and the profound peace of the vision set upon canvas by the Swiss painter have been the subject of much appreciative writing.

Rachmaninoff in his symphonic poem did not make a musical paraphrase of Boecklin's picture. He began by suggesting a mood as sombre as the mysterious island itself, but this gave place to dramatic episodes, now poignant and now turbulent. The composer apparently used the picture as a point of departure, returning to a contemplation of its mournful beauty only after wanderings far afield.

The symphonic poem might in fact have stood on its own qualities without the aid of a programmatic title. There was sufficient evidence of a musical pattern, including a persistent and effective employment of the "Dies Irae," and there were climaxes which under the commanding baton of Mr. Rachmaninoff were of horrendous power. The score is colorful, without orchestral extravagance, and throughout its considerable length, the composer's earnest sincerity, was manifest. The Russian visitor showed here, as he is reported to have done in Boston, that he is a conductor capable of getting what he wants.

The orchestra has seldom been heard to such advantage. Mr. Rachmaninoff was warmly applauded.

The performance of Tchaikowsky's "Romeo and Juliet" was also commendable, the orchestra responding readily to Mr. Altschuler's bidding.