

RACHMANINOFF FEATURE OF BOSTON CONCERT

Russian Pianist Scores a Triumph in His Own Concerto for Piano and Orchestra

Sergei Rachmaninoff, the Russian composer and pianist, was the feature of the concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra last evening at the Academy of Music. He played his own concerto in C minor for piano and orchestra, and showed himself to be equally great as creator and as interpreter.

The composition is not a new one to Philadelphia, having been played here by the composer some ten years ago and by other pianists since, but it is doubtful if so impressive a performance of the work has ever been heard in this city, even by Mr. Rachmaninoff himself at his previous appearance. Its general tone is melancholic, despite the "scherzando" title of the finale, as indeed much of his music is apt to be, and it was played as it seems to have been composed, as an integral part of the nature of the man.

Of Mr. Rachmaninoff's pre-eminence as a pianist little need be said. The listener lost sight of the manifest technical difficulties of the concerto in the somber but satisfying message of its musical content. Its themes are noble and the development of them, both in the solo part and in the equally important orchestral parts, are consistent and dignified, as befits their character. The orchestra has much to do, both with the announcement and the development of the thematic material, and the piano is used largely as an obligato instrument, a matter which Mr. Rachmaninoff never for a moment lost sight of in his artistic and masterly interpretation.

The accompaniment of the concerto might have been better. The scoring of the orchestral parts is very heavy, the full modern orchestra being used, even to the tuba, bass drum and cymbals. Several times the accompaniment was so heavy as nearly to obscure entirely the solo part, and there was considerable "wobbling" in spots in several of the instruments, suggesting an insufficient number of rehearsals for a competition in which the relation of solo part and orchestra is so intimate. In spite of this, however, Mr. Rachmaninoff scored a deserved triumph for a masterly work artistically performed.

The remainder of the program was devoted to purely orchestral works. It began with an orchestral suite from Cesar Franck's symphonic poem "Psyche," followed (after the concerto) by Saint-Saens's symphonic poem, "Phaeton," and by Fauré's suite from the stage music to Haraucourt's comedy, "Syllock," and concluding with Weber's "Eury-anthe" overture.

The Franck number consists of the orchestral parts of a composition for chorus and orchestra entitled "Psyche." It is written to a program, which must be all the more closely followed by the listener in the absence of the vocal parts. Though one of Franck's mature works, it can hardly be called one of his greatest ones, although the third movement is full of reminiscences, both in rhythm and in orchestration, of the finale of the great symphony in D minor. Mr. Rabaud read the work with sympathy, and it was fairly well played, although in places the orchestra did not seem to be so well in hand as might be desired, and there was occasional "wobbling" of leading parts noticed later in the concerto.

The best playing of the evening was done in the Saint-Saens's "Phaeton." Here the orchestra seemed to be under better control and played with more unity and better balance of the parts than in any other number. The Fauré suite consists of four short numbers, melodic and rational in composition. However, it is simply French stage music of the better sort, and its inclusion in a symphony program may well be questioned. They were well played, as, in a general way, was the Weber overture, although in places in the latter the sustained chords of the brass drowned out the melodic figurations of the strings and reed instruments.

While the orchestra played its program better than it performed its last concert, it still does not appear to be under that absolute control of the leader which is necessary to perfect orchestral performance, while there can be no doubt that the unity of playing, the accuracy of attack and release of notes in the various choirs, which the old Boston Orchestra had to so high a degree, has not been regained. The lack of tonal balance may be due to an unfamiliarity with the Academy, but it was apparent in all the numbers except the Saint-Saens symphonic poem. It was especially noticeable in the fortissimos, while at no time during the concert was the beautiful pianissimo shown in the December concert, very soft but still maintaining the color of the various instruments, revealed.