

THE CHICAGO

### Rachmaninoff Returns After Nine Years and Draws Record Crowd

If Sergei Rachmaninoff's audience of yesterday was, more than anything else, a tribute to the composer of the C-sharp-minor prelude, then that familiar fragment is one of the most valuable and vital of all piano-pieces; no other pianist in at least three years has drawn such a crowd in Chicago. For the third successive Sunday, a supplementary audience was lined up on the stage in Orchestra hall. The crowd was not special in the sense of racial, as for some of the violinists; and it was a liberal amplification of the general gathering to be found at most of the recitals by first-class pianists who come here. Of course, knowledge of and reverence for Rachmaninoff is his other and more important aspects had something to do with yesterday's outpour; his second symphony is a virile and popular matter in the orchestra's ready repertoire; and he was liked well when, nine years ago, he visited with the organization as conductor.

The Russian has a definite and an insistent personality; and this will carry him farther in the United States than his especial style of playing his own and others' music in recital while more gifted pianists plead in vain for the paying throngs. He seemed a giant at the keyboard in Beethoven and Chopin. In his own matter and in Liszt's, and he really was not naive for this blessing of personality plus a shrewd and well-controlled trick of showmanship. In the final part of Beethoven's sonata known best as No. 10, in three bits of Chopin, and in Liszt's seventh rhapsody, Rachmaninoff played as if his purpose were to exhibit to the audience just how each piece was composed; as if bent on holding a director's clinic rather than putting through the design.

As playing, it was hard, forceful, sometimes brilliant, with a hammer effect, as from a reproducing device, when he was bent upon being especially literal. He was not "reverent," as musicians like to say, or delicate, but analytic and stark; and well, to use the word again, literal. When he went into his own group, he was different: two of his preludes and two other pieces, including a sparkling and old-fashioned polka, came out shapely and with a certain succulence which persisted against his steel-fingered method. And, as was humanly inevitable, he added the prelude in C-sharp-minor, and enraptured everybody present by his way with it. Even the professional pianists in the house did not sneer.

Rachmaninoff takes a big penetrating tone from the keyboard, and did not—save, again, in his own music—get it into the air, to hang there in the vibrations that make the "song" of the piano. Even in Chopin's three pieces, including the great nocturne in C-sharp-minor, the melody seemed to expire ere it left the keyboard.

Ricardo Martin, usually of the opera, tried a recital in Kimball hall, and easily conveyed the impression that he was without good counsel in the empire. His voice was even better than it ever before has seemed to be; and it was, even when he went into perilous, uncertain high, a matter of he-tones. But he lacked the style, the taste, and the diction for such rare gems as Gloriano's "Caro mio ben," Paganini's "Nina," and Sordani's "Bornei pure"—three exacting examples of clean song; and his English was atrocious in pieces by Chadwick and Burleigh. Also, there is a traditional and well-kept department for recital which Mr. Martin did not carry to his task. Isaac Van Grove, who played the accompaniments with skill and brains, further participated with two small groups for piano. F. D.

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