

MUSIC

By Richard Aldrich

Rachmaninoff Night at The Festival.

The second performance in the Oratorio Society's music festival took place last evening in the Seventy-first Regiment Armory. The audience was large, as it was on the opening night. The program was devoted to the works of Serge Rachmaninoff, the Russian composer, now staying in New York, and he himself was a participant as soloist in his second piano concerto and accompanist in a group of his songs.

It had also been announced that he would conduct his cantata, "Spring-time," which was set down in the big program book as new and sung for the first time in America. But he did not conduct it, being unwilling to put upon his arm the strain of conducting, when he was also to play the piano the same evening. Not was the cantata given for the first time, for it had been sung here by the Schola Cantorum.

It might have been predicted that a program made up wholly of Mr. Rachmaninoff's music would have fitted ill in a festive schéma. Beautiful, original, strong as it is, there is a certain melancholy strain in it, a national strain, that tends toward monotony in large amounts. Yet the result was more fortunate than such a prediction. The audience was evidently deeply stirred by the whole program and let its feelings be shown in abundant applause, much of which was directed toward the composer whenever he was visibly in a position to receive it.

But, at all events, the pieces on the program were none of them well adapted to performance in the vast spaces of the 71st Regiment's stronghold. The cantata does not offer many opportunities for deploying great choral masses, and this fact was recognized in the reduction of the size of the chorus.

It needs finish, a fine adjustment of dynamics, an abundance of shading, and these are the things that it did not get. The choral singing was inferior in attack, in precision, and in quality to that heard on Tuesday evening. The baritone soloist was not George Baklanoff, as the program book had it, but Royal Dameron, who sang well. The composition itself has the individuality of expression that marks Mr. Rachmaninoff's work; it has beauty, freshness and buoyancy, and innumerable interesting details in the harmonic structure and in the orchestral accompaniment. But it should be heard in a smaller place from a smaller chorus more certain of the music.

The chorus was heard only once again, in the a cappella motet "Laud ye the Name of the Lord," also set down as new and sung for the first time in America. It is religious music of deep feeling and expression, and it was better sung than the cantata. It so impressed the audience that its repetition was called for.

"The Isle of the Dead," the symphonic poem after the noted painting, often reproduced, of Renold Böcklin, is one of the more familiar as well as one of the more striking of Mr. Rachmaninoff's orchestral compositions. It had been already heard here earlier in the season under at least more favorable surroundings. The orchestra did itself credit in the performance, and Mr. Dameron strove vigorously to elucidate its spirit and its effects of climax.

Miss Sophie Braslau sang three of Mr. Rachmaninoff's songs in the original tongue, for which he played the accompaniments himself. The most familiar was the brilliant "Floods of Spring"; the others were more typically Russian in their melancholy strain, and the one that he added as an encore strongly Oriental. Miss Braslau's voice sounded remarkably beautiful in its typical contralto color, and its power filled the hall. Some of this power was gained by forcing, and with a consequent sharpness of pitch; but the beauty of the voice was scarcely affected.

Finally Mr. Rachmaninoff played his second piano concerto, and again it must be said that armories are no places for piano concertos.