

# MUSIC

By OLIN DOWNES.

## Serge Rachmaninoff's Recital.

Serge Rachmaninoff is certainly one of the simplest and the greatest pianists now before the public. His recital yesterday afternoon in Carnegie Hall did not discover this fact; it only reminded us of it. No one projects a musical ideal, a dramatic emotion, with less of self-advertisement in the communication. No one is more regardless of customary means of attracting or flattering a public, and few indeed are those who, with less visible effort, command a greater mastery of the technic and the magic of the keyboard.

Yesterday Mr. Rachmaninoff played the rarely heard *Andantino*, and *Variations of Schubert-Tausig*; the *Schubert-Liszt "Wanderer" Fantasie*; the *E flat minor Intermezzo* and the *G minor Ballade*, op. 118, of Brahms; Chopin's *Rondo*, op. 16, the *F major Nocturne* and *E minor Waltz*; "*Fairy Tales*" in *F minor*, op. 26, and *E minor*, op. 20, of Medtner; Rachmaninoff's *Prelude in G major* and the *Rakoczy March of Liszt*—these and many encores, including Mr. Rachmaninoff's transcription of Schubert's "*Wohin*."

The exquisite theme which is the basis of Schubert's variations is more notable, on the whole, than the variations themselves, and perhaps Mr. Rachmaninoff was only warming to his work in their performance. The playing of the "*Wanderer*" fantasie was the most imaginative, the most beautiful and romantic that it has been this reviewer's privilege to hear. The piece had in Mr. Rachmaninoff's hands an extraordinary compactness and grandeur. There are moments here when Schubert, the lyricist, the singer of haunting songs, becomes Promethean in his utterance, and when the piano is hard put to it to suggest the orchestral span and sonority of his conception. Mr. Rachmaninoff painted a magnificent and heroic canvas, and this with surpassing power, which he never abused, which he apportioned and employed with suggestion rather than merely exterior effect. Against tonal backgrounds like the sunset or a thunderous sky appeared the melody of Schubert in its various transformation, now rock-hewn in majesty and severity of outline, now wondrously tender, poignant, searching the heart. By turns intimate and dramatic of mood, the piece nevertheless assumed the coherency and the great sweeping lines of a symphony. It is indeed a precursor of the symphonic poems of Liszt and the cyclic symphonic forms of the moderns, containing, on the basis of a single great theme, all the elements and the sections of the structure of the classic masters. All these elements Mr. Rachmaninoff conserved and summed up in his performance, which profoundly impressed the audience.

His playing of Brahms was appropriately in quite another vein, but a union of intellectual and poetic qualities demanded by the music of that master. The tragic undercurrent of the intermezzo gave place to the romantic, though unspecified tale of the ballade—the tale which might have come from a castle on a stormy coast, and a strange song sung by the tossing waves or by the voice of imprisoned fair within the tower. But Brahms left explanations to his music, and perhaps it is wise for commentators to refrain from substituting others of their own.

It was a great pleasure, by way of another contrast, to hear Chopin's early rondo which is neither serious nor profound music, but a perfectly delightful piece in a sublimated salon style. Chopin is naïve, childlike, brilliant with a brilliancy which is only the apotheosis of the kind of show piece that European drawing rooms knew in the '30s and '40s. Playing this music, Mr. Rachmaninoff caught precisely its note, performing it with elegance, esprit, a grace and freedom in the singing of the pretty melodies which made the thing an inspired work of art. The performance

of the nocturne—the melancholy and sultry opening, the wildly dramatic interlude, and the return to the early mood—was one of the climaxes of a memorable afternoon. The charming pieces of Medtner were played in a manner that would surely have delighted that composer. The playing of the *Rakoczy* march was in the true "tzigane" manner, lordly, extravagant, flashing with tone-colors and melodic ornaments, and a conclusion of intoxicating bravura.

All this without a gesture toward the gallery; without so much as flourish of wrist and arm; with a sincerity, a simplicity and a sovereign power of head, hand and heart that made for a finer vision and greater happiness in those who listened. To write of such a concert is necessarily to employ superlatives, and also to realize the inadequacy of words to describe what was not merely interpretative, but creative evocation of music.