

MUSIC

By OLIN DOWNES.

The Philadelphia Orchestra.

Every pianist and apparently every music-lover of professional or unprofessional stripe who could crowd into Carnegie Hall was there last night to assist, as the French say, at the appearance of Sergei Rachmaninoff, composer and pianist, with Mr. Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

There were first performances in New York of Mr. Rachmaninoff's Fourth Piano Concerto and his settings for chorus and orchestra of three Russian folk-songs, "The Drake and the Duck," "Oh! My Johnny," and "Powder and Paint." These, according to Lawrence Gilman, the informative programmatist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, are the first compositions that Mr. Rachmaninoff has produced since he made this country his home nine years ago, and they are fresh from his pen.

The concerto was finished last Summer; the songs were finished even more recently. First performances anywhere took place in Philadelphia the 18th of this month. The audience last night waited impatiently for the distinguished musician and virtuoso, applauding him at every possible opportunity during and after his performance.

The fourth piano concerto is wholly characteristic of its composer in the melancholy and sensuousness of the singing themes, the alternation of vigorous, sometimes savage, rhythms, and the brilliant and exacting part for the piano. The instrumentation is very sonorous and sometimes heavy. Mr. Rachmaninoff eschews modernism of harmony or of development. The concerto has three movements, the last two of which are connected. So far as form and idiom are concerned this work could have been written by Anton Rubinstein.

It cannot be said that the concerto, aside from the expertness of writing, offers very much that is fresh or distinguished. The characteristic turns of Rachmaninoff's musical speech are encountered. The first movement opens promisingly, with a theme sharply outlined by the piano over the pulsating accompaniment of the orchestra. But this theme is not carried very far, and the second theme, lacking decided physiognomy, takes some time to make itself felt.

It is in the course of the development that the movement reaches a bold and dramatic climax and some excellent measures of coda. The slow movement has poetic contrast of the piano and the orchestra in a kind of dialogue. But there is little evolution of ideas, and the constant reiteration of the main theme becomes ineffectual. The finale is a long movement, too long for its ideas, and there are pages that smell of midnight oil.

Toward Mr. Rachmaninoff, the composer of the concerto, there were the reservations to which references have been made. For the pianist and virtuoso there can only be the highest praise. Mr. Rachmaninoff is exceptional among his colleagues for the authority and intellectual power of his playing. No one carves out a melodic line with more strength and simplicity, and in point of virtuosity and a special ability to cope with an orchestra he has few rivals. It is safe to say that a poor opinion of his music heard last night is not very flattering to its quality, since such a performance would have made almost any music exciting.

The songs have a unique character. Texts and melodies are of folk derivation, but there is elaborate orchestral commentary of an original and even, at moments, an introspective character, which is of course the spirit of the composer. Whether the simplicity of the folk refrains, sung for the most part in unison by the voices, with elaborate and highly important orchestra commentary is congruous and of esthetic justification, is something to be determined after repeated hearings.

The songs as they stand, or as they were sung last night, were not heard to the best advantage. The voices were too few for the prevailing full and heavy instrumentation; the singing, especially of the opening chorus, was rather gingerly. A different balance might have been desirable for the full effect of the writing.

The concert ended with Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" overture, with its unforgettable theme of glowing, youthful passion and longing—one of the most beautiful themes that Tchaikovsky, much influenced by Italian music, ever composed. There are pages of the loveliest and most searching expression in this overture, one of the youthful Tchaikovsky's first important compositions, and one that introduced him to the public.

The performance was not only vigorous, it was excessively noisy and emphatic, as if the audience had to have shouted in its very ears the significance of each phrase and climax. The "Romeo and Juliet" overture is noisy enough, without that. Mr. Stokowski, conducting with his left arm, achieved sweeping climaxes and sang the love music superbly, but he was inclined to emphasize the vulgarities of the music rather than its distinctions.

The Malkin Trio.

Punctually last night on the stroke of eight the Malkin Trio, Jacques Malkin, first violinist; Manfred Malkin, pianist, and Joseph Malkin, 'cellist, began their concert in Aeolian Hall. Much of this concert must go unreported, because of other conflicting performances of the evening. Enough of it was heard to establish the fact of an excellent ensemble of artists whose abilities have been proved long before this and whose performances were characterized by a fine musicianship and sincerity in the service of music which dismissed any thought of individual prominence or vainglory.

The works performed were the Brahms piano trio, op. 8 and the long Tchaikovsky piano trio with the variations, of which two were omitted. In the opening movement of the first trio there were excellent balance and full expression of the virile spirit of the composer. Manfred Malkin, pianist, has an ample technic and a full musical tone. In this movement were also evident the sensitive style of Jacques Malkin, violinist, and the body and smoothness of tone of Joseph Malkin, an admirable interpreter, and the first 'cellist of the New York Symphony Orchestra. There was an audience of good size and warm applause for the performers.