

MUSIC

By OLIN DOWNES.

Sergei Rachmaninoff Plays.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, the distinguished Russian composer and pianist, played great and familiar works by Beethoven and Chopin and the romantic Schumann yesterday afternoon at his recital in Carnegie Hall, and followed these with a group of compositions by the Russian composers whom Mr. Rachmaninoff so worthily and appropriately represents at most of his concerts. Beethoven was present in the performance of the sonata opus 109. Schumann contributed the youthful and charming "Papillons." Interpreting the dramatic B flat minor sonata of Chopin, M. Rachmaninoff purged the work of the sentimentalism and ultra-romanticism which it is the custom to bestow upon it, and gave his audience instead a stark and heroic epic in tones. He did not attempt what might be called a "programmatic" interpretation of the piece, although the treatment of the funeral march inevitably suggested the approach and the passing by of a procession. But it was as a free fantasy in tones rather than as an explicit narrative of Poland's fall that this music was presented. Its thematic lines and its powerful and masculine structure were worthily emphasized. If Chopin was not at home in the sonata form he was nevertheless an extremely clear and logical musical thinker as well as poet; and if he was poet, lyricist and dreamer he could also conceive of the singing of steel on steel and the fury and shock of battle. It was a heroic Chopin that M. Rachmaninoff portrayed yesterday. It is sometimes forgotten that there was such a man. Incidentally, the final movement of the sonata remains one of the most original contributions to piano music of Chopin's whole period—original, above all, in its complete negation of rhythmical patterns and periods, and in its purely musical, rather than romantically emotional quality. M. Rachmaninoff brought home this paradoxical characteristic of the finale of the "Polish" sonata. It is hardly necessary to add that he had an immense audience and a tumultuous reception.

The New York Times

Published: April 7, 1929

Copyright © The New York Times