

MUSIC

By OLIN DOWNES.

One of the musicians so great that they can do no wrong, at least in the eyes of the public, is Sergei Rachmaninoff, the distinguished Russian pianist who gave his first recital of the season yesterday afternoon in Carnegie Hall. And Mr. Rachmaninoff is indeed a prodigious pianist in all that the word implies—not merely as regards his phenomenal pianistic equipment but in his profound sincerity, his musicianship, his heritage of the grand style. The audience yesterday afternoon showed by its approval and by its praise that so far as Mr. Rachmaninoff is concerned a financial depression has little or no effect upon the attractiveness of his performance to the public. As usual the hall had been sold out long in advance of the performance, and as many as could stand or occupy any point of vantage in the auditorium were there.

Nevertheless it was not wholly Mr. Rachmaninoff's afternoon. This may have been due to the character of his program. Programs constructed with some special purpose in view are likely to have the defects of their virtues. Mr. Rachmaninoff's program dealt with works in large or small forms which invoked the name of "Fantaisie." He began with the Sonata Fantaisie, Opus 19, of Scriabine, and proceeded with the C Major Fantaisie of Haydn; Chopin's Fantaisie, three of the Schumann Phantasiestücke ("In the Night," "Whims," "Fable"); the Beethoven "Sonata Quasi una Fantasia" or, in more popular parlance, the "Moonlight" Sonata, and Liszt's "Fantasia Quasi Sonata, After Reading Dante."

The word *fantaisie* is alluring and great composers have used it as indication of the nature of compositions often nobly imaginative. On the other hand, the name *fantaisie* does not necessarily imply imagination or nobility either. The Scriabine *Fantaisie*, for example, which is rarely played, supplies the logic of this inattention on the part of virtuosi by the fact that it is a rather futile and inflated composition, interestingly constructed from the basis of a single representative motive, but when that has been said, signifying very little else than much ado about nothing. Haydn's *Fantaisie* is better music of amiable prattle in the classic manner. On the other hand, the Chopin *Fantaisie*, the *fantaisie*-pieces of Schumann, the romantic C Sharp Minor Sonata are all superb flights, and Liszt's music inspired by Dante has at least sonority, strut and a plausible theatricalism. Liszt's imagination was haunted by the episode of Paola and Francesca. The *Fantasia Quasi Sonata* is worthwhile as a piece of Lisztian virtuosity and tonal rhetoric, if nothing more.

How did Mr. Rachmaninoff interpret this music? Always with power and mastery, with sculptural line and breadth of style. And the fact of breadth of style should not mislead any reader to suppose that he failed to do justice to the eighteenth century sparkle of Haydn.

But, again, perhaps because of the actual contents of the program, he did not strike fire from his audience until he reached Chopin's score, and this had the true imagery and fantasy of that superb composition. In the introduction the ghosts of Poland's past strode majestically from their graves; the tumult and heroic excitement of the following pages were drama and music in one. Nor should there be forgotten the poetical treatment of the middle section, which is a mod and a melodic line difficult for the greatest pianists to sustain.

The Schumann pieces were perhaps less fragile and whimsical than the essence of the music and perhaps on a more architectural scale—at least in the first of the three pieces—than the composer intended. Some might have wished for less clarity and more suggestion in these pieces. And, similarly, a more shadowy coloring in the first movement of the Beethoven sonata might have been nearer the spirit of the piece, which in this place was etched almost too clearly. But the playing of the scherzo movement and the passion and grandeur of the finale would have been hard to surpass. Liszt's *fantasia*, after Dante, was given the

amplitude of utterance that the music demands.

And then Mr. Rachmaninoff commenced his second recital by playing encores to an audience that was unwilling to leave the hall. It is possible that this part of the program may have furnished more music that the audience liked than the printed list of compositions which had gone before.

Quartet Plays Without Notes.

Four young men, Rachmael Weinstock, Harris Danziger, Julius Shafer and Oliver Edel, assembled in Town Hall yesterday afternoon to play chamber music. They appeared almost unheralded, bearing the collective title of the Manhattan String Quartet. The usual chairs were on the stage, but when it became apparent that the quartet was to play without music, the gentle somnolence that is liable to brood over afternoon concerts lifted sharply. For the program comprised three major works: the Brahms A minor Op. 51, the Haydn E flat major Op. 64, and the Debussy G minor Op. 10, and no musician need be told that a quartet performance of these works, without notes, constitutes in itself a tour de force.

If it had been this alone, one might have retired amid polite applause to comment on the futility of a "stunt" performance. But it became apparent at once that these young men had dispensed with their music not to make an impression but in order that their deep feeling for their work and the remarkable talent they bring it might be freed from the restrictions of keeping one eye on their score and the other on their leader; that the almost psychic interplay of feeling and mood between the players might be unimpeded and the four instruments be permitted to play, as they play in the composer's mind, like one.

The group approximated this ideal of quartet playing to a truly astonishing degree. Few performances merit the adjective "thrilling," but the one yesterday afternoon emphatically did. The music sang with the living qualities of freshness, suppleness and inevitability only heard when player and subject are fused. Playing like this stands on its own rare merits, but it is a pleasure to record one's personal joy over the tender loveliness of the Debussy *andantino*, the precision and delicacy of the Haydn *presto*, which seemed at times to be sounding straight out of Haydn's pages, so faultless was the ensemble.

The entire program did not reach this height; the Brahms, which opened it, was timidly treated in the beginning and the individual tone should have been ampler, richer, broader as it steadily became as the program continued. But the outstanding fact about these young men, who have played together for years at the Neighborhood Music School exclusively under the training of Hugo Kortschak, is the sensitivity of detail in their work, the warmth of disciplined emotion which permeates it—one has never heard the Debussy "Animé" so stirringly created—and the rare fineness of their ensemble. Compared to this occasional false intonations are relatively unimportant matters which time will doubtless correct.

The audience, which included among other musical notables Adolfo Betti, Harold Bauer and Walter Golde, evidently knew it was experiencing the unusual. It recalled the players five times.

H. H.