

MUSIC IN REVIEW

Rachmaninoff Heard in His Own Concerto Under

By OLIN DOWNES

The hero, as composer and pianist of the concert given by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy conducting, last night in Carnegie Hall, was Sergei Rachmaninoff. Two of his compositions made the program. The first was the symphony with chorus and soloists in four parts, composed to verses of Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Bells." The second was the Second Piano Concerto in C minor, which Rachmaninoff played in place more rapidly than usual, but with in a manner characterized by magnificence and a driving energy that had a compelling effect upon the players of the orchestra and the audience. The result was a crash of applause that sounded like the crack of a whip after the last chord and that turned into a long and thunderous ovation.

But Mr. Rachmaninoff's triumph as a pianist are the expected and inevitable thing, especially when he appears in the performance of one of his own works, and especially that work be the composition which will probably stand as the best, certainly most popular, concerto for piano and orchestra that he ever wrote—this one in C minor, called into being by the services of a hypnotist.

Turned to Dahl for Aid

This man was N. Dahl, to whom the concert is dedicated and to whom Rachmaninoff, deeply discouraged in his creative activities, turned when he had not composed for more than a year. Dahl, for whatever reason and in whatever way, was instrumental in restoring the composer's enthusiasm and confidence, with the result of this C minor concerto. It is, as a whole, a superb work in the style of the concerto of Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky. The middle movement is weaker than the first and last. The first and last follow forms and usages which are traditional. Within this frame Rachmaninoff provides the broad structure, the brilliant passage work and exciting rhythms and phrases of sensuous Slavic song which haunt the memory after the concerto has passed by.

He, of course, played the piece like the past master that he is, perhaps also a certain impatience with a work that belongs to his creative past. Nevertheless, whatever the opinion of its creator, with the authority of maturity and the fire and impulse of youth in its plentitude of physical power. He sat at the piano with his customary undemonstrative dignity, by his attitude discouraging applause between the movements, emerging at the last, with the grave, unmoved, somewhat melancholy, somewhat saturnine visage, the composer-virtuoso victorious. The triumph was gained in the grand manner, and great was the rejoicing.

The symphony, "The Bells," performed with the aid of the University of Pennsylvania Chorus (Harl McDonald director) and with Agnes Davis, soprano, Fritz Krueger, tenor, and Elwood Hawkins, baritone, is a later work than the concerto. The Symphony had not been heard in New York since Mr. Stokowski performed it in February of 1920.

It was composed in 1913 and a person intent upon dramatic coincidences could remark that it was a work not unprophetic in its symbolism of the world catastrophe. For this tonal fabric, woven about Poe's verse, is, as Mr. Gilman remarks in his program notes, "a tissue of bell-sounds" and the bells, whose sound accompanied every inhabitant of pre-war Russia from cradle to grave, are heard as happy chimes, as wedding bells, as bells of wild terror and fantasy, and as bells that toll mournfully an end of horror and tragedy. These, at least, are the moods and emotional sequences of the music.

Ingenious Scoring Used

The orchestra contains many bell effects. Some of these are gained by obvious methods of striking various of the percussive instruments present in the orchestra in unusual numbers, others are attained by means of suggestive musical motives and figures and by ingenious scoring for strings and for various instrumental combinations known, among other composers, to one Rimsky-Korsakoff.

The symphony is wholly different from other works in the form by Rachmaninoff. There is less of intricate symphonic development, and more of decorative writing which provides the background for the tonal picture evoked by the voices and the instruments. The brushstrokes are simple and very broad, often almost pictorial. The melodic character of the choral music must be grateful for the performers, until the third movement, which has an expressive relation to the traditional symphonic scherzo, is reached. This movement is in jagged rhythms and dramatic style. The brightness and gayety of the first part, the tenderness and sensuous exaltation of the second movement, are preludes to the changes that come later, and to the finale which, in places, reminds the listeners of pages of Rachmaninoff's tone poem after Boecklin, "The Isle of the Dead."

The resemblance is not thematic, but one of spirit. The work is in the manner of a tonal fresco on grand lines. It is a score that would be well devised for a vast public occasion, one which transcended in its proportions and the augustness of its ceremonies any performance that could be given in a concert hall. There are measures, moreover, of a subtler and less exterior sort, where one hears the very subjective and introspective Rachmaninoff, speaking in ways of music which distinguish him from other composers as much as his visible individuality distinguishes him from other people. But we do not find this in this work as a whole the greatest of Rachmaninoff.

The performance was earnest, understanding, dramatic not, perhaps, sufficient dramatic impact. The young voices of the chorus are fresh and the singers well drilled, but they were sometimes overweighted by the orchestra. In general there was a fine technical quality and tone that fused and pleased the ear, although again, not all the soloists were equal to the sonorous demands of the occasion.

Poldi Mildner at Town Hall

Poldi Mildner proved at her Town Hall recital last night that she has matured as an artist since her American debut more than four year ago. At the age of 21, she is now one of the most rewarding of the younger set of pianists. Her playing of two such difficult and disparate works as Schubert's "Wanderer" Fantasie and Chopin's

B minor sonata were eloquent evidence that her art has deepened and that her immense technique is at the service of a discriminating musical intelligence.

Miss Mildner began her first program here this season with Beethoven's Thirty-two Variations in C minor, which she tossed off with aplomb. The "Wanderer" Fantasie was a severer test of her endurance as well as her musicianship. She met it with a reservoir of power and with an awareness of its style and spirit.

The sources from which Miss Mildner draws her strength were cause for wonder. She is slight of person, not much more than five feet in height. Whence comes the power for the resounding series of chords that open the final movement of the Chopin sonata? Or the drive for the closing pages of the "Wanderer" Fantasie? Or the sweep and virtuosity for the first movement of the Chopin sonata? The answer can only be perfect control and synchronization of mind and muscles.

The capacity to feel was also notable in this recital. The largo of the B minor sonata had a spaciousness and directness of utterance.

The program also included Chopin's Scherzo in C sharp minor and the étude, Op. 25, No. 10 and Liszt's "Mephisto Valse." The audience valued Miss Mildner's playing

H. T.