

Rachmaninoff Chalks Up New Recital Success

BY CECIL SMITH.

Before an audience of generous proportions Sergei Rachmaninoff seated himself before a piano in Orchestra hall yesterday afternoon and forthwith proceeded to add another chalk mark to his long list of successful Chicago recital appearances. Rachmaninoff holds a special sway over his audience, and yesterday's demonstrations of enthusiasm were, as always, in startling contrast to his gaunt, silent, uncommunicative figure.

All the familiar prowess that has fascinated his hearers for years was there. It would be difficult to name any pianist, except perhaps Ignaz Friedman, who derives a more beautiful tone from the piano. He can play as fast as the fastest without sacrificing for a moment this wonderfully round mellowness of tone quality.

Yet it is a curious fact that Mr. Rachmaninoff is a poor interpreter of any music except his own. I realize that this assertion will bring a horde of his loyal followers at my throat, but I must stick unflinchingly to the point.

He is more interested in playing the piano than in playing music. In Bach's "Italian Concerto," for instance, the sense of the first and last movements was buried under an avalanche of virtuoso pianism. Phrase structure, melodic lines, counterpoint, harmonic sequences all were pushed aside to make way for a keyboard style alternately crackling, fondling, roaring, whispering.

The last movement was taken at a pace so fast that it was impossible to hear any accents. The contrasting middle movement became a wayward Chopinesque reverie.

His approach to the Beethoven sonata, opus 31, No. 2, and the Chopin C-sharp minor scherzo was equally tortuous, twisting, and hiding the themes and turning their development into a pianist's field day.

It will be gratifying to welcome Mr. Rachmaninoff back with the Cincinnati orchestra on Nov. 23, when he will have a chance to show his undoubted authority in the interpretation of one of his own concertos.