

VIRTUOSO CONCERT AT CARNEGIE HALL

Shuster and Kurthy Appear
With the Philharmonic for
Strauss's 'Don Quixote'

RACHMANINOFF IS SOLOIST

Plays Own Piano Concerto—
Overture to 'Donna Diana'
by Reznicek Offered

By OLIN DOWNES

The Reznicek "Donna Diana" overture, which never was a first-class piece of music, but has an odd way of bobbing up now and again in concert programs; Strauss's "Don Quixote," with Joseph Shuster and Zoltan Kurthy for solo 'cello and viola, and Rachmaninoff's first piano concerto, played by the composer himself, made the list of compositions performed at the concert of the New York Philharmonic - Symphony Orchestra, John Barbirolli, conductor, last night in Carnegie Hall.

Really, a number of virtuosos were present. We have named the admirable virtuosos of the orchestra. In his first piano concerto Mr. Rachmaninoff, who gave a prodigious performance of the piece, is a virtuoso pianist composer. In his extraordinary score inspired by the adventures of the Knight of La Mancha, Strauss is a composer virtuoso. He reminds one there of the remark Emerson made in "Representative Men" about Shakespeare—Shakespeare, genius descended from the skies; Shakespeare, who becomes anon just a master prestidigitator, one who announces confidently—and carries out his boast—an exhibition of the stars and planets this evening.

The exhibition was given last night in Carnegie Hall and one did not know exactly which to do—to thrill to Strauss when he makes his Don discourse upon chivalry or when he portrays the Don, despoiled of his illusions, riding homeward, bedraggled and pathetic, on Rosinante and most humbly surrendering the ghost in tones of a pathos and humility that are unutterably poignant—or to gibe at the brazen fakir who works the wind machine in a ridiculous parody of a ride through the air and imitates sheep and asks you to believe that wind instruments are windmills.

Consummate Virtuosity

It is consummate virtuosity, which will stand investigation, and a good advance precaution is not to believe everything you hear. But the introduction—the Don wildly reading tales of chivalry—is one of the most amazing pages in modern music; no gimcrack imitation, but the wanderings and fixations of an obsessed mind, and, incidentally, more than a hint of the technique of the polytonalists who were to come. And the conversations of Knight and Squire, with the cheek-by-jowl counterpoint which intertwines the themes of the sublime and the ridiculous—isn't this almost the "Wahn, Wahn, ueberall Wahn" of a superman viewing with wonderment and pity the bedevilment of the human race? When Sancho snores and the Don does vigil, there is the white, radiant vision of the mystic which is truer than all our reasoning, and next minute—the silly rapture inspired by the thought of the wench Dulcinea, which could make the tears roll down the cheeks while one shook with laughter at the foolishness of the business!

That is a score for you—an impossible score, since so much of the thought lies outside music's province, yet a work of the most audacious genius, and a curious story of the life of man, narrated with an intensity and exaltation of which, one would say, only the pure art of music was capable.

We find these things in the music. We do not invariably find them in Mr. Barbirolli's reading, which in technical respects impressed us as markedly superior to a performance of this work which he gave in this city two seasons ago, but which is not as sharply delineative, farcical on occasion, and by turns ironic, subtle and impassioned as the music.

Wrote Concerto at 18

Then Mr. Rachmaninoff came and conquered, with his early concerto that he wrote as a boy of 18 in St. Petersburg and has later extensively revised and reorchestrated. It may be that the revisions accorded the composition by the artist arrived at the maturity of his thought and imagination have to do with the uneven effect of certain places. Or this may be simply the inherent inequalities of an early work. It can be said that this work is strikingly prophetic of the composer that was to come, and that it is extremely interesting to see the elements here of a great composer's later development.

The music is often unblushingly sentimental, pompous, glittering or vain. The piano discourses in brilliant drawing room style. Then the Russian bear comes into the parlor. Now and again is a choleric Slavic outburst, and all this dominated by a young man's respect for form and a young man's inability to find the distinctive expression for what he feels most sincerely.

The concerto is written decoratively, after the Liszt model, with, of course, splashes of Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky. By no stretch of the imagination can this be called a master concerto. Yet it swept away the audience. Much of this was due to the composer's magnificent playing, always in the grand and romantic manner, always with something of a Byronic melancholy, and the clang of saber and spur, and the spirit of the young uniformed gentleman to be seen in a box with his fellow students at some musical première in the old Russian capital, the scene of Rachmaninoff's youth.

Music may be weak and superficial in actual texture, yet it may also communicate a subtle and intoxicating aroma when the man who interprets is the one who knows what he meant when he composed the piece. Here is the art of a master, the potency of youth. It was long before the audience would cease applauding and let Mr. Rachmaninoff disappear.

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