

OWN WORKS GIVEN BY RACHMANINOFF

He Appears With Philadelphia
Orchestra at Carnegie Hall
in First of Three Concerts

EUGENE ORMANDY DIRECTS

Pianist's Second Symphony,
Concerto No. 1 and Rhapsody
on Paganini Theme Heard

By OLIN DOWNES

Sergei Rachmaninoff, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, conductor, gave the first of three Sunday evening concerts which will be devoted to his music last night in Carnegie Hall. He appeared in the double role of composer and pianist. Mr. Ormandy conducted the performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony and did a like service with the orchestral parts of the First Concerto and the "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini for Piano and Orchestra."

The dimensions and the demonstrations of the audience gave proof of the exceptional hold that Mr. Rachmaninoff has upon the public of this day. This influence is due to his unique qualities as a creative and interpretive musician, his impressive personality, and his prowess as a virtuoso; and it holds because of his gifts and his sincerity as an artist.

The works heard yesterday belong, if we were to follow a favorite critical method of placing milestones along the road of an artist's career, to his first, second and third "periods." The only score on last night's program which bore a distinctively modern stamp, and even so a stamp of character and purpose rather than of any revolutionary idiom, was the Rhapsody on the Paganini theme.

Brilliancy of His Playing

For the rest, the First Concerto, written and played in Moscow when Rachmaninoff was 18, though revised very thoroughly by him in 1917, is nevertheless early Rachmaninoff and essentially of an old-fashioned and drawing room character. No doubt the form has been condensed, the development of ideas strengthened and intensified, but this concerto remains the weakest part of last night's offering, and it is reasonable to assume that its hearty reception by the audience was due principally to the brilliancy of the composer-pianist's performance. Its essential interest, one would say, was historic.

What the concerto promises is admirably carried out in the symphony. This Second symphony pertained, according to the selected method of classification above mentioned, to the middle and mature period of the composer's creative career. It is the period which, roughly speaking, embraces the Second piano concerto and the tone poem "The Isle of Death," which are to be heard at the second of these concerts on Dec. 3. The period is distinguished by the full flowering of Rachmaninoff's lyrical style, his authoritative handling of the orchestra and treatment of the form, and the grateful Slavic sensuousness, depth of color and rhythmic swing which continue to fascinate most of us whenever this excellent symphony is played.

Mr. Ormandy's Interpretation

It was admirably performed last night by the magnificent orchestra and because of Mr. Ormandy's eloquent interpretation. To those who gauge the amount of pleasure they get from a musical performance

by the date of the technic of the music—whether it is "modern," which is to say, if it bears the prevalent hall-marks of the post-war period, or "neo-classic" style, or atonality, etc., or "classic," in which case it must be eighteenth century or older—these people may not be stirred by this symphony. For its harmonies could have appeared in the days of Rubinstein and the treatment of the form could be Mendelssohn's, with the addition of some picturesque Slavic color and mood. We enjoy it immensely.

As music, which is the one test this commentator seeks to apply to anything he hears, it is full of ideas, which are handled masterfully and with luxuriant invention, and feeling. It has a fine line and exceptionally coherent structure. It bears inalienably the stamp of a creative personality. A very few measures, and you say, "Rachmaninoff!" This cannot be said of some very smart scores that very smart neo-classicists and internationalists of music turn out today. What a real and eloquent piece of music! What an organic form!

The Rachmaninoff of today is the composer of the Rhapsody on the Paganini theme, which is a very brilliant and ripe piece. The variations do new things with the

theme which fascinated Schumann, Brahms and others, above all, Brahms. Rachmaninoff finds some fresh kernels in it. He exploits them in variations which are consummately worked out and scored, with, needless to say, an extremely difficult and effective piano part.

His Paganini Variations

But this is not a show-piece or a mere bag of tricks for a soloist. The theme is seen from many different harmonic, rhythmic and melodic viewpoints. It is dissolved, so to say, into its constituent elements, and from these separate elements in some instances new creations are spun. The diablerie of this unique theme, creation of Paganini's genius, exercises Rachmaninoff's imagination, as it did other masters. After kaleidoscopic transformations, and after there stalks into the scheme of the variations the idea of the Grim Reaper, with the entrance of the old plain-chant of the "Dies irae," there is a lyrical expansion; the upper strings begin to stretch out several of Paganini's notes in a Rachmaninoff cantilena; the 'celli reply with Rachmaninoff sighs and melancholic rumination. At last there's a big, broad, architectural coda, with a smashing climax. This piece was cunningly placed, and marvelously played,

with unlimited tone-color, speed when necessary and power. It demonstrated unforgettably what happens when a master of his craft arrives at a summit of development. Here, again, perhaps—as in the symphony—is a little too much music! Four variations less, and the Rhapsody would be tighter, more compact, even more effective than it is. Hardly necessary to say, it brought down the house.

That, however, was only the logical conclusion of the evening. When Mr. Rachmaninoff appeared for the first time on the stage to play his concerto most of the audience rose in his honor, from those on the floor to those near the roof. Their admiration for him and their enjoyment of his music were more evident there than words can make them here. The occasion was a memorable tribute to a great artist.