

# 2D CONCERT GIVEN BY RACHMANINOFF

He Appears With Philadelphia  
Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in  
Series Devoted to His Music

## 'ISLE OF DEATH' OFFERED

Pianist Is Soloist in 2d and 3d  
Concertos—Program Led  
by Eugene Ormandy

By OLIN DOWNES

The audience which inundated Carnegie Hall last night, sitting and standing as it might, and following each performance with wild applause, said a good deal for the attraction that Rachmaninoff and his music have for the public. This was the second of the Sunday night concerts of symphonic music that Rachmaninoff is giving with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He appeared as soloist in the performance of his Second and Third Concertos. Mr. Ormandy conducted the orchestral parts of the concertos and the performance of the symphonic poem, "The Isle of Death."

What would have been, or what were, we wonder, the emotion of a denizen of the League of Composers, let us say, if he or she came to this concert? As an alleged modernist, such a person must have felt like a fish out of water. What was modern here? The music, where idiom was concerned, could all have been written before 1900. The concertos are descended straight from those of Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky and, especially in the case of the Second, they have a spaciousness, and stride, and splendor which, in the hands of such a performer, are stupendous.

### Power of His Composition

Rachmaninoff is what he is in his art not because of his harmony or form or turn of melodic phrase but because of the pulse, vitality, sincerity and grand line of his music. Even when it is not in his most distinguished vein, when it verges perilously on the sentimental or indulges in a Chekhovian melancholy, it makes very much of other music of our day appear puny, dully costumed and undernourished. This is all splendor and spaciousness and stride. It harks back to palace and steppe, saber and spur, and you think of the older Russia, its opulence and pomp and ceremony. No doubt this is a ruinous confession, in these times of social and economic change. Unfortunately, the later day has not equaled the earlier one either in fertility of invention or in breadth of design or nobility of gesture—qualities inherent in Rachmaninoff's representative music.

These qualities, and those of his superb performances, are the more arresting and exciting by contrast when a very tall, powerfully framed and dignified gentleman, with a skull like unto that of a Neanderthal man, rises and unlimbers as you would unlimber the blades of a jackknife, and with unsmiling urbanity bows to the tumultuous audience.

For Mr. Rachmaninoff played both concertos with prodigious élan. He took the Second Concerto—the work which, as we know from the Riesemann biography—was completed with the aid of the hypnotist, Dr. N. Dahl, rather faster than usual, not holding back very much, even for the lordly theme of the peroration that sweeps in the strings over the smashing harmonies of the piano accompaniment. When he finished the audience frantically cheered.

The Third Concerto, on a broader symphonic scale than the Second, with much elaborate and interesting development, especially in the first movement, did not overwhelm the audience as did the Second. Mr. Rachmaninoff might explain that as Beethoven explained the hesitancy of those who were hesitant about his "Eroica" symphony: "Because it is so much better." Different the Third Concerto may be, and more elaborately fabricated, too. But the concentration, the simplicity, the spontaneity of the Second, with the clean-cut themes and cogency of the thought, keeps it, we believe, in the position of the best concerto Mr. Rachmaninoff has written for the instrument. His playing, whatever the vehicle, would have caused excitement.

### Ormandy Leads "Todeninsel"

And now, without undue censure of Mr. Ormandy, who no doubt would willingly have surrendered the baton, regret must be expressed that Mr. Rachmaninoff felt unable to play and conduct on the same program and therefore did not conduct the "Todeninsel." Under Mr. Ormandy's direction the work, which may prove to be Rachmaninoff's greatest orchestral score, was highly effective, as it can hardly help being, for it is a unique and inspired score, wonderfully constructed, and the product of the most authentic inspiration.

We happen to have heard Rachmaninoff himself conduct the piece. When he does so it has a quality attained by no other conductor. It becomes an exalted and mystical reverie. Even when the music is most impassioned, it does not lose its impersonality. Boecklin's painting is of the isle with the cypress trees and cemetery, and the boat with the white-robed figure moving toward it over a dark and silent sea.

It is music deserving of the sentence of Renan when he said of Turgenieff that "the reveries of our century had amassed themselves about his heart." There is the place where the horn goes down to a pianissimo almost inaudible, and the second violin take the G-sharp from the horn and commence mysteriously to vibrate the motive which is so near to the melody of the "Dies irae." It is the moment when the composer could well have been thinking of Boecklin's own description of his picture, saying that it should communicate the impression of silence so profoundly that one who looked at it would be startled by a knock on the door. It is at such a moment that the place we have mentioned can well communicate. That it passed without much significance is an indication of the general character of a dramatic reading which, nevertheless, in the inmost sense, missed the mark.

To this it might be replied that presumably Mr. Rachmaninoff wholly endorsed Mr. Ormandy's performance, in a concert devoted to his music. Under the composer's

leadership, for all that, it sounded entirely different, and illustrated remarkably the different meaning that the same notes can have in the hands of different artists, to say nothing of variants of tempo and dynamics and such palpable matters. Some day we want to hear again Mr. Rachmaninoff personally interpret his masterpiece. To this it should be added that the composer, after playing his concert, led the conductor forward to share the applause.

### New Friends of Music Concert

The decidedly rewarding program presented by the New Friends of Music late yesterday afternoon in Town Hall was made up of the quintet in E flat, Op. 16, of Beethoven; the trio in G major, Op. 121A, by the same master, and Mozart's quintet in E flat (K. 452). Participants in the performance of these works included Helen Teschner Tas, violin; Webster Aitken, piano; Augustin Duques, clarinet; Arthur Burg, horn, and the following members of the New Friends of Music Orchestra: Fritz Magg, 'cello; Lois Wann, oboe, and Bernard Balaban, bassoon.

It was an interesting idea to play the two quintets for piano and wind instruments on the same occasion, for Beethoven patterned his after Mozart's and the opportunity to compare their merits had its definite value for the serious listener. Each of the quintets was a favorite of its composer. Beethoven was fond enough of his opus to rearrange it as a quintet for piano and strings and also as the string quartet, Op. 75, while Mozart referred to the example heard yesterday as the best he ever had composed.

Although both composers were in their late twenties when they wrote the respective quintets, Beethoven was then in his initial period and Mozart at the height of his mature career, as creative artists. In consequence the Beethoven quintet possesses the exuberance of youth, whereas Mozart's is more subtly expressive and the more exquisite in treatment.

The later Beethoven of the period of the Ninth symphony was represented by the fine trio for piano, violin and 'cello, consisting of ten variations on the comic song "Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu" from Wenzel Mueller's opera, "Die Schweltern von Prag." It is a worthy companion piece on a smaller scale to the composer's great "Diabelli" variations written the same year. The last four of the variants were particularly effective in the able performance accorded in the masterpiece by Miss Tas, Mr. Magg and Mr. Aitken.

### Alton Jones Recital

Alton Jones's playing at his Town Hall recital last night showed a laudable gain tonally and in communicativeness. Since last heard by this reviewer the pianist had grown both as executant and interpreter. His work was more imaginative, more sensitive and more colorful. It had become predominantly lyric, propelled with a touch that no longer took on edge

when stressed, but retained its singing quality at all times.

In the weightiest selection on his program, Franck's "Prelude, Choral and Fugue," Mr. Jones shunned the sort of heroics often brought to its unfoldment, especially in the fugal division. Quite rightly he emphasized the tender, sensuous, introspective side of this music. Some might object to the free use made of rubato in the prelude, but it was in keeping with the rhapsodic, improvisational conception of this section favored by the pianist and put across with conviction. It was impressively led to the chorale, where Mr. Jones gratefully avoided any hint of exaggerated dynamics and yet imparted the imposing breadth of effect required in the climactic measures.

A rarely heard adagio in F by Haydn and that composer's Fantasia in C major were given with much care in phrasing and dynamic detail, the adagio being a particularly poetic bit of playing enhanced with refined and subtle tonal nuances. "ere was a plenitude of mood and atmosphere in Castelnuovo-Tedesco's "Cipressi." Mr. Jones has long possessed a well developed technique and made admirable use of it in Pich-Mangiagalli's "Dance d'Olaf" and Rachmaninoff's "Etude tableau," Op. 39, No. 1. He also performed Liszt's "Waldesrauchen," the Chopin-Liszt "Chant polonais," Op. 74, No. 5, and the Chopin scherzo in B minor. An enthusiastic audience was present.

N. S.