

# RECITAL IS GIVEN BY RACHMANINOFF

Capacity Crowd Hears Pianist  
Play Beethoven Sonata, Opus  
111, at Carnegie Hall

## NOVELETTE IS OFFERED

Schumann Work Seldom Heard  
—Mozart Variations and Bach  
Partita on Program

By OLIN DOWNES

There are some profound explanations and some perfectly simple ones of the immense success of the recitals that Serge Rachmaninoff gives each season in this city, recitals which, as that of yesterday afternoon at Carnegie Hall, are always packed with as many listeners as the law allows. Perhaps the fact that we have here a very great musician, who respects himself, and his audience, and his art, is a primary force in the situation.

The dignity of Mr. Rachmaninoff and his unimpeachable honor in the service of his art—like Toscanini; the authority of his interpretation, won by the exercise of his native genius and the selflessness and depth of his study; and the emergence from this background of his matured individuality, are potent factors in the situation. For they are characteristics of one of the few interpreters before the public who does not have to raise his voice, or pose or ballyhoo for success, and who is without fear and without reproach in the fulfilment of his task.

Mr. Rachmaninoff's program was unconventional in its arrangement, although in large part it was made of familiar music. He was content to play the first movement, with the variations from the Mozart A major sonata; to play them at a brisker *tempi* than some conceive for this music, viewing it as a play of exquisitely ordered sound, and not as a theme that can become sentimental, with variations which can be prettified by too slow a pace or undue gush of sentiment.

### Intensity of Feeling Noted

After the charm of this rococo piece came the utterance of the mystic Beethoven—the sonata Op. 111—and then the seldom-played Schumann Novelette in F sharp minor. The intensity of feeling, the rugged drama of the first part of the sonata, with the powerful fugal development which follows the earlier manipulation of the material, was one side of the design. The other was the variations on the arietta, where Beethoven, shut off from mortal sounds, hears an inner voice of the spirit, and senses the rustle of a wing.

Very fortunate was the transition to the Novelette of Schumann, which is two or three "novelettes" in one. It is delightfully without a fixed form, and closes with the haunting song that the composer wishes to sound "as a voice from afar." And, shocking as it may seem, both of these works can be said to pertain to that category of music which is anathema to our smarter blades of the avant-garde—romantic music by romantic composers—all the cohorts of hell! Alas, alas. And—the delight of the audience!

The remainder of the program consisted entirely of transcriptions, including an important new transcription by Mr. Rachmaninoff of three movements of the Bach E major partita, originally for violin alone, and the composer's arrangement of his song, "Lilacs"; thereafter a whole flock of transcriptions by Schubert-Liszt, Schumann-Tausig, Chopin-Liszt, Tchaikovsky-Rachmaninoff and Kreisler-Rachmaninoff into the bargain.

This can, of course, start all the arguments as to whether transcriptions are or are not artistically justifiable; whether they are as effective as when the works transcribed are played in their original form, etc., etc. To this could be made all the stock replies, citations of the innumerable occasions when Bach appears as the transcriber of his own works and the works of others; of the expanding capacities of instruments not far developed in the time when the original music was written. And so forth.

### Analysis of Transcription

For us, a good transcription, one that appears to be in good taste and to reveal in a fresh setting, and not conceal, musical beauty, is a good transcription, while a transcription which transgresses these principles is a bad one. The matter seems to us as simple as that. A worth-while transcription enriches the literature of the instrument for which it is devised.

The Prelude of the Bach Partita, as treated on this occasion, seemed to us to be admirably effective, faithful to the composer's purpose. We do not like the arrangement of the Gavotte as well. We like to hear the original—the rude sweep and scrape of the strings for the swinging chords that emphasize the rhythm. The Gigue went very brilliantly.

In the song transcriptions two important characteristics were impressively indicated. One was the authority and the technical equipment, so complete that the musical purpose is never lost sight of because of the technical problems. The other was the capacity of the great artist to make infinitely expressive the simplest melody, as was so often done yesterday.

Neither achievement is possible to the half-baked. A fledgling will be completely out of his depth if he has no technical figures to lean on; or else he will be nonplussed by physical problems. Rachmaninoff played not merely as a virtuoso in this place, but as a singer, one who had not forgotten that whatever the elaborations or the degree of artifice may be, melody, and no other substitute, is the core of music. It was great playing.

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