

ORMANDY DIRECTS AT CARNEGIE HALL

Rachmaninoff Plays His Fourth
Piano Concerto in Program
of Philadelphia Orchestra

SECOND SYMPHONY HEARD

Immense Audience Listens to
Composition of Soloist Which
Was Recently Revised

By OLIN DOWNES

An immense audience listened last night in Carnegie Hall to a program consisting of two major compositions by Sergei Rachmaninoff, played by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy conductor, and received both compositions with rapturous applause.

One of these was the Second symphony, a work more than thirty years old. The other was Rachmaninoff's Fourth piano concerto, with the composer as soloist—a recent score, extensively revised so late as last Summer.

In the reception accorded the composer and the pianist there is a significance beyond that of a mere detail of musical news. There is a remarkable testimony to the position that Rachmaninoff holds today in the repertory.

The vitality of certain of his works may have for some who consider themselves leaders in musical progress the element of surprise. For Rachmaninoff has never been rated a modernist, nor is he one. The Second symphony, so far as novelty of form or harmony is concerned, was no more "modern" when it was first heard than it is today. And, still, it arrests the attention of the public and we have never heard it given without success. There is some reason for this, which it may be worth while to observe.

For thirty years and maybe more it was said of Rachmaninoff that he composed in the past, being not more than an echo, at best, of Tchaikovsky. His sentimentalism his tendency to excessive length—last night's symphony, with substantial cuts, lasted forty-five minutes—and his willingness to follow the traditions of classic sonata form were listed among his weaknesses.

Meanwhile, what has become of Scriabine? And have Stravinsky, early Stravinsky or late Stravinsky, materially affected the position of Rachmaninoff? Or has he been shaken by the bright young man Shostakovich either?

We are beginning to suspect that there are two kinds of musical sensations. One is when a man produces a new score full of unheard effects and astounds the public, and starts a fine row in the critical press. Another is when a composer does not particularly surprise his public, or frighten the bourgeois, but proceeds in his own particular way and holds his place as a sincere master and an authentic creative personality of his epoch. We are becoming suspicious that Rachmaninoff is that kind of a composer. At any rate, the public seems to think so.

Of course, there are choice spirits for whom, if the public likes something, that something is beneath the attention of intelligent or sophisticated beings. For ourselves we are persuaded that when a symphony or another sort of

composition lasts for thirty years and continues to go strong, that there is some good, vital reason for it, and we do not think it is a reason based upon mediocrity, either.

The Second symphony lives because it is so rich in its ideas, so resourceful in their treatment and so characteristic in its Slavic lyricism of Rachmaninoff. Certainly Tchaikovsky is found in pages, but not an imitated Tchaikovsky. It is long. Even as the symphony stands it could be pruned for purposes of concision, but it is not tiresome, since there is not a note which is not laden with music in the score.

The orchestral has its special color. The mood may be that of a sort of "Cherry Orchard" melancholy, introspection, even sentimentalism. Or it is romantic drama, in terms of a sensuousness and a pomp not unknown in music before Rachmaninoff. The authenticity of its inspiration, the ease with which the composer moves within his chosen frame, the wealth of his resource, make a living symphony which could go on longer than it does and still interest us and stand its ground as it confronts the decades.

The symphony was applauded almost as much as the soloist and the concerto. This fourth concerto, if memory serves, has been considerably shortened, as well as revised since its first performances in 1927. The concerto would have been worth the hearing if only for the sheer lordly magnificence of Rachmaninoff's playing.

At this stage of acquaintance we do not like the Fourth concerto as well as the Third or the Second, but remembering the fact that we liked the Third less at its first performance than we like it today, and that, in the general run of events, that concerto has gained rather than lost with the public, we are inclined to go cautiously in a hasty estimate of the one heard last night. Its reception was a triumph for the man who created and played it and for the brilliant orchestra and, in the sum of the evening, for Mr. Ormandy.