

MUSIC

SYMPHONY HALL

Rachmaninoff

There may be a dozen or so individual artists, who appear in Boston from season to season, whose appearances are invariably pleasing and which have distinctive personal characteristics. Rachmaninoff is one of the first in this group.

He is somewhat of a solitary figure among most pianists today. In point of years he belongs to an elder generation of players whose tradition and style are of the effusive, inflated, and romantic 19th Century. Yet, as an artist, he is not of them; neither can he be called a "modern." His playing never is grandiose after the Liszt manner, nor yet is it of the more continent, percussive style of the moderns.

The salient points of his interpretations are virility, controlled sentiment and passion, and nobility.

He displayed these qualities yesterday in a program which began with Beethoven's quasi-programmatic sonata, opus 81; Schumann's "Etudes Symphoniques;" a "Momento Capriccioso" of Weber—a glittering little show piece which, however, is good music; a beautiful Gluck Gavotte; and three pieces by Liszt. Mr Rachmaninoff's own variations on a theme by Corelli were played for the first time.

If the Beethoven sonata was somewhat uninteresting, possibly the blame attaches to the composer, for this is, to one person, distinctly lesser Beethoven. The Weber was properly brilliant, yet not superficial. Gluck's familiar Gavotte, in an arrangement by Pauer, was charming, played with beauty of tone and impeccable style.

Schumann's "Symphonic Studies" have always seemed to one listener to be Schumann at his best. There is less gushing sentiment, less irritating exuberance than in much of his other piano music.

In a brilliant, rational, performance full of rhythmic vigor, Mr Rachmaninoff confirmed these impressions. In the "Studies" another significant detail was apparent—the player's superb technique, which always makes even the most fragmentary melody heard above supporting harmonies, and which makes heavy, full, chords transparent and clear, and not, as with some other players, chaotic sound.

Mr Rachmaninoff's new variations are, like so many others, pieces of moment. Some are interesting, harmonically and rhythmically. Others are somewhat dull—ingenious as technical exercises, perhaps, but not enthralling as pure music. The third variation, with mildly modern harmony, is among the best.

Did the composer, by any chance, intend any caricaturing of the styles of various composers? There seemed to be traces of Schubert, Beethoven, Chopin, even Debussy, with a reminiscence of one of Mr Rachmaninoff's own early preludes. With the exception of the last, this may be an unfounded conceit. The audience received the composition very cordially.