

MUSIC

SYMPHONY HALL

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Sergei Rachmaninoff devoted himself to playing music inspired by fantasy at his recital in Symphony Hall last evening. It was the great Russian pianist's first appearance of the season here, and the opening recital of the series of six to be offered on Wednesday evenings by the Symphony Hall management. A very large audience was present.

Scriabine's Sonata Fantaisie, op 19, with which the recital began, was interesting more for Mr Rachmaninoff's playing than for its own intrinsic merit. It is Chopinesque in style and not particularly distinguished in material. But Mr Rachmaninoff has the divine gift of musical poetry, and with this he strikes fire in more than one place which time has reduced to faintly glowing embers. This was as strikingly illustrated in the pianist's beautiful and delicate interpretation of Chopin's fantasy, op 49, a piece which has been beaten beyond recognition in a thousand performances under the merciless fists of Herr Pounder and Mme Thumpemhard. Last night the piece took on new life, and a warmth and glow that ordinarily are lacking.

Liszt's Fantasia Quasi Sonata was probably the most novel piece on the program. It constitutes an item in the second "year" of Liszt's op 35, called "Years of Pilgrimage," and was written in Bellagio, Italy. More or less programmatic, it is the musical distillation of the emotions Liszt felt after he and his companion, the Countess D'Agout, had read Dante. The Fantasia lacks the breadth and grandeur of the B minor sonata, but is comparable to the latter work in its peculiar blend of empty grandiloquence and genuine poetry. The course of musical history might have been changed and the name Liszt might now be held in greater esteem if he had consistently maintained the lyrical heights he achieved in the middle slow section of this work. The Fantasia is thoroughly a virtuosic piece, full of martellato octaves and running chords in 16th notes in the presto section. Mr Rachmaninoff played it with a dash and brilliance which set feet to stamping in the auditorium and aroused handclapping which brought him back to the stage again and again. It was a rare treat to hear this music performed in such perfect style.

The extreme clarity and depth of Mr Rachmaninoff's tone were revealed in Schumann's "Phantasiestucke" and a C major Fantaisie by Haydn. The rubato accorded to the adagio and allegretto of Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata did not seem in keeping with the flowing rhythmic character of those movements, but the concluding presto agitato was as fiery and tempestuous as could be desired.

There is no artist of the piano quite like Mr Rachmaninoff. Listeners are apt to take prodigious technical powers for granted, but they should never think carelessly of the individuality of his interpretations, which have a certain melancholy dignity and depth of feeling that are not to be matched.

C. W. D.