

MUSIC

SYMPHONY HALL

Sergei Rachmaninoff

It seemed like old times in Symphony Hall yesterday afternoon as Sergei Rachmaninoff played the piano to an audience for whom extra seats had to be put upon the stage. Such crowds were not unusual a decade or so ago at concerts by the musical elect, but of recent seasons they have been rare.

Yesterday's recital was characteristic. That is to say, Mr. Rachmaninoff was in top form, and presented a substantial program to the warmly expressed delight of his hearers. It might be considered a superficial remark to say that, technically, Mr. Rachmaninoff is always the same. But without unreasonable emphasis that is true. Few musicians are so ever-dependable as he. Time and again he seats himself at a piano and without any extraneous display, or any seeming effort, performs as a virtuoso and a great artist.

To be sure, his temperament does not always kindle quickly. Yesterday, for example, he played a bit coolly until he reached Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata. Once into the mysterious octave theme of the familiar masterpiece, Mr. Rachmaninoff's conception of the music seemed to grow until the finale took on almost orchestral proportions. Yet there was no pounding or ranting, as other pianists have been known to give the piece; everything was clear, due to the proverbial neatness of the Rachmaninoff fingerwork, and his frugal use of the pedal.

The preceding Schubert-Tausig Variations, the Bach-Liszt / minor Prelude and Fugue for organ, and Mendelssohn's Rondo Capriccioso shared the technical virtues of the Sonata, but they seemed to have more light than heat.

After intermission came the usual shorter pieces—the D-flat Nocturne and two mazurkas of Chopin; three Rachmaninoff works—a Humoresque and Moment Musical (these two in recently revised form), and an Etude-Tableau. Liszt's "sonnet of Petrarca" in A-flat major, and the 11th Rhapsody ended the afternoon. There was especial pleasure in the fact that Mr. Rachmaninoff included the poetic "Sonnet of Petrarca," music undeservedly neglected these days. The recital was in the Celebrity Series of Aaron Richmond.

C. W. D.