

Rachmaninoff Captivating In Concert

By Johan Storjohann Egilsrud

To go from the gay clarity of an Eighteenth century ballet suite to the complicated and orchestral-tricky musical joke, "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks," by Strauss, and to include in the musical journey through two centuries a mature work by Beethoven and an early half-romantic concerto by Rachmaninoff, and yet be thoroughly at home in all the idioms and styles—to do all this with ease and with unflinching memory as Dimitri Mitropoulos did last night at the sixth Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra concert in Northrop auditorium, is the kind of feat the great conductor does so often we are beginning to expect it from him.

But such versatility and such inspired insight never will cease to astonish me.

Study in Contrasts

The contrast between the brittle piquancy of Gretry's ballet suite from "Cephalus and Procris," with its lucid and bright "Tambourine," its ingratiatingly tender "Minuet" and its aggressive but formally correct "Gigue"—the contrast between this almost impersonal Eighteenth century music and the violently individualistic "Till Eulenspiegel" with its surprising twists and turns, its capricious rhythms, its glaring orchestral colors, its frantic outcries and witty little tunes—the enormous contrast of style and psychological content in the two works was completely mastered by Mitropoulos. Every composition was given its individual quality, and every detail was alive and full of meaning.

Although I have heard many protests lately against having locally magnified string quartets on a symphony program, I am personally so fascinated by whatever Mitropoulos conducts that I thoroughly enjoy the performances.

Strings Are Thrilling

Besides, the greatest composers have poured some of their best thoughts and feelings into these forms; and since only very few people hear chamber music, these works have been sadly neglected until Mr. Mitropoulos enlarged their volume and projected them to the thousands who crowd Northrop auditorium.

And when the music is intrinsically so significant as Beethoven's F minor quartet, op. 95, which was played last night, the difficulty of accepting the music is reduced to nothing. If the quartet had been labeled a "Suite for Strings" and had not been known, I feel certain no one would have thought of questioning the justification of performing it.

Mr. Mitropoulos made the music speak with a high eloquence that carried all the conviction of great emotional and formal authority as well as the excitement of a virtuoso performance.

Ovation For Rachmaninoff

The great Russian composer-pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff, played his first piano concerto as soloist. The work has all the earmarks of immaturity, in spite of its revision. It opens with the conventional and superficial effects of obnoxious chord and arpeggio passages, and it progresses through many stages of equally obvious development of rather facile, but pleasing tunes that sentimentalize unimportant musical ideas.

The last movement had, however, a splendid brusque defiance and a drama that resembled the composer's later works. The sharp angularity and the fury of this movement stood in effective contrast to the simplicity and singing quality of the second movement. But no matter what the content may be, the great composer lifts whatever he plays to a level of strange significance by the magic of a personality that cannot be banal because it is so sincere.

Even when there was much ado about little in the music, Rachmaninoff made it dramatically effective. The lingering, somewhat sentimental touch in the slower passages was used with discretion and was relieved by the cool, rippling thirds and the brilliant chords in more agitated parts. Although he received an ovation, he refused to ply an encore.