

Rachmaninoff, tall, angular, a little stooped, his hair close cropped, his face smooth shaven, walked across the stage of the high school auditorium last night, acknowledged the applause which greeted him with a low gracious and graceful bow and the glow of a smile which, though faint, was warm enough to illumine his grave, white face. Then he sat down to the piano and tossed out a handful of pearls as if to find out if there were plenty of jewels in the piano offered him. And there were.

Thereafter Rachmaninoff forgot his audience and became a high priest at an altar offering of his best to the gods. He leaned toward the instrument, dipped his long, slender, expressive fingers into the liquid notes, fixed his eyes on the keyboard and kept them there throughout the number, throughout each number.

It is a habit of his which adds to the effect that his music is an act of devotion. He is not playing for you and for me. He is genius seriously and sincerely at work. He is not showing off the work of Saint-Saens, Schumann, Chopin and the others nor even his own brilliant playing. He is Rachmaninoff, himself, creating while he interprets, absorbed, listening intently to his own interpretations to learn if they are as nearly perfect as he can make them; putting into his work all the glow, color and feeling, all the emotion and intelligence of which he is capable; polishing each note before it falls to a state of crystal purity and clarity or crashing into a handful, two handfuls, of chords with the precision and power of a master.

The first storm of applause—it was a storm in spite of the fact that it came from a meager, storm-proof audience—seemed to bring him back to temporal things. There was nothing of professional aloofness in the way he responded to the demonstration of delight in his tonal feast. It was measured, dignified, but warm and with that faint glow of a smile in it. He bowed deeply, not perfunctorily. We thought we heard him murmur an appreciative "merci." But there was, nevertheless, a feeling that one had interrupted a votary at his devotions, so sincere, broad and beautiful as well as radiant is the playing of this man. One was torn between a natural desire to prolong the applause and give way to an expression of the pleasure he gave his hearers and the contrary wish to have him resume his place at the piano as soon as possible to see what new tonal beauties he could offer, what more of tripping lightness, of sharp presto, of dreamy andantino, of heavy masses that rolled, reverberated and thundered, of crisp, staccato notes tossed from the keyboard as if they were in the way.

It was a great night with Rachmaninoff. Here's hoping he may come again for the benefit alike of those who missed him and those who heard him.