

Rachmaninoff in Vienna.

A conversation with the artist.

A strikingly tall, gaunt gentleman crosses the hotel lobby at a brisk pace. It is Rachmaninoff, the famous Russian pianist, who, after a hiatus of several years, reappeared before the Viennese public last night in the sold-out main hall of the Konzerthaus.

"I am Russian," he tells us when asked, "but I haven't seen my homeland for decades. I now live permanently in America, but not in a comfortable apartment or at least in one of the magnificent, comfortable New York hotels, but in a rolling railway car. I am constantly on the move, performing every week in a different major city, sometimes giving several concerts in the same city."

It should be added here that Rachmaninoff is currently America's most popular pianist, and that every Yankee knows his distinctive beak, etched with strong veins and appearing too large for his enormous body, just as well as that of any prominent politician. His restless wanderings across the vast territories of the United States have made his name known to everyone

"I hardly ever get around to composing," the artist continued. "And I don't cultivate it all that much. Even the reproducing artist can be creative in his own way. My motto isn't necessarily to create something new, but to reimagine the old is the guiding principle of my work. Last year, after a long break, I dared to return to the public eye with a small composition, a concert piece, the product of a momentary whim that I almost regretted later. Performing leaves me no time to compose more, to create something bigger and more lasting. One never stops learning; there's always something new to learn, something old to improve. Even virtuosos have to keep up their daily practice hours, perhaps even more than students."

"This is also the main problem with modern artists: that they do not want to commit themselves to intensive, sustained study, but prefer to advance at breakneck speed. Instead of building up step by step, they want to win the laurels of immortality in one go."

Rachmaninoff finds heartfelt words for the recently deceased master of bel canto, Battistini, whom he revered like hardly any other singer.

"Once again a great artist has died, one of the few true masters... An immeasurable loss for all art lovers."

Suddenly he remembers his intention to stay only a minute. And now he has been chatting for almost a quarter of an hour...

"Perhaps I'll come back to Vienna next year. For now, I intend to give two concerts in Paris, and then it's off to London; from there back to America in about two weeks. A few days later, I'll be a regular on the Pullman cars, back in the salon—my second home...."

Almost sadly, he whispers, already realizing as he's leaving: "Because I love being here even longer in Vienna...." Then his lanky figure straightens, he offers a fleeting greeting and shakes his head, as if to say: "Nonsense, barren sentiments of a cosmopolitan!"
E. M. S.

[Translation: Google]