



Rachmaninoff.

Bruno Walter presented a Russian Evening: Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky. Rachmaninoff, who is known to be an excellent pianist and recently reminded us of his talent with his own dedicated concert, was the soloist of the evening. Anyone who might have inferred any historically developing connections from the chronologically reversed program sequence, from the present to the past, was corrected by another ear. Here stood two eras, two styles, two distinct musical wills side by side, without any bridge leading from one to the other. On the one hand, Stravinsky, and on the other, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky. How one got from one to the other was up to the listener; on which side one preferred to linger became a personal matter of taste and musical development. Bruno Walter was—and this is truly admirable about him—an objective advocate for both.

The concert began with Stravinsky's "Chant du rossignol." The same story that underlies his opera "The Nightingale" (performed here two years ago) is told here in symphonic form. And Bruno Walter has surprisingly embraced his expressive intent, faithfully recounting it in every detail. The story tells of how a nightingale, through its song, moves the Emperor of China to tears, is then displaced by an artificial nightingale from Japan, and finally welcomed back because it banishes death from the sick emperor's bedside. Stravinsky's music is inconceivable without action or dance-like movement because, ultimately, even in symphonic form, it remains consciously dramatic, making the listener a spectator even when, as here, no stage set is present. One could call it program music, sometimes impressionistic music, but it is more than that. It doesn't emotionally burden the listener with the experience of a program or overwhelming impressions; it doesn't identify the listener's feelings with those of the event, but rather allows them to become a passive spectator of a performance. Stravinsky is a purveyor of musical narratives, not through the power of melody, but through the power of rhythm and orchestration. A peculiar, mind-numbingly tedious entertainment, nothing grand, nothing profound, and yet, in its own way, of the strongest impact, even in its creative output. Then the great leap into the past, to the living Rachmaninoff and the dead Tchaikovsky. We certainly don't want to be disrespectful, nor in our fast-paced world pit one virtuoso against another, but in this program sequence, Rachmaninoff would have been better placed at the beginning. His personality gains from his playing, from the honesty of his portrayal, even from the emotional restraints he imposes on himself, and the sacrifices he sometimes makes palpable, as if for the present. One will always be delighted to hear such a powerful Romantic, such a mature, self-contained artist play, but one cannot, nevertheless, deny that at least this C minor concerto, as a composition, has not withstood the rapid changes of the last twenty years very well and cannot deny its fragility, even in authoritative performances.

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[Translation: Google]