



Third Bruno Walter Concert.

Soloist: Rachmaninoff.

A romantic evening: Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff, Berlioz, one after many others. What would one say if the theatre repertoire and the theatregoer were burdened with such romanticism as is predominantly the case today in the major symphony concerts? Music as an art form, almost always the one in which groundbreaking flashes of insight first appeared, is today one of the most reactionary. Modern production seems exhausted and stands perplexed before resistance, reproduction even more perplexed and indecisive. As if anything new could prevail immediately, as if it were possible without struggle. One should not constantly point to the excesses and overreach of modernity, to its incompetents and discrediting followers. And if only a single work, a single piece, has been created that justifies this movement, then it should be seen as an expression of our time, of our being, and given at least the same space as the past. Honouring and understanding the past from the perspective of the present should become the motto of all those who reproduce it. Which of the living generations is so inwardly connected to that literary Romanticism that such a program and its reproductions are justified? In any intellectual endeavour, such an inhibiting pressure is currently felt as in music, and at no time has music been made more indiscriminately and aimlessly than in our own. Music today wants to be a world unto itself, a means of enjoyment that distracts and diverts, something that can be accepted along familiar lines without intellectual engagement. The naiveté that honours the work and opens itself to it, the indulgence that consciously anticipates the intoxication of its execution, spreads and is dominant, always a danger to every new gesture, every new sound. To avoid any misunderstanding: this does not apply to Romanticism itself, which had its justification and its presence at that time.

To Bruno Walter. After Mendelssohn's overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" had rushed by and the performance reminiscences had been exchanged (I feel complicit in this), Rachmaninoff sat down at the piano to play his Piano Concerto No. 4 for its premiere. How highly we regard him as a pianist was recently discussed here on the occasion of his piano recital. Now, about his latest composition. Even if we assume that we are judging this piano concerto from the perspective of the turn of the last century, it cannot be justified, neither as a product of its time nor as a work of art in itself. What value do successful details have in a work of such scope and such demands if it lacks a grand sweep (curiously, the Romantics rarely possessed a grand sweep)? In the first and final movements, it appears so inventively stuttered and stammered that one hesitates to associate it with the composer of Piano Concerto No. 2. The middle movement is not bad, but thematically and in its expansion it is more reminiscent of a lullaby than the slow movement of a piano concerto. No inner compulsion speaks from this work, only the ambition to continue a series. The most insightful pianist, the most sensitive interpreter, showed here with the clarity for which he is valued that his last composition lacks a great, formally appropriate flow, lacking that conciseness of the themes and their imaginatively fantastical development which one had expected from him after his earlier performances.

Afterwards, a master and a masterful performance came to life: Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, also masterfully conducted by Bruno Walter.

Otto Steinhagen

[Translation: Google]