



Music

At the Beaux-Arts

Rachmaninoff Recital

Program:

J. S. Bach: Italian Concerto.

L. v. Beethoven: Sonata in C minor Op. 111.

Schubert: Impromptu in A-flat minor. Rondo in D major.

S. Rachmaninoff: Prelude in G minor. Etude-Tableau in A minor.

F. Chopin: Three Etudes, Op. 25.

F. Liszt: Three Etudes: a) in D-flat major, b) Waldesrauschen, c) Gnomentanz.

Encores:

Chopin: Mazurka. Waltz.

Rachmaninoff: Prelude.

Borodin: Scherzo

We believe that Rachmaninoff achieved record success among the Brussels public. It was pure frenzy, and the audience would not have been satisfied with the four encores that the virtuoso graciously granted them, if the hall lights hadn't been dimmed.

A well-deserved success, certainly, and one that spoke as much to the composer as to the virtuoso. Rachmaninoff played as an encore "his" prelude, you know, "the" prelude, the one everyone knows. And this work, so often repeated, so butchered by every beginner and every radio station, under the fingers of its creator, in this enormous hall where the audience was silent, hypnotized, took on an extraordinary, hallucinatory quality. We have rarely felt such a collective thrill, born of the unanimous consent of a crowd of more than two thousand listeners. It was impossible to remain distracted, to listen critically. Like everyone else, we were captivated by this spell, this atmosphere of panic that must have reigned during certain particularly dramatic passages in the theatres of ancient Greece.

Yet Rachmaninoff is not what one would call a power pianist. He lacks the sonic fury of a Gieseking, nor the sophisticated playing of a Horowitz. His interpretation is limpid, with smooth, clear timbres, characterized by extraordinary evenness and velocity. He suggests rather than imposes. This is why his interpretation of Beethoven was more reminiscent of Rachmaninoff than of the master of Bonn. But in Schubert, Chopin, and Liszt, one could easily admire the diverse and decorative gifts of this classic of Romanticism. Rachmaninoff is indeed the spiritual heir of Tchaikovsky and Liszt, but in a more aristocratic way, embodying that upper-class aristocracy that stands in opposition to the aristocracy, which one might call divinely ordained, of the Classical period. And the upper-class puritan of the Fine Arts was not mistaken. He sensed, he applauded, one of his champions, one of his bards. We understand that this spirit cast a shadow on the masters of present-day Russia. We do not know, moreover, if the ridiculous ostracism that supposedly struck Rachmaninoff in the USSR was so widespread, since last year, Russian pianists played works by this composer at the Ysaÿe Prize.

But let us not get sidetracked by politics. Let us say that this session was one of the most memorable, if not the most memorable, of this season. It is not often that one encounters many artists of Sergei Rachmaninoff's stature.

Louis Verschraegen

[Translation: Google]