

MUSIC

By OLIN DOWNES.

Rachmaninoff Again Triumphs.

Sergei Rachmaninoff played yesterday afternoon with his wonted mastery in Carnegie Hall. There are no unprecedented features of the occasion to report, but this does not lessen its significance. The art of Mr. Rachmaninoff is not a thing which depends upon novelty for its importance. He is simply—and un-faillingly—a great artist, whose conceptions are usually on a higher and nobler scale than is customary in these days. This is why Mr. Rachmaninoff retains his public and why it is endlessly interesting and profitable to come in contact with him as a musician. Yesterday he seemed, if anything, more aloof than is customary from his audience, but the audience felt him from the moment he appeared and before he had struck a note. Whatever he played, whether the listener liked that particular composer or whether Mr. Rachmaninoff's ideas corresponded to those of his audience, had an immediate and inescapable significance.

He began with a rarely played sonata of Mozart, which he gave extraordinary clearness, transparency and articulation of phrase. He then played two Scarlatti sonatas—two out of the many works of Scarlatti in this form and style which modern pianists are rediscovering for the pleasure of the public. The pieces were performed with delightful virtuosity and spirit. Thereafter Mr. Rachmaninoff played in turn the Schumann "Carnaval," three pieces of Chopin, an original composition and a transcription of his own. He played with more and more color as he proceeded with Schumann's music. It would be easy, probably, for individuals familiar with the music to dissent with this or that detail. Mr. Rachmaninoff was disposed toward particularly rapid tempi in some parts of Schumann, and he had, of course, his own nuances and coloring. Some may have found the D flat nocturne a little dry and too clearly etched, or have conceived otherwise the waltz or parts of the G minor ballad. Such differences of opinion, if they existed, had little importance.

Whatever Mr. Rachmaninoff did was big, imaginative and wholly in proportion. His romantic composers became, perhaps, a little more stark and even classic in line than they do with some other interpreters. Sometimes this treatment gave the listener sudden realization of unexpected line and masculine power where he had thought there was only romantic color. It threw certain pages into special relief, as the playing of the "Sphinxes" in the "Carnaval." These enigmatic unisons should not be omitted when the "Carnaval" is played, and Mr. Rachmaninoff by his special treatment gave them a rich, somber, almost orchestral sonority.

Back of everything was the mind of the master musician and the eloquence of an individual who never as a man or artist carried his heart on his sleeve. Mr. Rachmaninoff does not make ostentatious advances to his audience. He remains exactly himself, expressing his convictions as sincerely and as simply at the piano as he speaks in daily intercourse with his fellow-citizens. And that is sufficient. Rachmaninoff's audiences come to him. They came yesterday in numbers that packed Carnegie Hall to capacity, and they observed the unusual demonstrations when he had finished his program. In all this, as we have said, there was no particular novelty, but great art is always new, always striking in its beauty, significance and power.

The League of Composers.

When a new work of ultra-modern cast is projected by a pianist with the gifts of Walter Gieseking the professional reviewer of the occasion had better reflect before he commits himself to an opinion. The reason for this is that Mr. Gieseking would make most music sound significant. We cannot imagine a finer performance given the Third Sonata of Karol Rathaus than was given it by this extraordinary interpreter at the concert of the League of Composers last night in Town Hall. The clarity of the interpretation was matched by its authority and fire. The sonata is very difficult to play, and not merely from the technical point. It is a task calling for consummate musicianship as well as fingers of rather incredible capacity. In all these things Mr. Gieseking excels. The composer was supremely fortunate in his presence.

However, the concert gave certain bases for comparison and perspective as it proceeded, since Mr. Gieseking took part in several performances. He played with O. Onnou and R. Maas of the Pro Art Quartet, Aaron Copland's "Vitebsk" for the first time anywhere, and he performed the piano composition of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, "Dances of King David," for the first time in New York. This latter music made a much poorer impression than that of Rathaus. It is more facile and less original. The writer happened to hear it for the second time, since he heard Gieseking introduce the piece at the Frankfurt festival of modern music in 1927. Details of its excellent workmanship had higher visibility last night than ever, but they only served to emphasize the paucity of a rather flagrant virtuoso piece.

Retrospect of the concert goes back to the Rathaus sonata as the most interesting and significant music of the first part of the program. The work has well-defined structure and a passionate spirit. These in themselves do not make fine music, but they go far toward generating sounds which have interest, vitality, and reason for existence. The ideas of the first movement of the sonata seem disparate in value, but they are presented with sequence and developed with clear purpose. They do impress themselves upon the ear. There also appeared at a first hearing to be thematic relationship between different parts of the sonata. It would be interesting together again. But, again, how would this sonata sound without Mr. Gieseking?

Also Copland has written a free fantasy on a Jewish melody heard by Ansky, the playwright, in his birth-place of Vitebsk, Russia, and used by him as part of the incidental music for "The Dybbuk." At a first hearing the writer found some striking ideas, but a treatment which is too extended and often rather strained. The composition was well received, however, and the composer bowed his acknowledgements. The final part of the program consisted of Schönberg's Second String Quartet, with voice, performed by the superb Pro Arte Quartet and Ruth Rodgers.