

SYMPHONY HALL

Rachmaninoff

Seasons come, seasons go—and a Rachmaninoff recital is still very much of an event. Yesterday's concert might even be said to be more so, for not often in recent seasons has this great pianist been heard when in finer form.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Liszt's death. It is this occasion which presumably guided the pianist in the inclusion of an unusual preponderance of Liszt works on yesterday's program. In recitals of less able pianists, such a gesture might have been a definitely unfortunate one, for these days there is much of Liszt that we can do without.

But with Rachmaninoff it was different: he has an especially magical way with composers who sometimes are looked upon condescendingly—he approaches them without fuss or feathers, putting emphasis upon their good points, and, by greatest art, minimizing their less fortunate aspects.

Of the three Liszt offerings played in yesterday's recital—the transcription of Bach's Fantasy and Fugue in G minor, the arrangement of Paganini's Etude in E major, and the second "Sonetto del Petrarca"—the latter, slight as it is, appeared to receive the most effective treatment. Upon it was bestowed a poetry that was not expended elsewhere in the program—not even for Chopin!

Beethoven definitely benefits from the pianist's unconcerned and business-like approach. Seldom does the listener have the chance to hear what the music itself is really like, apart from any excessive ardors or posturings on the part of the performer. (Too often one suspects that the storm and stress of many pianists' Beethoven rises largely within themselves from the strain of coping with mechanical difficulties of deceptively difficult music.) The same wholesomeness makes models of his Chopin.

Rachmaninoff's own "Etudes Tableaux"—four of them—marked in many ways the climax of the afternoon, showing him at his best as a composer, added to his utter magnificence as a pianist.