

Vanity Fair: March, 1919; page 49

The Man Who Wrote the C Sharp Minor Prelude

Sergei Rachmaninoff—A Sane Russian Genius

UNLIKE many another musician Rachmaninoff does not draw attention to himself with an aureole of emotional hair, or deck his length of body and limb in the charm of strange and outlandish garments. The one item of notoriety in the Rachmaninoff vogue is the C sharp minor prelude—commonly referred to in Flatbush, to quote a well-known wit, as It (capitalized)! Doubtless the C sharp minor prelude has helped spread the fame of Sergei Rachmaninoff, but it cannot alone account for the enthusiasm over the serious, neutral-colored, almost sombre Russian who rises soberly in a concert room and bows with the grave aloofness of a strong man, of a strong brain, infinitely saddened by the events of the last four years, grievously burdened with the doubtful fate of his distracted country.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF is the composer not only of the C sharp minor prelude, but of many other works for the piano—preludes, sonatas, concertos,—of songs and choral pieces, of symphonies and symphonic poems, of operas. As an executive artist he is not only one of the foremost of living pianists, but a conductor of long experience and wide fame, both for orchestral concerts and for opera. Among Russian musicians of to-day consensus of opinion would probably give him the foremost place.

Rachmaninoff was born March 20, 1873, on the family estate in the province of Novgorod. Loss of fortune compelled his family to abandon the idea of giving him the typical education of the Russian aristocrat but to cultivate instead his evident talent for music. It is



worthy of note that his grandfather, described as a "real Russian noble in the grand style," was a remarkable amateur pianist, having been a pupil of John Field, and that a cousin is A. I. Siloti, also a famous pianist, who was a favorite pupil of Liszt. So rapidly did the little Sergei prosper in music that he might have been a child prodigy of the piano had not wiser counsels prevailed, very fortunately.

Entering the Petrograd Conservatory at the

age of nine, he soon became known as its "pride and ornament." Thence he went to Moscow to study the piano with Zvieriev of the Moscow Conservatory and finally with his cousin Siloti. Showing talent for composition, he took up that branch under two Russian composers of prominence, Tanejeff and Arensky. Tchaikovsky showed a keen personal interest in his development. For the final examination at the Moscow Conservatory he offered his opera "Aleko", which was performed successfully at the Moscow Grand Theatre in 1893.

Conditions in Russia became such that in December, 1917, he went to sojourn in Scandinavia. Late in 1918, he came to the United States. His piano works and his songs are of course familiar here, and some of his orchestral music has been played a good deal.

As to the later developments of the Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff does not mince words. "The Bolsheviks", he recently said, "are not socialists at all; they are brigands. The Allies ought not to enter into discussions with them, but should instead send more armed forces to Russia to help the order-loving majority of the Russian people to resume control before still more harm has been wrought. Bolshevism has nothing to do with socialism. It is a plague invented in Germany for German ends, financed with German money, bristling with German cannon. The two million German prisoners in Russia made the Bolshevik domination possible. Trotzky is simply a bandit. Bolshevism makes a specious appeal to the ignorant masses, and unfortunately it is fostered in other countries by idealists who are blind to the truth."