Greatest of Living Russian Composers, on Eve of American Concert Tour, Discusses the Terets of His Musical Creed — Says It Is Too Soon to Tell About War’s Effects on Art — A Sure Culture Will Remain National in Character — German Classics Too Great to Be Shelved — Russia the Source of the Best in Modern Music

By DOROTHY J. TEALL

The Russian school of music is today admitted by far the most important and original, and Sergei Rachmaninoff is the great Russian composer to arrive in this country, as exercised the greatest influence in the present day with that bright and constructive genius. You will say that in view of his American appearances in 1909 there should have been no wondrousness only knowledge of his appearance and himself. But 1909 was an antitollus era. A new generation of music-lovers has grown up and the time has long been fed not on facts but on the Chopin Minor Prelude, a piece which only a Titan or a romanticist could have composed.

Mr. Rachmaninoff is not a Titan. He is very tall, it is true, and quite broad of shoulder, but his smallness resembles his breadth and even some of his height. He is clean-shaven and bald of face, and his hair must be restyled as all-embracing as that of a brown. Some imaginative persons have tried to view him in his face the open and his country’s sufferings, but though the downward droop of the muscles makes it rather sad, it does not repose, it brightens with smiles and poises it with a great sense of vanity. Small fancies that if this face were caught off guard it would display a constant grimace. We begin to wonder which would finally and forever prove its possessor or its possessor, as the word has come to be misused.

These details of physiognomy are important, because if Mr. Rachmaninoff is not a Titan, he is the sort of man who could be designated as a Russian. Mr. Rachmaninoff does not yet speak English, and it may be that the English do not speak Russian at all. If the exchange of literature, which must of necessity be recorded seems still and in the manner of a judicial examination, the blame will be laid not on the difficulties of conducting the conversation. Unconsciously, Rachmaninoff reveals himself as a nationalist, a patriot, a democrat, a conservative and a ro- manticist. He is all of them.

"My music is scarcely revolutionary, so I suppose I must be called an evolutionist," Mr. Rachmaninoff’s face wore a puzzled expression which invited explanations. "Yes, it is obvious that you are more revolutionary than revolutionist in music. But if that explanation had been properly put as a question, it would have specified rather your sociological than your artistic views. The meaning was that you are a democrat, since you believe music to be the product of climate, and similarly impersonal forces. Well, then, if nationalism is the eternal, unchangeable law in music, it may be profitable to characterize the various national styles. What, in a word, is Russian music?"

"Sad," Mr. Rachmaninoff answered with a wistful readiness. "Russian is the greatest musical school to-day. It is all a matter of the internationalism which is maintained, the war’s outstanding social consequence is to be an era of unparalleled voluntary internationalism must set its impress upon the music of to-day, as the unification, which was put to Mr. Rachmaninoff.

"Do you think culture— and, in particular, of course, music— will be cosmopolitan in this post-war period, or must it always remain national? Of course we must have national and separate musical literatures for France, Russia, Germany?"

"A Bas Musical Internationalism!"

"Musical internationalism! Never! Indeed, there must always be separate national styles. Culture and national sentiment between nations will continue because of the immutable differences in climate, if nothing else."

"Ah, you are an evolutionist!"

Sergei Rachmaninoff, the Famous Russian Composer, Who Will Be Heard as Pianist by the American Public This Season. His Latest Photograph

Mr. Rachmaninoff answered with mild amusement, "You are thinking of the Russian music of to-day. Is it not that such a despotism in music is impotent. If a composer is devoid of political interests, he is bound to be as a Russian. His music is so superlatively great; it speaks so directly to the heart. That is the whole reason why it speaks so directly to the heart. Yet, how much more is there to instrumental music? Is it art or only a musical expression of the world’s culture?"

"Therefore, how should I know? Every- thing may be beautiful, but it is difficult to tell. Well, then, German music."

"There is not much to say about that either. Strauss had written himself out by the time the war began. "It may be that German music of the past the war is having a very obvious and clear-cut effect. We hear less of the German classics, and the spell of their greatness seems broken. How does that condition impress you?"

"Oh, it is sheer folly to shelve Bach, Beethoven, Mozart! A boycott of great masters like those can be injurious only to the boysts. Nothing can alter the just reputation of these masters as the sublimest figures in music."

"Before the war there was a feeling, here in America at least, that because they were the most sublime, no others could be sublime in even a minor degree. Is it not well that such a despotism should be overthrown? For that only the terms of peace remain to be settled, the works of the German masters are bound to be heard again, and thus no lasting harm has been done."

"Yes, if you put it that way, that the German classics were crowding all else out of the field in this country, that they were enforcing a veritable tyranny, then certainly one might say that the war-time reaction against them was a rather good thing."

A turn in the conversation brought up the subject of opera, and rather amusingly in view of the fact that he himself has written in the operatic form, Mr. Rachmaninoff was asked whether he liked it.

"Of course I like it! Some of the greatest Russian musical works have been of that sort. But I forget; you do not know our operas here. It is very remarkable, for they are as rich and marvellous as anything in modern music. I said regrettable, but it is perhaps also reprehensible of you not to know them. Fourteen of Rimsky-Korsakov’s compositions were cast in that form; ten out of the fourteen were great. ‘Le Coq d’Or’ you know; of the rest you do not know; nine of those tremendous works are closed books to you! Yet nowhere in the world do we find better opportunities for producing great new works than here in your country. Why do you restrict yourselves to a diet of Italian operas? (which, however, are, worn quite threadbare), and a few French works?"

Asks Why American Public Knows So Little of Russia’s Music — Ten of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Fourteen Operas Were Masterpieces, but America Has Heard Only One — Thinks Music of Future Will Follow Lines of Accepted Forms — ‘Le Coq d’Or’ and Folk Song Must Eventually Lead to Production of Great Music in Any People

Especially now that the Wagnerian and other German operas are banished, I would say you would feel the need of new works."

"Not the least count in the indictment against us is our inability to find a reason for our neglect of the operas which you have mentioned, Mr. Rachmaninoff. It is a condition which the modern music-lover must accept as he does his politics. Among the things that are there, independently of his own interest, it is evident that you like opera. Perhaps you would not like opera without an amendment as to the effect the war will have on other accepted musical forms. A future, I can’t tell! I dare not attempt prediction."

Evolution Rather Than Revolution

"Do you not think it likely that the present war-induced dearth of music in the European atmosphere may establish this country? Perhaps old muscular forces will become characteristics with old political forces."

"I hope not. I hope not. Still, hopes are vague affairs; if they could be confirmed, it would be all the better, since we have been able to take more seriously our past. Whether there really is ground for expecta- tion? We have various so-called forms of music in the past."

"But, the use of a program, the introduction of an element of poetical interest, has come to stay; not program music but music which has sometimes employed it, an attempt to make music intelligible to the uneducated essentially visual perceptions; but programism as practised, though of course fashionable, is no more than the twelfth century romanticists, Schumann’s music, the music of Chopin and Liszt."

"I am saying this: that the composers not only may but some composers even ought to have a program mind, in a thread of interest which is to string together compositions which we seek to explore in his work; whereas to put the program in his mind, to follow the composer’s guide through the labyrinths of composition.

"Yes, I mean above all. Of course, In police must aid in the building of great music, if not in the making of great music. It is impotent. If a composer is devoid of political interests, he is bound to be as a Russian. His music is so superlatively great; it speaks so directly to the heart. That is the whole reason why it speaks so directly to the heart. Yet, how much more is there to instrumental music? Is it art or only a musical expression of the world’s culture?"

"Yes, at least in the indictment against us is our inability to find a reason for our neglect of the operas which you have mentioned, Mr. Rachmaninoff. It is a condition which the modern music-lover must accept as he does his politics. Among the things that are there, independently of his own interest, it is evident that you like opera. Perhaps you would not like opera without an amendment as to the effect the war will have on other accepted musical forms. A future, I can’t tell! I dare not attempt prediction."

(Continued on page 4)