

Rachmaninoff's memory guides Kottler's hands

By TIM RICHARD

"This one is brighter and has a better bass. If I were playing Tchaikovsky, I would use this one," said pianist Mischa Kottler as he examined Steinways in the back room of the Hammill Music store in Livonia.

"But this one has the quality," said Kottler as he rang out the eight opening chords of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 on a second instrument, and then shifted to the theme in the first movement that used to be a radio program signature.

Kottler should know how the composer (1873-1943) would want it. As a youth, Kottler received some career inspiration and tips on playing the second concerto from Sergei Rachmaninoff himself.

How well Kottler learned the lessons will become apparent to Oakway Symphony Orchestra fans at 8 p.m. Saturday in the auditorium of Harrison High School, Twelve Mile east of Middle Belt in Farmington Hills. With Francesco D'Blasi conducting, they will perform the Russian's most famous work as the feature of the fourth concert of the season.

"I MET Rachmaninoff when I was about 14," said Kottler, who had come to the United States from his native Kiev, Russia. "I was accompanist for Leopold Auer (the violinist who was later the mentor of Jascha Heifetz). Auer said I shouldn't be an accompanist, and he made an appointment for me to meet Rachmaninoff."

"I said, 'Oh, my God!'"

"Rachmaninoff said he wouldn't teach me, but he advised me to go back to Europe and study."

Kottler turned to the piano and ran through an ascending portion of the first movement. "You know this part?" He said. "Not so loud." I said, "But it's marked fortissimo."

He said, "I know, but you're not going to be heard because the orchestra is too loud and too important at this point. Save your energy for when you really need it."

"From that," said Kottler. "I learned a great deal."

HE PICKED UP the score. "Rachmaninoff had been depressed at the failure of his second symphony. He went to a psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist cured him. He would repeat, 'You will write a great concerto.'"

"See here, Rachmaninoff dedicated it to the doctor—Nikolai Dahl. Dahl—that's not a Russian name. Well, he (Rachmaninoff) was at Leipzig for a time."

"The one who made it (the second concerto) popular was Vladimir Horowitz. He played it continuously. Do you know Horowitz would play only five concertos in his American concerts—Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, two of Brahms and the (Beethoven) 'Emperor'?"

One famous story about Rachmaninoff is in all the books. Audiences always demanded to hear as an encore his famous prelude in C sharp minor, with the gloomy descending chords. In time the composer came to despise it.

Kottler told what isn't in the books: When called back to play it, Rachmaninoff would mutter at the cheering

audience the Russian equivalent of "you sons-of-bitches."

KOTTLER LEFT as Auer's accompanist and went to Paris to study with Alfred Cortat. (He didn't know it at the time, but Rachmaninoff despised Cortat, although the Frenchman was a great pianist nonetheless.)

Later Kottler would study in Vienna with Emil von Sauer, a major pupil of the legendary Franz Liszt.

Before one can become too impressed by these credentials, Kottler hastens to add, "Say what you want, the pianists of today are far superior. Liszt played his own works. He never had to play Bartok and Prokofiev."

Kottler had his own concert career and finally settled in Detroit, where he was the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's pianist and frequent soloist for more than 20 years.

He was director of music at WWJ for 33 years, although today that radio station's offering of the classics is nil. Kottler is still a professor and chairman of the piano department at Wayne State University.

PRIOR TO the intermission Sunday, Oakway will perform Frescobaldi's "Toccata," Handel's "Water Music" suite, and three excerpts from Berlioz's "Damnation of Faust."

In addition, Paul Amorello, first oboist in the orchestra, will be soloist in the haunting English horn part in "The Swan of Tuonela" by Sibelius. "Swan" is one of four "legends" the nationalist Sibelius wrote based on the Finnish tales called the "Kalevala."

Sorority will mark its Founders Day

Alumnae and collegiate members of Alpha Omicron Pi, Detroit, Lansing and Ann Arbor will celebrate Founder's Day, at 11:30 a.m., Jan. 21 at Topinka's Restaurant, Redford.

Mrs. Esther Hulsing, an Alpha Omicron Pi alumna and past president of the Huron Valley Girl Scout Council, will be the guest speaker. Members from the northwest suburban chapter, including residents of Plymouth, Livonia and Farmington, can make reservations with Mrs. William O'Shea, 35979 Middleboro, Livonia.



MISCHA KOTTLER
Tip from Rachmaninoff

Ice rinks provide winter fun for all

Seven natural ice skating rinks are located in the Farmington area for the use of residents, the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation department reminds winter sports enthusiasts.

Five rinks are located in Colony Park subdivision, on Oak Point Drive; Kendallwood Farms subdivision, on the corner of Kirsidae Lane and East Tulipwood; Lincolnshire subdivision,

on Glencastle near East Junior High; Gill Elementary School, near Bridgeman and Gill; and Lincolnshire East subdivision, on Eleven Mile between Middlebelt and Inkster Road.

Two other rinks are located in Meadowbrook Hills-Woods subdivision, on Rhonswood in the tennis court area; and the City of Farmington's flooded rink located at the corner of Shiwassee and Farmington Road near City Park.

Civil War buff puts in a few words for the South

By TERESA BANAS

Shelves saddled with the weight of hundreds of cloth-bound books line the walls. Although new authors have emerged and submerged over the years, the topic is the same. In each of the 600 volumes is a recollection of life during the Civil War—and Milburn Lent owns them all.

Lent, 52, is a collector and the Civil War is his hobby. His oldest volume dates back to 1863. The Bedford resident also owns several authentic guns from that period as well as other war-time memorabilia including a soldier's uniform, a gun belt, and several bullets found at battle sites.

Lent says his interest in the war began 22 years ago when he read "A Short History of the Civil War," by Fletcher Pratt. Since then his library has expanded considerably. The

library includes reference books and original regiment reports. The reports are categorized by the state the soldiers came from.

"It started with this little paper-back," he says. "And I got deeper and deeper into it as I went along."

Lent attributes his driving interest in this topic to the geographic proximity of the war. "It was so close," he says. "It happened in this country where everything is familiar to us. And I just loved the people in that day and age."

"THEY WERE GENTEEL people with strong family lives," he continues. "And all these boys wrote about were their families."

"What I admire most is that during the first two years of the war, the enlisted were all volunteers," he says.

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Milburn Lent's private library probably tops any one else's around. He owns more than 600 books about the Civil War. Lent also collects other souvenirs of the war—like this musket. (Staff photo by Teresa Banas)

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