

Preface

Max Reger and his organ works – chronological table

1873–1890 Brand, Weiden, Sondershausen

1873, 19 March	Johann Baptist Joseph Maximilian Reger is born in Brand near Kemnatz (in the Bavarian Upper Palatinate), the son of the teacher Joseph and his wife Philomena.
1874, Easter	Reger's father, who is highly regarded as a teacher and plays several musical instruments himself, is transferred to Weiden and settles there with his family.
1884–1889	After piano and violin training at home, Reger begins taking piano lessons with the organist Adalbert Lindner, who will later become his fatherly friend and first biographer.
1885	Construction of a home organ from parts of a scrapped training organ from the teacher training college in Weiden. Reger becomes acquainted with works by Bach, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Liszt.
1886–1889	Organist at the Catholic services of the city church in Weiden, used by both Catholics and Protestants.
1887	Max Reger's first public appearance as pianist.
1888	Deeply impressed by a Parsifal performance at the Bayreuth Wagner Festival, he decides to become a musician.
1890, April to August	Studies with Hugo Riemann at the Conservatory in Sondershausen.

1890–1898 Wiesbaden

1890, Fall	Riemann leaves Sondershausen to teach in Wiesbaden and is accompanied by Reger. First compositions, piano teaching, occasional jobs, theory lessons
1892, Fall	Op. 16 First Suite in E minor „ <i>Den Manen Joh. Seb. Bachs</i> ”
1893	Composition teacher in Wiesbaden, collaborator of the “Allgemeine Musikzeitung”. The first Reger concert is held in Berlin on 23 October.
1896	Volunteer for one year in the 80th Infantry Regiment in Wiesbaden.
1897, 4 March	Karl Straube (born on 6 Jan. 1873) plays Reger's Suite in E minor in Berlin. Beginning of lifelong friendship with this organist, the most significant of his time.
1898	Reger becomes ill in the spring and returns to his family in Weiden in June upon their insistence.

1898–1901 Weiden

	Intensive creative activity during these three years in Weiden: piano and organ works, lieder, choral music and chamber music. All the chorale fantasias and the large works without chorales Op. 46 and 57 are written during this period.
1898, August	Op. 27 Fantasia on the chorale “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott”
Fall	Op. 29 Fantasia and Fugue in C minor
	Op. 30 Fantasia on the chorale “Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele”
1899, Spring	Op. 33 First Sonata in F sharp minor
Mid-October	Introduction and Passacaglia in D minor without Opus number
September	Op. 40 Two Chorale Fantasias (“Wie schön leucht' uns der Morgenstern” and “Straf mich nicht in deinem Zorn”)
1900, February	Op. 46 Fantasia and Fugue on B-A-C-H
Spring	Op. 47 Six Trios
Second half of	Op. 52 Three Chorale Fantasias (“Alle Menschen müssen sterben”, “Wachet auf! ruft uns die Stimme” and “Halleluja! Gott zu loben, bleibe meine Seelenfreud!”)
September	
1901, Spring	Op. 56 Five Easy Preludes and Fugues
	Op. 57 Symphonic Fantasia and Fugue
	Variations and Fugue on “Heil, unserm König, Heil” (“Heil dir im Siegerkranz”)
Second half of June	Op. 59 Twelve Pieces

1901–1907 Munich

1901, 1 September	Reger moves to Munich with his parents.
November/December	Op. 60 Second Sonata in D minor
1901/02	Op. 63 Monologues, Twelve Pieces
1902	Gradual improvement of his financial situation with income from teaching and piano accompanying.
Spring	Op. 65 Twelve Pieces
	Op. 67 52 Easy Chorale Preludes
25 October	Marriage with Elsa von Bercken, née von Bagenski.
1903, 6 January	Karl Straube becomes St. Thomas organist in Leipzig.
Spring	Op. 69 Ten Pieces
Late Summer	Op. 73 Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme in F sharp minor
1901–1904	Op. 79b (13) Chorale Preludes
1904, Early summer	Op. 80 Twelve Pieces
	Op. 85 Four Preludes and Fugues
1905, 28 September	Death of Reger's father Joseph.
Fall	Op. 92 Second Suite in G minor
1906	Prelude and Fugue in G sharp minor without Opus number
	Increasing concert activity during the last Munich years: Holland and Switzerland in 1905, tours of numerous German cities, leading him as far as St. Petersburg in 1906/07.

1907–1911 Leipzig

- 1907, 22 February Reger accepts the appointment as University music director and director of a master class for composition at the Conservatory in Leipzig. In this time Reger writes his great symphonic works (Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto, 100th Psalm, Symphonic Prologue), but curiously enough, despite the presence of his friend and preferred organ interpreter Karl Straube, he composes no works for organ during this period.
- 1908 Honorary PhD. from the University of Jena.
- 1909 Concert tour in England.
- 1910, 7 to 9 May First German Reger Festival in Dortmund.

1911–1915 Meiningen

- 1911 Reger increasingly wins international acclaim, but has difficulty being accepted by the Leipzig critics. He thus accepts the offer to become director of the Meiningen court orchestra (1 November).
- 1912 Concert tour in Central and South Germany. "Eine romantische Suite" Op. 125
- 1913, April/Mai Op. 127 Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue in E minor (for the inauguration of the gigantic organ in the Breslau Jahrhunderthalle). A concerto for organ and orchestra, possibly planned for this occasion, is not written.
- 1913, End of August to 7 September Op. 129 Nine Pieces
- 1914, Second half of September Op. 135a 30 Little Chorale Preludes

1915–1916 Jena

- 1915, 1 April Reger moves to Jena in order to be free of obligations and to live from his art.
- before 17 May Op. 135b Fantasia and Fugue in D minor
- 1915/16 Op. 145 Seven Pieces
- 1916, 11 May Reger dies in a Leipzig hotel room.

Notes to the present edition

The present edition presents Max Reger's organ works in seven volumes. The music text was taken from the Complete Edition¹, whereby printing errors were corrected*, after critical examination. Detailed commentaries on the editorial principles as well as extensive critical notes are contained in the volumes of the Complete Edition edited by Hans Klotz. In the Complete Edition, only the following changes were made in relation to the master texts (autographs and/or first editions):

- a) The voice leading was rendered occasionally clearer by alterations of the note tails and beams.
- b) The indications of registration and manuals have been presented in a more simplified manner.
- c) The words *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, *stringendo* and *ritardando* have replaced *cre---scen---do---* etc. These indications are valid until Reger's next dynamic or tempo-related marking. It is essential that the performer be aware of this change in the music text, since it is not without importance regarding the solution of problems concerning transitional dynamics and tempo modifications.
- d) As an orientational aid, caesura signs were added at the ends of themes (Passacaglia) and at *cantus firmus* lines.

Notes concerning the Interpretation

Tempo

The tempo indications in Reger's organ works, especially in the early and middle works, are not to be taken all too literally. Particularly the fast movements are to be played generally slower than indicated by the composer. Reger wrote to the organist Gerard Bunk in May 1910 at the occasion of the Dortmund Reger Festival: "*Young man, don't play my pieces too fast; ... play everything quite calmly, even when it says to play faster.*"² And Karl Straube expressed the following opinion: "*The use of express-train speed as tempo is a crime against his art.*"³ What Reger wrote to the Duke of Meiningen in 1912 regarding a performance of Brahms' Fourth Symphony fully applies to the interpretation of his own organ works: "*The tempo of a piece is not determined solely by the indications provided by the composer, but also by the density*

of the harmony, the polyphony, the hall in which the piece is performed and the principle of the greatest possible clarity."⁴

Dynamics and Tempo

Karl Straube felt that Reger had not been blessed with the talent of "*selecting the right words and symbols which would allow others to penetrate into the secrets of this musical world.*"⁵ The only thing that Reger wanted to obtain with his excess of dynamic markings was an "*emotionally stirring interpretation.*"⁶ This means that every dynamic marking, whether it can be realized or not, influences the tempo relationships in a work. Straube again: "*The unity resting in the whole should be preserved.*"

* The publishers would like to express their thanks to Prof. Dr. Hermann Busch for his kind help with the editorial preparation.

The Sound

One can only do justice to Reger's musical uniqueness when one sees the organ works (which embrace only 28 Opus numbers next to 146 Opus numbers in his entire oeuvre) in connection with his piano music, chamber music, lied compositions and works for orchestra. Even the graphic presentation of his works, including the organ works, clearly shows that he was rooted in the Romantic tradition: "*Max Reger's relationship to the great St. Thomas cantor is not as close as one often tends to believe. Reger comes from the late Beethoven, the Romantic composers and Johannes Brahms.*"⁷ Reger's conception of the organ's sound was undoubtedly decisively influenced by the organ of the "Marktkirche" in Wiesbaden (III/51, Walcker 1863). The organ had a cone-valve chest and mechanical action, but also possessed a register crescendo (crescendo roller) and combination pedals. Reger unabashedly repeatedly expressed his enthusiasm for modern organs with their devices for obtaining "*the fastest and most intense dynamic contrast effects*", as Adalbert Lindner reported.

On 14 June 1903, at the occasion of the German-Swiss Music Congress, Straube performed Reger's "Feste Burg" Op. 27 and the "Symphonic Fantasia and Fugue" Op. 57 in a new "classical" interpretation (thereby ignoring numerous indications of the composer concerning transitional dynamics). Although Reger approved, he continued undauntedly to write for a dynamically equipped organ, as the following works prove. Reger's ideal organ sound was also anchored in the tradition of the 19th century. There is no known manifestation of interest in the (Neo-Baroque) "Werk" principle on Reger's part. The interpretation of Reger's organ music thus presupposes an instrument possessing a sufficient quantity of foundation stops and mixtures which are not too high, but well-rounded. The reed pipes should blend together with the overall flue stop sound, and the (usually required three) manuals should generally allow a dynamic-orchestral sound, and seldom or never a sound divided into divisions or separated in space.

Sonata No. 1 Op. 33

*Dedicated with reverence and gratitude to Professor A. W. Gottschalg,
Grand-Ducal Saxon Court Organist
Composed in Weiden in the spring of 1899*

On 8 April 1899, Reger wrote to Arthur Egidi from Weiden: "*I've just finished a new organ sonata (in F sharp minor). Don't be frightened by the title 'sonata'; it is not in sonata form. The title is used only generically here!*"⁸ Lindner reported that he repeatedly discussed the problem of the organ sonata with Reger. They both held the opinion "*that it was impossible to transfer the old piano chamber-sonata form to the organ, with its lyrical, amoroso secondary theme in the first movement, the subjectively emotional, expressive quality of its song-like Adagio or Largo, and the Rondo form of the finale.*"⁹ Heinrich Reimann had also expounded such views in the Allgemeine Musikzeitung.¹⁰

The three movements of this work are called Fantasie, Intermezzo and Passacaglia – designations also found in works by Joseph Rheinberger. It is possible that Rheinberger inspired the formal structure of Reger's first organ sonata, for in a letter to Rheinberger, a highly esteemed organ composer in his day, one can read: "*Esteemed Herr Geheimrat! May I humbly venture to send you by the same post my newly published First Sonata for Organ (in F sharp minor Op. 33), and to kindly ask you to graciously peruse this work, my latest offense against harmony and counterpoint etc. etc. At the same time, may I make so bold as to express, esteemed Herr Geheimrat, my most sincere admiration of your truly magnificent organ sonatas ...*"¹¹

Adalbert Lindner wrote that this work is "*... one of the most significant revelations of Reger's art ...*"¹²

Sonata No. 2 Op. 60

*Dedicated with gratitude to Professor Martin Krause
Composed in Munich in November / December 1901
First performance by Hermann Dettmer in the Cathedral of
Merseburg on 11 May 1902*

Reger's second organ sonata was written in the composer's middle creative period. The names of the movements (Improvisation, Invocation, Introduction and Fugue) again point to Romantic models.¹³ In the first movement, Reger avoids any reference to the classical formal scheme, and pursues an improvisatory-like plan in which contrapuntal sections alternate with lyrical, atmospheric passages. Each section builds up to a crescendo, but only to end on a half cadence, which thus causes a permanent instability, and

distinctly removes this sonata movement from the sphere of its Classical predecessors. The central movement with its chorale symbolism discloses the influence of the New German School. The programmatic character of this movement is unmistakable: the anguished "Invocation" ("Grave con duolo") is answered and comforted by the ethereal chorale. Here, however, the melody no longer has any liturgical connotations, but rather sublimates the antagonisms of the Romantic soul and becomes a symbol for the supra-personal and religious world in general, as opposed to the restlessness of the material world, prey to worry and distress. "*The piece is like a shrouded figure which can only be imagined, which can and should never be completely unmasked.*"¹⁵

First Suite Op. 16

"To the Manes of Johann Sebastian Bach"
Composed in the winter of 1894 / spring of 1895
First performance by Karl Straube in the Holy Trinity church in
Berlin on 4 March 1897

During his Wiesbaden years, Reger diligently studied the works of Johannes Brahms and became an ardent admirer of this composer, whom he would gladly have met personally. Reger had planned to dedicate his B-minor Symphony to the maestro, but the work was never written. In the summer of 1896, Reger sent Brahms his Suite Op. 16 ("*my best work yet*"). Brahms answered immediately, but not without calling Reger's attention to the bold dedication of the Suite:

Dear Sir!

I wish to express my most cordial thanks for your letter, whose warm words – perhaps a trifle too amicable – touched me pleasantly. You would like to honor me by dedicating this lovely offering to me. But you do not need my permission to do this. I could not help smiling while considering your request, coming at the same time that you send me a work whose frankly audacious dedication frightens me!

*Yes, you may go ahead and inscribe the name of
Your faithful and devoted*

J. Brahms

This letter led to a correspondence between the two men, who later exchanged photos. Brahms's photograph stood on Reger's desk for many years.¹⁶

After completing the Suite, Reger immediately made a four-hand piano version of it and begged his London publisher Augener to

publish this arrangement as well: “There are so many people who play four-hand piano music, and urgently wish to become acquainted with new works, too; and precisely this four-hand arrangement of my Suite is ideal for making my works more accessible.” Reger alluded to the difficulty of his works by writing: “What guarantees Brahms’s immortality is not at all his allegiance to the past masters, but his gift for creating new, heretofore unimaginable psychological moods on the basis of his own personality. Here lies the root of all immortality.”¹⁸

Second Suite Op. 92

Composed in Munich in the fall of 1905

The Second Suite for organ was written at a time when Reger, having overcome an initial phase of violent rejection, was enjoying broader recognition. Increasing numbers of performances also improved the composer’s financial situation so that he was able to rent a cottage on the Baltic Sea in Kolberg during the summer of 1905. Free of cares, he devoted himself there completely to this compositional work. However, his vacation ended prematurely with the unexpected death of his father Joseph Reger on 28 September. It is possible that his father’s death inspired Max Reger to write another work for the organ, the “churchly” instrument, after Reger had dedicated himself extensively to chamber music. But it is more likely that the composer acceded to a publisher’s wish for short, technically easy pieces, and chose a structure in several sections which allowed the performer to play the movements separately as well. Significantly, the Suite was published as a whole in one volume and as a series of independent pieces in seven separate volumes.

Six Trios Op. 47

Dedicated with deep respect to Mr. G. G. Bagster
Composed in Weiden in the spring of 1900

Adalbert Lindner, Reger’s friend and adviser, called the Trios Op. 47 “a flower between two chasms”, thereby alluding to the B–A–C–H work Op. 46 and the three Chorale Fantasias Op. 52: “This brief respite from all the demanding intellectual work in the form of a

simple song, an organ, piano or violin piece, which then immediately ushers in the next ascent, still steeper, to yet more mighty intellectual peaks, appropriately characterizes the master’s economical management of his creative energy and is a substantial gauge of the strength of Reger’s creative spirit.”¹⁹

Since Reger’s previous organ works had found only few performers up to then (above all Karl Straube, Georg Stolz, Friedrich Spitta, Paul Gerhardt and Otto Burkert), Reger felt that the time was ripe to publish some easily playable organ pieces. The composer apparently wrote the pieces “quickly and in high spirits”²⁰ and conceived them primarily for pedagogical purposes.²¹

Two Transcriptions

Prelude and Fugue in F sharp minor
Dedicated to my dear friend Hans von Ohlendorff
Composed in Meiningen in 1912

Romance in A minor
Possibly composed in Munich in 1904

Max Reger had a very uninhibited relationship – typical of his time, moreover – to musical transcriptions. It is amazing how many works he adapted to other instruments or arranged by adding new parts. Among his many piano transcriptions we find Bach organ works as well as “selected pieces” from Richard Wagner’s operas. He also made elaborate orchestrations of lieder by Brahms, Schubert and Schumann, for example. Reger also repeatedly transcribed his own works for other scorings in order to address new circles of performers.

The original version of the Prelude and Fugue in F sharp minor is found in Vol. IV of Opus 82, “Aus meinem Tagebuch” (seven little pieces for piano two-hands). This charming composition impressively shows how Reger succeeded in refining his style and lightening his writing – characteristics which stamped his later works.

The Romance in A minor had originally been written for harmonium. Arrangements of this little piece were also made by Richard Lange (for string orchestra, as well as for solo strings with accompaniment) and Sigfrid Karg-Elert (for wind quartet, salon orchestra and other scorings).

Vienna, Fall 1988

Hans Haselböck

Notes

- 1 Max Reger, Complete Works. In collaboration with the Max-Reger-Institut (Elsa-Reger-Stiftung), Bonn. Volumes 15–18. Revised by Hans Klotz. Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden 1956ff
- 2 Gerard Bunk, *Liebe zur Orgel*. Dortmund, no year, p. 74
- 3 Karl Straube, *Briefe eines Thomaskantors*. Stuttgart 1952, p. 174
- 4 Quoted after Heinz Lohmann, *Bemerkungen zur Interpretation der Orgelwerke von Max Reger*, in: *Musik und Kirche*, 1973/5, p. 226f
- 5 Straube, p. 212
- 6 Straube, p. 174
- 7 Straube, p. 175
- 8 Max Reger – *Briefe eines deutschen Meisters*. Leipzig 1928, p. 62
- 9 Adalbert Lindner, *Max Reger. Ein Bild seines Jugendlebens und künstlerischen Werdens*. Stuttgart 1922, p. 164
- 10 21. Jg., Nos. 40 and 41
- 11 Quoted from Martin Weyer, *Die deutsche Orgelsonate von Mendelssohn bis Reger*. Regensburg 1969, p. 148
- 12 Lindner, p. 165
- 13 Cf. for example Joseph Rheinberger’s *Sonata No. 16*
- 14 Weyer, p. 147ff
- 15 Guido Bagier, *Max Reger*. Stuttgart 1923, p. 142
- 16 *Briefe*, p. 54
- 17 Lindner, p. 99f
- 18 *Briefe*, p. 53f
- 19 Lindner, p. 206
- 20 Bagier, p. 139
- 21 Letter to Karl Wolfrum of 6 October 1900. *Briefe*, p. 82

Sämtliche Orgelwerke

Max Reger

Herrn Prof. A. W. Gottschalg, großherz. sächs. Hoforganist
in verehrungsvoller Dankbarkeit

Erste Sonate

fis-moll

op. 33

Fantasie

Allegro energico

Musical score for the first system of the Fantasy, measures 1-3. The score is in F# minor (three sharps) and 6/4 time. It features a grand staff with three staves. The top staff is the right hand, the middle staff is the left hand, and the bottom staff is a separate bass line. The tempo is marked 'Allegro energico'. The first measure is marked with a first fingering 'I' and a dynamic of 'ff'. Pedal points are indicated as '8' 4' 2' (ohne 16') and '16' 8' 4''.

Musical score for the second system of the Fantasy, measures 4-6. The score continues with the grand staff. Pedal points are marked as '+ K III' in both the middle and bottom staves. The dynamics are marked 'crescendo' in both the middle and bottom staves.

Musical score for the third system of the Fantasy, measures 7-9. The score continues with the grand staff. Pedal points are marked as '+ K II più f' in the middle and bottom staves, and '+ 16' etc. più f' in the bottom staff. The bottom staff also has a marking '+ K I più f'.