

PREFACE

The composition of the chorale fantasias

Reger's study of chorales and his use of them in large-scale forms is closely associated with a decisive event in his life. Following a complete physical and psychological breakdown triggered by financial worries, professional uncertainty, unsettled circumstances and the stresses of military service, Reger returned to his family home in Weiden in June 1898.

The 'beneficial rest and inner composure' which accompanied this change enabled the ambitious composer to 'devote himself to the development of his artistic plans and designs without any external distractions'.¹

This led to a particular focus on the composition of major organ works which, from Reger's perspective and in contrast with contemporary works, were once again to be orientated more towards the style and legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach. Here, the essential characteristics for Reger were 'the *inexorable* logic of the writing, the solidity of the part-writing, the deliberate *avoidance* of all so-called *lyrical* (i.e. mostly sentimental); never a *playing* with the tonal effects of the different registers, but a *purposeful* true composition for organ.'²

Between 1898 and 1901, when Reger moved to Munich, he composed the majority of the organ works he himself called 'elephants'³, including all the chorale fantasias, the First Sonata in F# minor Op. 33, the Fantasia and Fugue on B-A-C-H Op. 46 and the Symphonic Fantasia and Fugue Op. 57.

Three further aspects were significant for the composition of the chorale fantasias: firstly, Reger intensively explored the texts and melodies of Protestant chorales, leading to his famous declaration, 'The Protestants don't know what they've got with their chorales!'⁴ Secondly, his study of the central aspects of human existence was reinforced by his intensive study of contemporary literature. Finally, Reger's reception of works by Richard Strauss led to Reger's positioning between the conflicting priorities of absolute and programme music.

Even though the young composer proclaimed the ideals of a style founded on Bach, Beethoven and Brahms to be a guiding compositional principle, he admired Strauss for the kind of sound he created and – for all his rejection of the superficially programmatic – regarded Bach's chorale settings as 'symphonic poems in miniature'⁵.

Ultimately for Reger, 'each work of art which reveals something to me spiritually [is] a symphonic poem'⁶. Thus it is that Reger's friend Fritz Stein also recognized that his work with or based on Protestant chorales was caught between the poles of 'elemental power and mystic contemplation'⁷: 'The Catholic Reger discovers and reveals the depths of the Protestant hymn which the secular naturalism of the world at that time failed to recognize. Reger – and this is the essential fact – does not experience these fundamental religious forces in denominational terms, he experiences them [...] from the hiddenmost depths of Bach's art.'⁸ The composer himself described the closeness to programme music in a letter to Caesar Hochstetter: 'While retaining the chorale melody as a c. f. [cantus firmus], every verse is illustrated musically.'⁹

The organ music of the 17th and 18th centuries, especially that of Samuel Scheidt, but also the expansive chorale fantasias of the North German organ style, which fully exploited the tonal and compositional language of the day, offers models for a detailed interpretation of the Protestant chorale in content and technique. Nevertheless, Reger created something new with his seven chorale fantasias. His biographer Guido Bagier aptly put it: 'We have in the most extreme sense a kind of programmatic music before us, for the power of the textual underpinning grips Reger with such intensity that the musical imagination is completely filled with its ideas and all tonal constructs are intuitively dependent upon it.'¹⁰

Max Reger composed his seven chorale fantasias within two years, between August 1898 and October 1900. At the same time, they form the conclusion of his preoccupation with this large-scale form, excepting the chorale cantatas intended for use in a different context. They comprise two contrasting pairs of works: Opp. 27, 30 and 40/1 & 2 as well as the sequence of Fantasias Op. 52/1–3 conceived as a trilogy. In his overall assessment, Fritz Stein described Reger's tremendous contribution to the genre as follows: 'The defiant courage of the Lutheran hymn, fear of the world and the longing for death, all the horrors of the guilt of sin and fear of death, the result of heartfelt contemplation of the divine mystery, unshakable confidence in faith – "credo, quia absurdum!" – , praise of eternal goodness in the beholding of divine glory, – through all the heights and depths of human existence and experiencing God, the soul of the struggling artist, torn apart by demonic forces, has walked with the pious poets of these ancient chorales, and has found itself and its God in the desolation of these years of struggle.'¹¹

¹ Adalbert Lindner, *Max Reger. Ein Bild seines Jugendlebens und künstlerischen Werdens*, Stuttgart 1922, p. 109.

² Letter from Max Reger to Hugo Riemann dated 18 March 1899, in: Susanne Popp (ed.), *Der junge Reger: Briefe und Dokumente vor 1900*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 401.

³ Letter from Max Reger to Otto Leßmann dated 14 January 1901, Max-Reger-Institut Karlsruhe, Ep. Ms. 185.

⁴ Adalbert Lindner, see note 1, p. 136.

⁵ Max Reger, preface to the edition *Job. Seb. Bach, Ausgewählte Orgel-Choralspiele (für Klavier zu zwei Händen bearbeitet)*, Munich 1901.

⁶ Max Reger, "Offener Brief", in: *Die Musik* 7. (1907), Vol. 1, p. 12.

⁷ Fritz Stein, *Max Reger. Sein Leben in Bildern*, Leipzig 1941, p. 18. [1956: p. 15]

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Letter from Max Reger to Caesar Hochstetter dated end of September 1898, in: Susanne Popp, see note 2, p. 347.

¹⁰ Guido Bagier, *Max Reger*, Stuttgart, Berlin 1923, p. 120.

¹¹ Fritz Stein, *Max Reger*, Potsdam 1939, p. 116.

Opus 27

A Autograf für Karl Straube
Max-Reger-Institut, Karlsruhe, Signatur: Mus. Ms. 002

Titel: *Phantasie für Orgel | über den Choral: | „Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott.“ |*
Max Reger op 27a | Widmung links unterhalb Titel: *Seinem lieben Freunde |*
Karl Straube

Reger verwendet wie üblich schwarze Tinte für den Notentext und rote Tinte für die Vortragsanweisungen. Darüber hinaus weist das Autograf handschriftliche Eintragungen in blauer Schrift (Karl Straube) auf, überwiegend Angaben zum Fußsatz. Am Schluss der Partitur steht der Vermerk: Fine.

Die Stichvorlage, im Archiv des Verlages Rob. Forberg, Leipzig, aufbewahrt, wurde vermutlich bei der Bombardierung während des Zweiten Weltkriegs im Jahr 1943 vernichtet.

As usual Reger used black ink for the musical text and red ink for the performance instructions. In addition, the autograph contains manuscript annotations in blue writing (Karl Straube), mainly markings on the pedalling. At the end of the score the marking: Fine.

The engraver's copy, which was preserved in the archive of the publisher Rob. Forberg in Leipzig, was probably destroyed in 1943 in bombing during Second World War.

E Erstdruck Verlag Rob. Forberg, Leipzig, Plattennummer 5278
Ab 1904 Übernahme Universal Edition, Wien, U.E. 1247

Titel: *Seinem lieben Freunde | KARL STRAUBE. | PHANTASIE | für | ORGEL | über*
den Choral | Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott. | Von | MAX REGER | Op. 27. Pr. 2
Mark | Eigentum des Verlegers für alle Länder. | LEIPZIG, ROB. Forberg

Ab 1934 durch Verlag J. Rieter-Biedermann/C. F. Peters, Leipzig übernommen, Verlagsnummer 4404, Plattennummer 11269, weitere Auflagen Edition Peters.

Acquired in 1934 by the publisher J. Rieter-Biedermann/C. F. Peters, Leipzig, publisher's number 4404, plate number 11269, further impressions by Edition Peters.

Opus 30

A Autograf für Karl Straube
Max-Reger-Institut, Karlsruhe, Signatur: Mus. Ms. 005

Titel: *Phantasie für Orgel | über den Choral: | „Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele!“ |*
Von | Max Reger op 27 b.
Widmung: *Seinem lieben Freunde | Karl Straube.*

Reger verwendet wie üblich schwarze Tinte für den Notentext und rote Tinte für die Vortragsanweisungen. Auffällig ist das nahezu vollständige Fehlen von Artikulations-/Phrasierungsbögen. Die

As usual Reger used black ink for the musical text and red ink for the performance instructions. What is striking is the almost complete lack of articulation or phrasing slurs. The manuscript annotations by Karl

handschriftlichen blauen Eintragungen Karl Straubes beschränken sich auf wenige Stellen, überwiegend zu Warnakzidenzen. Am Schluss vermerkte Reger: Fine | Max Reger

Straube in blue are confined to very few places, mainly to cautionary accidentals. At the end Reger noted: Fine | Max Reger

S Stichvorlage

Universal Edition, Wien; Dauerleihgabe in der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Wien, Signatur: L1.UE.400.

Titel: *Phantasie für Orgel | über den Choral: | „Freu-dich-sehr,-o-meine-Seele!“ | von |*
Max Reger op 30
Widmung: *Seinem lieben Freunde | Karl Straube.*

In üblicher Weise verwendete Reger schwarze und rote Tinte. Ebenso wie in **A** fehlen Artikulations- und Phrasierungsbögen nahezu vollständig. Von Verlagsseite erscheinen handschriftliche Eintragungen sowie Stempel. Die ursprüngliche Opuszahl „Op. 27b“ ist sowohl auf dem Titelblatt als auch im Kopftitel in „Op. 30“ korrigiert. Als Schlussbemerkung notierte Reger nur seinen Namen ohne Datumsnennung.

Reger used black and red ink in the usual way. As in **A** articulation and phrasing slurs are almost completely missing. The publisher added manuscript markings and a stamp. The original opus number 'Op. 27b' is corrected both on the title page and in the title heading to 'Op. 30'. At the end Reger wrote just his name, with no date.

Zwei weitere Quellen dienen als Ergänzung. In einem Brief an Georg Göhler schrieb Reger: „In meinem op 30 (Phantasie für Orgel „Freu dich sehr“) ist leider ein recht dummer Druckfehler stehen geblieben. pag. 14 letztes System ist das b vor c falsch; es muß so:

Two additional sources were consulted: in a letter to Georg Göhler Reger wrote: 'In my op 30 (Fantasia for Organ "Freu dich sehr") a really stupid misprint has unfortunately remained. pag. 14 last stave the b before c is wrong; it must be like this:



(Kein b! also c nicht ces!) heißen.“¹

Außerdem plante Reger die – nicht realisierte – Veröffentlichung einer Fassung für Klavier zu vier Händen. Das Autograf (Stichvorlage?) befindet sich heute im Besitz der Universal Edition, Wien, als Dauerleihgabe in der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Wien (Signatur: L1.UE.401).

(not b! that is c not cb!).¹

Reger also planned to publish a version for piano four hands (which was not completed). The autograph (engraver's copy?) is now owned by Universal Edition, Vienna, and is on permanent loan to the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (shelfmark: L1. UE.401).

¹ Brief von Max Reger an Georg Göhler vom 25. Oktober 1899, Ratsschulbibliothek Zwickau, zit. n. Susanne Popp (Hg.), *Der junge Reger. Briefe und Dokumente vor 1900*, Wiesbaden 2000, S. 453.

¹ Letter from Max Reger to Georg Göhler dated 25 October 1899, Ratsschulbibliothek Zwickau, quoted after Susanne Popp (Hg.), *Der junge Reger. Briefe und Dokumente vor 1900*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 453.