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MAX REGER

PLAYED BY
DAVID
GOODE

COMPLETE ORGAN WORKS

VOLUME 1 : THE MAJOR WORKS BASED ON CHORALES

COMPLETE NOTES ON THE MUSIC
BY DAVID GOODE

MAX REGER, THE RELUCTANT REVOLUTIONARY

Max Reger was a paradoxical combination of radical and reactionary. For the form of many of his larger pieces he took Bach's music as a starting point; in his contrapuntal style that of the conservative Brahms. Yet in terms of harmony he stood, often to his own surprise, in the vanguard of 'progress' as it developed after Wagner. In his lifetime it was for this last aspect that his works were controversial. His harmonic logic (which he insisted it was) continues the Wagnerian experiment, in that it relies solely on voice-leading rather than conventional tonal syntax for the immediate connections between chords, while modulations between keys, though certainly employed, are often elided by one or more steps. Schoenberg (who recognised Reger's genius, and who performed many of his works in the *Society for the Private Performance of New Music*) took the process in another direction, that of atonality or—his favoured term—pan-tonality. Reger, however, never quite abandoned tonality as a system; instead, he experimented with ever more contracted harmonic progressions. The Symphonic Fantasy and Fugue Op. 57 and, among the works on this disc, *Alle Menschen* Op. 52 No. 1 or the *Trauerode* Op. 145 No. 1 are among the most advanced examples of this tendency.

Reger's music is often criticised for its complexity. This presupposes both that there is an optimum level of density for any given musical idea or structure—a problematic idea indeed—and that this optimum level is always the lowest possible one, which is by no means the case. One may recall that Mozart's music was in its day also criticised for its complexity, despite being substantially 'simpler' than Bach's. Reger's music, to be sure, is a far cry from the minimalist works of our own day, or indeed from those of his near-contemporary Erik Satie; but who could not be grateful in the first place that there is such variety in music, and then that someone, somewhere was writing music of such profusely fertile thematic invention, of such strikingly individual harmony, of such imaginative instrumental resource, and of such inspirationally heroic scale? There is in addition a strong argument to be made (in the Chorale Fantasias, even if nowhere else) that concepts of the theological scale and profundity Reger was handling require no lighter or smaller expression. Too many notes? As Mozart reportedly replied, 'Only as many as are necessary, my dear Emperor'.

ON PERFORMING REGER'S ORGAN MUSIC

Reger's music is among the hardest of all the organ repertoire to perform—a fact which has contributed to its comparative neglect when set beside much of the more accessible French repertoire. There are several issues here. One is, of course technical complexity—a complexity which, moreover, has little to offer performers wishing to display their speed and digital brilliance. The challenge instead lies in the assimilation of dense contrapuntal textures allied to an advanced harmonic style. This achieved, the detailed dynamic instructions must then be reproduced on whatever system is to hand, without drawing attention to the registration changes involved. For this a properly-adjusted *Rollschweller* is obviously ideal; however, one can usually approximate this with a sensitive use of the sequencer, which can moreover also offer a more precise means of choosing the registration at each moment. (Works such as *Straf mich nicht* border in any case on unplayability on the organs of the time, such are the detailed instructions regarding couplers—which with a sequencer can be effectively incorporated). Finally, and most importantly, these technical difficulties must be entirely subordinated to a fully realised conception of the musical structure, which (despite the wealth of surface detail) is often on the largest and most slow-moving scale.

Reger was known (and, indeed, can be heard on disc) as a pianist of notable sophistication and flexibility. These characteristics may seem surprising given

the style of some of his music, and yet in fact it is they which enable the music to be heard at its best. They are attributes which every Reger interpreter would do well to cultivate: one has only to study a work such as *Straf mich nicht* or *Alle Menschen* to find 'hairpin bends'—sudden changes of harmony and texture, fleeting emphases—that require unusually careful handling. If the connections between parts are broken (for registration changes, for example) the structural continuity is often lost. Similarly, the everyday rubato in the chorale fantasias plays a no less important or subtle role than in a Franck chorale, for example in the coloratura decorations of the chorale melody, where a respect for the underlying contour of the melody must be balanced by a savouring of the character of each individual progression.

Tempo is a crucial factor in Reger performance. It is to be regretted that no recordings of his organ playing survive, but there are certain pointers to a correct conception of tempo in his works, such as his remark to Gerard Bunk in 1910 to 'play everything quite calmly...even when it says to play faster'. There are also significant reports of performances which were slower than we might expect. Straube's première of Op. 127, for example, took forty minutes, compared to well under thirty in many modern performances. Most of the tempo markings in the middle period works are obviously—indeed, comically—too fast, to the point of utter unplayability (the Fugue on B-A-C-H Op. 46 is a good example, as is the Fugue in D Op. 59 No. 6); thus the question is only how much to slow them by. It is perhaps significant that in the late pieces Op. 145 the markings are very much slower: the *Trauerode* begins at quaver = 40, with the central passacaglia at crotchet = 36! Some players maintain that the markings of the middle period are exactly twice too fast, due to a misinterpretation of the metronomic unit (across, or across and back, as one unit), and certainly a half-speed rendition of these gives a straightforward fluency and logic to the counterpoint which is quite negated by faster playing. This is borne out by an anecdote concerning the *Mozart Variations* for two pianos in which the local pianist, performing with Reger but without a rehearsal, was relieved that it was Reger who started the fugue, 'since it was exactly half the speed I had been planning'. Usually, the best strategy seems to be the familiar one of finding a musical speed for the fastest passages in order to give the tempo of the whole.

For those of us without ready access to the Walcker and Sauer organs of Reger's time (even where these are in an unaltered and playable condition) the recreation of an appropriate sound-world is a major challenge. In particular the proper relationship between the three main manual departments is essential, with in all cases a rich foundation of fluework for the moderately bright mixtures and light reeds to rest upon. Thus organs of a pronounced neo-Baroque character, due to the bright mixtures and 'chiff', will both fragment the melodic and harmonic 'line' and lack the overall symphonic richness, while organs built firmly in the French or English Romantic traditions will generally rely too strongly on the heavy reeds (particularly the Swell reeds) to build an ensemble sound, thus losing the clarity of the counterpoint. The solution here offered is an instrument retaining a large quantity of early 20th-century pipework, but reorganised according to an aesthetic not far removed from that of Reger's time. An analogy might be that of playing classical symphonies with original wind instruments but with a modern-instrument string group of original size playing with minimal vibrato and informed bowing style—a strategy that has in fact been used by modern chamber orchestras with some success. In this case, particular care has been taken to use sparingly the heaviest reeds and brightest mixtures, and to substitute all possible foundations, mutations and quieter reeds to create a blended and transparent tutti. The three main manuals are the Great, Swell and Solo, all speaking forwards into the building in a sympathetic relationship, with the Pedal behind; the Rückpositif (not an independent part of Reger's organ) is here generally used as a discreet reinforcement for any department as required. Only in parts of *Ein feste Burg* is a more 'Baroque' approach hinted at.

THE CHORALE FANTASIAS

The chorale fantasy, originally an early Baroque form, developed its 19th-century form only gradually, coinciding with a revival of Bach's music (though ironically not his organ chorales). In the middle of the century, Mendelssohn's sonatas were an example of this tendency, as was Liszt's *Ad Nos* Fantasy and Fugue. Brahms, the strongest influence on Reger, did not leave a fully-fledged example, concentrating instead on the chorale-prelude at the very end of his life. Only the Chorale and Fugue on *O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid* falls broadly into the category, a work that seems to have had little effect on Reger's style except in the early chorale preludes of 1893–4.

The seven chorale fantasies can safely be placed among Reger's finest achievements, certainly within the area of organ music. In particular, the Op. 40 and Op. 52 sets show a sustained level of expression, formal innovation and technical mastery that are arguably matched in 19th-century organ music only by the *Trois Chorales* of Franck or the *Ad Nos* of Liszt. Formally, the fantasias fall into two types: those concluded by fugues whose subjects eventually combine with the chorale (*Wie schön, Wachtet auf, Hallelujah! Gott*) and those through-composed. The former scheme provides a more obvious means of closure; indeed some musicologists would identify an overwhelmingly masculine, indeed almost sexual, sense of direction towards climax. Yet a scheme such as that of *Straf' mich nicht* or *Alle Menschen*, in which negativity and chromatic turbulence is gradually subsumed into an irresistibly positive tonal apotheosis, is no less involving. Despite their often strong structural grounding (and Reger's polemic stance in favour of 'absolute music') this is programme music of great vividness, not so much in the manner of Strauss as of Bach's cantatas with their intense spiritual feeling and graphic word-painting.

Ein feste Burg Op. 27

1. A firm stronghold is our God,
a good defence and weapon.
(He helps us freely
out of all our troubles.)
The old, evil enemy:
He means things seriously now.
(Which have befallen us).
There is nothing on earth like him.
2. By our own might nothing is done.
We are soon lost.
But the right man is fighting for us,
whom God himself has chosen.
If you ask who that is,
he is called Jesus Christ, the Lord Sabaoth.
There is no other God:
he must hold the field.
3. And if the world were full of devils,
wishing to consume us,
we are not so very much afraid:
we should yet pull through.
The prince of this world sees things sourly,
but he can do nothing against us.
For this reason he stands condemned:
one little word can bring him down.
4. People should let God's word stand as it is,
and not require thanks for doing so.
God is good hands with us,
as are his spirit and his gifts to us.
If they take my body,
my possessions, honour, child and wife,
they gain nothing from doing this:
the kingdom must yet remain ours.

This is the most self-consciously neo-Baroque of all Reger's organ works, perhaps a result of two factors. Firstly, it was Reger's first essay in this essentially Baroque genre, and one can feel that Reger has not quite found a personal voice amidst the incessant semiquaver counterpoint. (The Fantasia and Fugue Op. 29 similarly does not entirely escape the influence of Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in G minor BWV 542.) Secondly, it is perhaps a response to the strong Lutheran tradition associated with this particular chorale, and the various settings from the Baroque. In particular, several features recall Bach's trio on the chorale (BWV 720) which it is reasonable to suppose Reger knew: the trio texture to bar 45, the prevalent *suspirans* figure, and a registration including 16' reed for the L.H.

Most of the piece is in extrovert and energetic style, with little slow music; Reger's instinct for the grand gesture is already apparent in the treatment of the chorale in the first half of the piece, with the dramatic alternation of D major (contrapuntal) and B flat (chordal *tutti*), in which scheme he also dovetails different sections of the chorale text. The mood only darkens briefly into G minor with thoughts of our helplessness without God, brightening again at the mention of 'the right man fighting for us'. A 'world full of devils' is graphically portrayed by fortissimo swirling chords surrounding the chorale, which then 'pulls through' to the treble. The 'prince of this world, seeing things sourly' is then evoked in a momentary swing to D minor, and is 'brought down', almost comically, by the 'little word' of the Christian. The last section of the fantasia is a steady accumulation of contrapuntal resources to the end of the piece. Here Reger springs a last surprise to illustrate 'they gain nothing by doing this': the music suddenly evaporates to nothing before a triumphant restatement of the last line.

Freu dich sehr, meine Seele Op. 30

1. Rejoice greatly, O my soul,
and forget all trouble and pain,
since Christ, your heart, now calls you.
From the vale of woe,
from affliction and great sorrow,
you shall journey into joy
such as no ear has yet heard
and which lasts eternally.
2. Day and night have I called
to the Lord my God,
because I have always had a cross to bear,
so that he should help me out of my trouble.
Just as a journeyman longs
for his road to have an end,
so have I wished
to end my life.
3. World, devil, sin and hell,
our own flesh and blood,
here constantly torture our soul
and leave us totally dispirited.
We are full of fear and torment,
our days are nothing but a cross to bear.
From when we are born
there is enough misery for us on earth.
4. When the red of dawn brings light
and sleep turns from us,
care and grief slip away,
troubles are at an end.
Our tears are the bread
which we eat from morn till eve.
When the sun stops shining,
our bitter weeping does not cease.
5. Therefore, Lord Jesus, morning star,
who rises eternally,
be not far from me now,
for your blood has redeemed me.
Help me this day
to depart in peace and joy,
oh, be my light and way,
do not withhold your support.
6. Even if my eyes grow dim,
even if my hearing fades,
if my tongue can no more speak,
if my understanding fails me,
you are still my light, my refuge,
my life, my road and my gateway.
You will always rule me
and lead me on the path to heaven.
7. Rejoice greatly, O my soul,
and forget all pain and sorrow,
for Christ your lord is now guiding you
out of this vale of misery.
His joy and splendour
will you see eternally,
rejoice with the angels,
triumph for evermore.

Though the longest of the fantasias, *Freu dich sehr* is in some ways the Cinderella of the set, being almost unknown. It retains some of the neo-Baroque aspect of *Ein feste Burg*, while advancing to a much greater formal complexity. The mood of the text is ambiguous almost to the very end, alternating hope and despair, and it is tempting to ascribe this choice of chorale to Reger's fragile mood at this time, having recently returned home to his family following a nervous collapse. The text's shifting emphases and its enormous length create a formal challenge which Reger does not always quite overcome in the manner of, for example, *Straf' mich nicht*. Nevertheless there is much beautiful music here, particularly towards the end, and an always vivid and personal response to the text.

The work falls broadly into a five-section symmetrical layout: fast F major sections to begin and end, slow *coloratura* sections inside these, and a central portion in B flat minor. The opening is somewhat in the style of Buxtehude, rapid runs alternating with chordal progressions, before a short *figato* appears, based on what appears to be a chorale. In fact it is a subsidiary theme which plays a linking role between each verse. The chorale proper is then presented in the alto as part of an Baroque-style trio texture, followed by the link to verse 2. This first elaborated section for the R.H. is accompanied by rather busy lower parts, perhaps portraying the burdens of life. A modulation from the tonic F major to B flat minor, using the link theme, introduces the stormy textures of verse 3, in which spiritual torments are graphically portrayed in a six-part texture with demisemiquavers. Towards the end this subsides with a sighing motif in the R.H., and the familiar link theme returns for a remarkable passage still in the 'despairing' key of B flat minor. Snatches of 'Aus tiefer Not' (Psalm 130) and 'Wie schön leucht' are momentarily heard, as though reminding of God's faithfulness in trouble, before verse 4 begins (with the tune in the pedals) underneath harmonies which hover between F major and B flat minor, hope and despair, sleep and wakefulness. The link theme in the pedals leads to verse 5, the second elaborated R.H. verse (a texture often chosen by Reger for the 'morning star'). The link theme leads to a heavily chromatic passage with 32' pedal, portraying 'eyes growing dim'; nevertheless, the text affirms God as light and refuge, drawing from Reger five-part writing of heart-warming beauty. The chorale reappears for the last time, in canon and then in chords on full organ.

Wie schön leucht uns die Morgenstern Op. 40 No. 1

1. How beautifully the morning star shines on us,
full of grace and truth from the Lord,
the sweet root of Jesse.
You son of David, of Jacob's line,
my king and my bridegroom,
have taken over my heart.
Lovely, friendly,
beautiful and noble, great, honest, rich in gifts,
raised high in splendour.
2. O my pearl and worthy crown,
the son of God and Mary,
A high born king!
You are the fairest flower of the heart;
your sweet gospel
is pure milk and honey.
O my blossom, Hosanna!
Manna from heaven for us to eat,
I cannot forget you.

3. Pour deep into my heart,
sacred jasper, noble jewel,
the flame of your love.
O might it be that I through you
am for ever a limb of your body!
My soul seethes for you,
eternal goodness,
afire with love,
until it finds you.
4. A look of joy comes to me from God,
when you regard me
with such friendly eyes.
Your son has entrusted himself to me.
He is my treasure, I am his bride
and take great delight in him.
Hurrah! Hurrah!
He will give me heavenly life on high,
my heart will praise him eternally.
5. Make strings sound sweetly
and let the lofty song of praise
resound all joyfully.
That I may be with Jesus,
my wonderful bridegroom,
and quiver with constant love.
Sing! Leap!
Be joyful and triumphant, thank the Lord,
great is the king of honour.

The *Wie schön* fantasia has a strong connection with that by his teacher, Heinrich Reimann, though the chronology is unclear. Straube wrote (albeit long afterwards in 1944) that Reimann had improvised the fantasia in 1896 and subsequently published it, with Reger not only owing to Reimann the very genre of the chorale-fantasia but also the existence of his own *Wie schön* fantasia. However, Reimann's work was in fact published in 1895. This could have been a spur to Reger; but a more pronounced stimulus seems to have been taking place in 1898, when Lindner noted that Reger was more generally becoming interested in Protestant chorales in general, and soon afterwards produced *Ein feste Burg*. Whatever Reimann's influence, the two works do share many features, with free, dramatic introductions, at least one *coloratura* verse (Reger's third variation) and a concluding fugue. Reger, however, integrates his parts more closely—the introduction and first two variations are seamlessly joined, as are the third and fourth.

After the wild introduction, the music melts atmospherically into the chorale, presented beneath counterpoint whose lyricism aptly conveys the quiet fervour of the text. The tempo quickens into the triplets of the second verse, only to slow again for one of Reger's most beautiful elaborated R.H. solos, speaking of 'sacred jasper, noble jewel'. As the text increases in intensity ('afire with love') the pace accelerates towards the fourth verse with its extrovert virtuosity. (This was written at Straube's request in place of the plainer original). Rather in the manner of *Wachet auf* and *Hallelujah! Gott* this sinks at last to a gentle conclusion in preparation for the fugue, which fully matches the other two in its combination of engaging melodic charm and headlong energy.

Straf mich nicht in deinem Zorn Op. 40 No. 2

1. Do not punish me in your wrath,
great God, spare me!
O, let me not be lost,
do not reward me after my deserts.
If my sin has enflamed you
quench the flame of your fury in the Lamb.

Who thanks you in hell?
Save me from the anguish
of damned souls,
that I may praise you always
on that day, O highest God.
3. O, see my limbs,
how they are frozen;
my soul cannot wait;
for your help I pine away,
night and day
my bed overflows with tears.

by heavy torments;
my heart has had enough of sighs,
begging for help.
Why so long do you terrify my poor soul
in its cavern of despondence?
5. Away you foes, away from me!
God hears my prayer.
Now I may, as I desire,
enter your presence.
Satan—away! Hell—flee!
That which once wounded me
was something sent me by God.
6. Father, may you have eternal praise,
here and on high.
Likewise Christ,
to be praised always.
Holy Spirit, may you be praised,
high in fame and honour,
that you have heard my prayer.

Reger indicated the particular tone and complexity of this work when he remarked to George Stolz, 'What a miserably heavy [or difficult] piece of music... it couldn't have turned out any lighter [or easier] simply because of my inclination towards the mystical.' In part this is an appropriate response to the intense, unstable mood of the chorale text. Thus the verse-by-verse structure is overlaid not only by a general mood from darkness and despair to hope and triumph (as in *Wachet auf*) but is also often interrupted, in the early stages, by dramatic outbursts which create an almost expressionist mood of dislocation and anguish. These are based on a falling chromatic figure of three notes, either slowly in single notes (as in the pedal in the first bar), or in fast triplet chords.

After a free introduction, verse 1 of the tune is presented with simple paths, gradually becoming enveloped in counterpoints. Verse 2 (the tune passing to the pedal) resumes the tortured style of the opening: to portray the 'anguish of damned souls' Reger creates four swirling bars containing some 70 notes

each. The mood lightens somewhat with the thought of praising God, but the falling chromatic motif soon reappears to lead into verses 4 and 5. These are more muted and lyrical in tone, though hardly less anguished. The tune for verse 4 is in the tenor, that of verse 5 embellished in the treble; one can appreciate Reger's development in the space of only two years by comparing the four-part counterpoint here (which could hardly feel less academic) with that in *Ein feste Burg* and *Freu dich sehr*. As the music sinks down, the outbursts reappear for verse 6; the tune is either in the pedals beneath them, or moving between tenor and (elaborated) treble. During this verse there begins an escape from despair and depression towards hope and praise, and by the time verse 7 begins, the tune in the treble is accompanied by cascades of semiquavers (in sixths) for the L.H. The three-semiquaver figure is heard, now leaping upwards in the pedals, and as 'Christ is praised' the pedals join the peals of downward scales. In the last two pages the invention proliferates exuberantly, to such an extent that only a emphatic cadence, via C major, can bring it to a conclusion.

Alle Menschen müssen sterben Op. 52 No. 1

1. All men must die,
all flesh withers like grass.
What lives must perish
if it is to be renewed.
This body must rot
if it is to be healed
for the great glory
prepared for the virtuous.
2. Jesus died for me
and his death is my gain.
He has brought me salvation
so I can depart in joy
from the tumult of this world.
Into God's glorious heaven.
there I will for ever gaze
on the Trinity.
3. O lovely Jerusalem,
how brightly you shine.
O what lovely strains of praise
we there can hear in gentle peace.
O the sun arises now,
the sun of great joy and bliss.
Now the days breaks
that will have no end.
4. O I have now seen
this great glory
and now I am beautifully clad
in the white dress of heaven;
with the golden crown of honour
I stand before God's throne
and look upon such joy,
joy which can never end.

Always sensitive to criticism, Reger was particularly resentful of a remark from Georg Göhler, early in 1900, that his works showed '...a certain weakness of invention'. On completion of these three fantasies (incredibly, within ten days) in the white heat of inspiration, he exclaimed to his old teacher Lindner, 'Here in these pieces is a Reger without imagination or inventiveness!' The stimulus of adverse criticism recalls Bach's production of the *Clavierübung* Part III 'for all true connoisseurs and lovers of music' following Scheibe's critique of 1739. Thus these works belong together as a group, and chart a progression from darkness to light (with *Wachet auf* as the central pivot) which may conceivably mirror a personal restoration of self-confidence. *Alle Menschen*, with its topic of sin, death and salvation, is the darkest and most intense in tone. It is also harmonically and formally the most complex, following the text almost line by line.

The introduction begins with a bold dissonant gesture. The first quiet passage introduces a key motif of the piece—the falling minor ninth or seventh, illustrative of death. When in due course the chorale appears in D flat major in the L.H., this falling motif is also present, with drooping harmonies, in the R.H. At the thought of 'healing' and 'glory', the pace quickens and the harmony clears, only to tip over again into the turmoil of the opening with impending thoughts of Jesus' death. Verse 3 is in fact presented quietly, almost with hesitant awe at Christ's sacrifice, with the tune elaborated in the R.H. As it passes to the L.H. and then pedals, the tone once again lightens with thoughts of 'salvation' and 'joy'. This reaches full organ, and then again the volume drops for verse 6 and the 'heavenly Jerusalem' in radiant D flat and then B flat major. The 'sun arises' with an impressionistic texture above the pedal tune, and the texture builds up once more for the announcement of the last verse, doubled in L.H. octaves. Though the mood is extrovert and the excitement builds almost steadily, even here the tonality is still uncertain. Not until the very close is heaven, in the form of the tonic D-flat, finally reached, and the falling motifs of death heard no more.

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme Op. 52 No. 2

1. Awake, the voice is calling,
the watchman high on the battlements:
Awake, O city of Jerusalem.
It is midnight.
They are calling us clearly:
"Where are you, wise virgins?
Arise, the bridegroom is coming!
Stand up and take your lamps!
Alleluia!
Get yourselves ready
for the wedding:
you must approach him."
2. Zion hears the watchmen singing,
her heart leaps for joy.
She awakes and hastily gets up.
Her friend comes splendidly from heaven,
strong in praise and mighty in truth,
her light burns bright, her star ascends.
Now come, you worthy crown,
Lord Jesus, Son of God.
Hosanna!
We all follow
to the hall of joy
and celebrate the evening meal.

3. Glory be sung to you
with tongues of angels and of men,
with harps and fine cymbals.
Of twelve pearls are the gates
of your city. We are the choir
of angels high around your throne.
No eye has ever seen,
no ear has ever heard
such joy.
We shout for joy
and sing to you
our Alleluias evermore.

Wachet auf has always held a secure place in the organ repertoire, with its well-known Advent tune, clear structure, vivid (almost impressionistic) evocation of its text, and its engaging fugue subject. It opens in the darkness of midnight, perhaps portraying a world not only slumbering but spiritually lost, whose torpor is disturbed only by periodic bursts of violence. The arch shape of the opening chords faintly foreshadows the chorale to come. The transition from the murky depths of C minor to a radiant E major, as the chorale appears beneath a 'starlit haze' of harmony, is among the most magical in all organ music (being a more striking version of the similar moment in *Wie schön*). The darkness is not easily dispelled or the world aroused; but gradually the texture clears and gains momentum for the second verse.

Here the tune is first accompanied by triplet quavers in a joyful lyricism; this leads to the moment of greatest excitement—the coming from heaven of the bridegroom—for which the tune passes to the feet beneath cascades of triplets in thirds, like the pealing of Christmas bells. The excitement subsides for the last part of the verse, in which the 'crown of heaven' and the 'evening meal' (not only the joyous banquet in Heaven, but also the precious Eucharist on earth) are contemplated in music of beautiful introspection. The concluding fugue is unusually transparent in texture: it rarely exceeds three parts for the first fifty bars. As the imitation becomes more complex, however, a sublime C sharp minor passage in five parts heralds the arrival of the chorale tune in counterpoint with the fugue subject: firstly in the pedals, then in the left hand, and finally in a full chordal texture.

Hallelujah! Gott zu loben Op. 52 No. 3

1. Alleluia! May the praising of God
be my soul's delight.
May my God be eternally raised up,
My harp dedicated to him.
As long as I live and exist
I shall thank, worship and praise him.
2. Place no trust in princes!
The benefit they bring is never secure.
Would you rely on man,
Whose spirit quickly passes from him?
See, he falls, the prey of death
And his attack is in the dust.
3. Hail to him who in this earthly life
Has Jacob's God as his help,
Who has given himself to this God,
Whose name is counsel and deed.
If he hopes for his salvation from the Lord
See, God himself is his portion.
4. He, who made the sky,
the sea and the earth
In all their fullness and splendour
From nothing, by sleepily saying "let it be":
It is he, the ruler of the whole world
Who keeps trust and faith.
5. It is he who protects the stranger
And cares for the widow,
Who looks after the orphans
And leads them by his hand
He turns the ways of the godless
Into the night of death.
6. He, the Lord, in love bestows
Sight to the blind.
The lame and the sick find strength in him,
Consolation and light.
See how God, who gives all,
Is always faithful in loving his people.

Hallelujah! Gott is (with *Wachet auf*) the most often played of the chorale fantasies, and it is not hard to see why. The tone is one of radiant cheerfulness, the harmony warmly diatonic with many suspensions, the keyboard virtuosity gratifyingly apparent, and the form (introduction, five variations and fugue) straightforward, with the chorale melody plainly audible throughout. The rising fourth from B to E is invoked at the very start of the *bravura* introduction, which begins freely, then leads into verse 1 with a brilliant passage in thirds and sixths for both hands. The tune now moves steadily upwards through the fantasia: from the pedals (verse 1) through the tenor (verses 2 and 3) to the treble (verse 4).

Verse 1 features fast-moving counterpoint in no fewer than five parts to portray the soul's praise of God; verse 2 evokes the insecurity of earthly power with slippery chromatic writing for the R.H. and pedals; while verse 3 shows God as helper and counsellor, with beautifully expressive chains of suspensions. In verse 4 the vigorous five-part counterpoint resumes to show God's power. Verses 5 and 6 are linked by a mood of gentle serenity (darkening only occasionally in the fifth for 'the ways of the godless' but winding to a beautifully meditative conclusion) before the fugue bursts in with its typically loquacious subject. The contrapuntal devices here become ingenious even by Reger's standards: once the chorale has duly reappeared in combination with the fugue subject, Reger inserts, additionally, the fugue subject in stretto. Ultimately the chorale itself is presented in stretto, and the work ends over a tonic pedal, with the opening notes in the highest register.

Two Chorales without Opus No. (1893-4)

O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid Komm, süßes Tod

These remarkable pieces were among Reger's first publications and are unlike much else written at the time. Extending Brahms's late style of sinewy and expressive diatonic dissonance into a texture of near-atonality, particularly in *O Traurigkeit*, they also reveal the melancholy side of Reger's nature, as attested by his strongly depressive letters of the time. In *O Traurigkeit* the tune passes between the right foot (in slow minims) and the top part of the right hand (somewhat elaborated) with four other parts weaving a complex and sombre pattern of lines around. Each transfer of the tune is marked by a change in registration—no small requirement for the organist in the circumstances! *Komm, süßes Tod* was supposedly prompted by a study of Bach's chorale preludes, and it preserves a somewhat Baroque texture (though not harmony) throughout. The tune is highly ornamented above two left-hand parts and a gently leaping pedal figure.

Seven Pieces Op. 145

These pieces are almost the last music Reger wrote, some months before his death in 1916 (only the Clarinet Quintet is later). They occupy an unusual place in his output, since three of them are patriotic (whether elegiac or triumphalist) and the others seasonal. Yet the collection possesses more coherence than such a combination might suggest, in particular a somewhat equivocal tone; and this is matched by other works of the period. While the *Vaterländische Ouvertüre*, written in 1914 at the start of the war, is a conventional gesture of support, by the following year his choral settings, *Der Einsiedler* and *Requiem* take a more personal and elegiac stance. The pieces also function in various ways as miniature chorale fantasias, hence their presence in this set. *Dankpsalm* (no. 2) is one of Reger's most-played pieces, yet a brief acquaintance with the remarkable but rarely-played *Trauerode* (no. 1) reveals that neither can be fully understood without the other; together they form a kind of 'super chorale fantasia' of some 200 bars. The *Trauerode* was dedicated 'to the Fallen' of the war and its intensely tragic tone reveals the depth of Reger's feeling. He avoids a tonal sense almost throughout. The outer sections are freely constructed on the sighing 3-note motifs heard at the very opening; the middle section is a passacaglia (marked 'always with very dark colours') on a full thematic version of these, which rises to a shatteringly brutal climax. Only in the closing chorale, 'Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan', is a D major resolution achieved, though even here the sighing figures still punctuate the cadences. (Both the falling chromaticism and the use of this particular chorale recall Liszt's example in the *Weinen, Klagen* Variations). *Dankpsalm* continues in D major in an uprush of energy; however, it is not long before the doleful passacaglia returns. In turn this is soon consoled by the chorale, which then passes to the bass below rich triplet counterpoint. The opening is recapitulated, and culminates triumphantly in a sonorous harmonisation of 'Lobe den Herrn'.

Weinachten (no. 3) is for the most part a sombre evocation of Christmas—the wartime mood of the *Trauerode* is not entirely dispelled. After the fragmentary opening, two chorales are used, of similar contour: 'Es kommt ein Schiff, geladen' and 'Ach was soll ich Sünder machen', the latter rising to full organ. As it subsides, the ethereal strains of 'Vom Himmel hoch' descend from above and mingle ingeniously with 'Stille Nacht' in a charmingly pastoral conclusion. Passion is dark and spare, with movement restricted to crotchets and a subdued dynamic range: the choral, 'Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen' is presented simply at the end, but its opening figure (inflected expressively by a upwards semitone) is present almost throughout. Ostern is its antithesis: an upward explosion of energy built on a semiquaver version of the choral 'Auferstanden, auferstanden', which is hinted at early on, but fully revealed only as a conclusion. Pfingsten, with the character of a solemn procession, explores the gentler aspect of Pentecost: Holy Spirit, perhaps, as consolation in trouble. The chorale, again revealed at the end, is 'Komm, heilige Geist'; its distinctive shape (rising tone, falling fourth) informs much of the writing.

Seigesfeier returns to patriotic considerations, namely what today we can see as a premature celebration of victory. Opening in an echo of *Hallelujah, Gott zu loben*, the piece soon develops into a development of *bravura* passagework (generally in sharp keys) and fanfare-like writing (generally in flatter keys), and amongst them a phrase-by-phrase harmonisation of 'Nun danket alle Gott', which strides out in G major like a banner amidst the tumult of battle. One wonders whether Reger was here moving beyond patriotism to a call for God's protection. As 'Nun danket' reaches an unresolved conclusion, Reger launches into a majestic harmonisation of 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles', with the pedal tune soon followed by a canonic voice in the treble. He repeats the last two lines, almost as if searching for maximum possible emphasis; on this recording the full resources of the instrument are here finally unleashed.