

Max Reger

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MAX REGER.

Readers of German musical journals will have noticed that no living composer, with the single exception of Richard Strauss, occupies at present such a share of the German critics' attention as Herr Max Reger. Concerts wholly or chiefly devoted to his music are given generally 'with the assistance of the composer,' in most of the music centres of Germany, and the opinions expressed thereon by the sages of the Press are as diverting and wholesome in their variety as any that can be quoted from the standard biographies of Schumann or Berlioz, Wagner or Brahms. One thing in the midst of this confusion of 'expert' opinions seems certain: Reger is evidently



(Photograph by Gebrüder Lützel, Munich.)

one of those rare personalities of commanding power who divide into two opposite camps the musicians and music-lovers who take—or fancy they take—an interest in the present and future of their art. There are the enthusiastic admirers on the one hand, and the unbelieving detractors on the other; the prophets of their hero's great future, and the augurs of ill-omen who foresee the early collapse of the Reger 'boom.'

Max Reger was born on March 19, 1873, at Brand, near Weiden, Bavaria. His father was Josef Reger, a musician who taught his art to the pupils of the Roman Catholic Präparanden-Anstalt at Weiden. Young Max received his first pianoforte lessons from his mother; his father, and a Herr D. Lindner, taught him the organ. After passing through the Weiden

Realschule, he entered the Präparanden-Anstalt to qualify himself for a school teacher; but a visit to Bayreuth made such an impression upon the young enthusiast that he decided to devote his life to music. He studied composition, and submitted his first efforts in the way of orchestral pieces to Herr Hugo Riemann. The highly favourable opinion expressed thereon by that distinguished theoretician prompted Reger to become Riemann's pupil, first at Sondershausen, and subsequently at Wiesbaden. In 1898 a serious illness forced him to return to the parental roof; but in 1900 he moved to Munich, where he now resides. Quite recently he was appointed professor of harmony, counterpoint, and organ at the Königliche Akademie der Tonkunst, and (as successor to the lately-deceased Professor Max von Erdmannsdörffer) conductor of the famous Porgesscher Gesangverein in the Bavarian capital.

One of the most remarkable features of Reger's creative activity is his tremendous industry, his latest published work bearing the high Opus number 86. Needless to say, this almost Schubertian productivity is only possible because of his marvellous facility. In this connection Reger is reputed to have written the aforesaid Op. 86, a most elaborate set of variations with fugue, for two pianofortes (four hands), on a theme by Beethoven, without any sort of preliminary 'sketching,' straightaway in finished 'engraver's copy.' And here it may be mentioned that he has so far shown a great affection, and a quite exceptional gift for handling the variation form, some German critics going so far as to place him in this respect on a line with Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms. However this may be, we believe his works include already more sets of variations than even Brahms produced during his lifetime. Reger's organ music presents difficulties to the player such as have never been known before. According to some of his compatriots, Reger is doing for the organ what Wagner did for dramatic music. At their fifth 'Organistentag' (Organists' meeting) held at Bielefeld on December 28, 1904, German organists paid him the signal compliment of arranging a sacred concert devoted only to Bach and Reger, when Herr Gustav Beckmann performed the symphonic fantasia and fugue (Op. 57) which is dedicated to him, a remarkable work which is said to have been inspired by Dante's 'Inferno.' The young composer's staunchest champion seems to be Professor Waldemar Meyer, of Berlin, who during the past winter season gave three performances of a representative Reger programme, including a string quartet in D minor (Op. 74), a Ciacona from a G minor sonata for violin alone (Op. 42), and a string trio in A (Op. 77B).

Reger's compositions include eighteen works for the organ—some of them comprising as many as a dozen large pieces—in which the influence of Bach is strongly evident. Of these his fifty-two choral preludes (Op. 67) appear most likely to find immediate favour, on account of their comparative simplicity. There are also two sonatas (Op. 33 and 60), a fantasia and fugue on BACH, a set of variations (Op. 73), and about half-a-dozen most elaborate fantasias on old German chorales (Op. 27, 30, 40, and 52 I., II., III.). His chamber music includes four sonatas for violin solo (Op. 42), which seem to take us back to Bach—for what composer since Bach has written sonatas of any artistic value for the violin alone? Then we have two romances for violin and pianoforte, sonatas for violin and pianoforte, violoncello and pianoforte, clarinet and pianoforte, a string quartet, a serenade for flute, violin and viola, a trio for violin, viola, and violoncello, and many elaborate works for pianoforte solo. He has already written 200 songs, of which his 'Schlichte Weisen' (simple tunes)

(Op. 76) seem destined to become popular. Of his choral music, three sacred cantatas based on old German chorales, and intended for the chief festival days of the Protestant Church, deserve notice. They are 'Vom Himmel hoch, da konim' ich her,' for four solo voices, two solo violins, organ, chorus of children, and congregation (for Christmas), 'O wie selig seid ihr doch, ihr Frommen,' for mixed chorus and congregation, string orchestra and organ (for All Saints), and 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,' for contralto and tenor (or soprano) soli, solo violin, solo oboe, organ, and mixed chorus (for Good Friday). The choral parts in these church cantatas are comparatively simple, because to them is assigned the *cantus firmus*, while the variations and ornamentations are given to the instruments. It may be readily imagined that these compositions are modern imitations of Bach's wonderful church cantatas. In fact, the influence of that master is everywhere to be traced in Reger's music, and what better, deeper, sounder foundation could a composer of Reger's undoubted gifts build upon than the incomparable Johann Sebastian?

The work which seems to exercise the critics most at present is undoubtedly the violin and pianoforte sonata in C (Op. 72). To some it is a 'quite wonderful (*ganz wundervolles*) work, which leads us into worlds of feeling never trod before, and opens for us vistas new, great, and astonishing' (according to Herr Ferdinand Pfohl in the *Hamburger Nachrichten*); while other critics confess dejectedly or contemptuously (according to their mood) that they 'cannot understand in the least what it is all about.' It is certainly a strange and wild effusion, a sort of challenge to the critics—and even more. For Reger seems to have written it to insult his detractors. There are in the first movement two snatches of themes, several times repeated, which in the German nomenclature of the notes 'spell' the words 'Schafe' (sheep), and 'Affe' (monkey), thus:



This is a bad joke, which however has the merit of brevity. An indulgent public which pardons Strauss's ponderous fooling in the 'Antagonists' section of his 'Heldenleben' and the 'Nursery' scene in his 'Domestica,' will doubtless extend a similar courtesy to the younger and no less 'serious' artist.

Reger's most important contribution to chamber music, the above-mentioned string quartet in D minor (Op. 74B), was produced for the first time at Frankfort-on-Main in December last; it was repeated at a Reger concert given on January 6 by the enterprising Musikalische Gesellschaft at Essen-Rhur. On both occasions it seems to have made a great impression on serious-thinking musicians and amateurs, while at Professor Meyer's three Berlin performances the impression deepened with each successive hearing of this 'most difficult quartet in existence,' as it has been called. One of the leading conductors of the Rhineland, who is also a tremendous Bach enthusiast, went so far as to express to the present writer his conviction that the work is 'one of the most beautiful things since Beethoven!' and that Reger, if not a whole, is at least half a Bach *redivivus*!

Reger does not seem to have published anything for the orchestra alone, but he is at present completing a symphony, the first performance of which has been promised to the aforesaid Gesellschaft at Essen.

Reger is a striking figure, even physically, for he stands well over six feet, and he has a powerful head with a lofty brow; a disdainful mouth betrays strength of character. He is reported to be a great humorist, and his boisterous fun seems to show itself in his 'Six Burlesques' and in many a merry scherzö. Who will be the first to introduce the young master to an English audience?

A. J. J.

Reviews.

Worship Song with accompanying tunes. Edited by W. Garrett Horder.

[Novello & Co., Ltd.]

The Rev. W. Garrett Horder is an earnest student of, and an acknowledged authority on sacred poetry. His cultured taste and wide catholicity are manifested in his anthology 'The treasury of American sacred song' and the hymnal 'Worship Song,' of which latter collection the book before us forms its natural complement. Mr. Horder mistrusts the 'musical editor.' He says, in the preface to his book, 'the result of such single musical editorship has usually been the inclusion of too large a number of the editor's own compositions, and even when that has not been the case the selection of tunes has been determined too much by his individual judgment.' The first part of this indictment may be true, but, on the other hand, a hymnal may be weakened by not having an experienced, even a non-composing musician at the helm. In the present instance the friendly criticism of such an editor might have prevented the separation of so time-honoured a mating as Bishop Ken's Evening Hymn with the tune 'Tallis' Canon,' and might have avoided the 'tinkered' version of 'Bedford' by adopting the more beautiful triple rhythm as written by its composer. We also notice that Hewlett's fine tune 'Dalkeith' has been rhythmically 'touched up' and so, apparently, has 'Holy Cross' (No. 423); and a future edition of the book would be more complete with an index of composers' names.

'Worship Song' contains 803 hymns, but as the tunes number 627 some of the latter have been repeated, in some instances even four, five, and six times. In so large a collection this repetition was almost inevitable, and no objection could be raised thereto in the case of what may be termed 'common tunes,' those that are not specially associated with any particular words; but it seems a pity not to have restricted the use of such tunes as Oakeley's 'Abends,' E. J. Hopkins's 'Ellers,' Sullivan's 'St. Gertrude,' Hewlett's 'Dalkeith' to the words for which they were specially written. Regret may also be expressed at the omission of such standard tunes as 'Warrington' (an ideal tune for 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun'), 'Trinity' (by Giardini), 'Martyrdom,' and 'Wareham.' A large number of new tunes has been specially contributed to the book by nearly thirty different composers, about a score being the handiwork of Mr. Henry Baker, author of the devotional tune 'Hesperus,' which has worthily found its way into many hymnals. Time alone will tell how large a proportion of these new strains will endear themselves 'to the great congregation'; but a careful examination of the new tunes in each freshly compiled hymnal as it comes from the press forces upon the mind the conviction that 'the old is better.' There is, however, so much that is really good in the music of 'Worship Song' as to justify words of warm commendation. It is a collection of which any editor might be proud, and Mr. Horder is to be congratulated upon having thus crowned the success of his labours in the issue of a hymnal that is distinctly practical, worshipful, and meritorious.

Nocturne. For the pianoforte (Op. 13). By Maud Matras. [Novello & Co., Ltd.]

There is a touch of the tragic in this piece which will appeal to pianists of an imaginative turn of mind. The piece begins *forte* and ends *fortissimo*, and although quiet passages occur by way of contrast, stern determination and strong passion prevail. It is no summer's night that the composer depicts, but the tempestuous darkness of mid-winter.