

An impressionistic oil painting of a man with glasses, wearing a light blue jacket, playing a clarinet. The style is expressive with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette of blues, greens, and earthy tones. The man is shown in profile, looking down at his instrument.

MAX REGER

COMPLETE WORKS
FOR CLARINET
& PIANO

DAVID ODOM, CLARINET
JEREMY SAMOLESKY, PIANO

THE MUSIC

The musical landscape at the turn of the 20th century was varied and changing. The rich soil of the terrain fertilized by Brahms, the trail toward the steep cliff that Wagner cleared, and the rocky uncharted riverbanks that lay beyond the edge of the Wagnerian cliff offered composers unique destinations to set up camp. Many composers found enjoyment near the cliff, dangling their feet over the edge, basking in the sun and withstanding the strong breeze of musical change. For others, the temptation of a jump off the cliff into unknown territory was too much to resist. Max Reger programmed his musical GPS for a small forest just north of the Brahmsian fields on the western side of the Wagnerian cliff. This was an ideal location for one wanting the security of known topography, yet a clear view of the activity in the surrounding area and the horizon beyond. Somewhat overshadowed by the musical celebrities and pioneers of the day, he nonetheless had the admiration of his contemporaries (Schoenberg considered him a progressive, as he did Brahms) and inspired many of the next generation of composers (Hindemith attributed his compositional style to Reger).



Reger composed a considerable amount of music in his short 43-year life, focusing almost exclusively on small-scale works in traditional forms. He felt a sense of duty to uphold and revive the chamber music tradition of the Classical and Romantic masters for whom he had such reverence, finding its future to be in the hands of “a few leading spirits.” His solo and chamber works include several string quartets, piano quartets and quintets, sonatas (e.g. violin, cello, clarinet), and numerous solo pieces for piano. His compositions for organ have become staples of the repertoire, many of which are virtuosic showpieces. Though his style could be described as “one part Bach, one part Brahms, one part Wagner, and a pinch of Reger,” it would be a disservice to belittle his skill and talent to such stereotypical, and often unfounded, comparisons. While the influence of these composers is evident in his compositions, his style continually evolves from his early period through his mature years, becoming increasingly unique and original. A comparison of the clarinet sonatas alone shows a shift toward a simpler, cleaner, more economical style.

A stranger to moderation, Reger was a man of excess and pulled out all the stops in his personal and professional activities. Though prone to bouts of deep depression and heavy drinking, Reger was able to compose at a remarkable rate. He began to see a need to battle his demons and unlock unrealized potential, so in 1898 the 25 year-old returned to his hometown of Weiden for a self-imposed rehab program of sorts. The three years he spent with his family proved beneficial and he immersed himself in music as composer, teacher, and patron. It is during this time that he became inspired to write for the clarinet. He attended a performance of Brahms' masterful F-minor Sonata in early 1900 given by clarinetist Johann K rmeyer and Reger's former teacher Adalbert Lindner, an event that had a significant impact on the eager composer. In his famously brazen and unapologetic manner, Reger said to his teacher following the performance, "Fine, I am also going to write two such things." He promptly composed the Opus 49 Sonatas in the spring of 1900 and gave a private performance of both with K rmeyer.

Reger moved to Munich in fall of 1901 in search of more professional opportunities. Though his music was often criticized as being unimaginative or too intellectual, it continued to gain attention through performance, publication and review. In addition to professional success, Reger began to achieve personal happiness that had previously eluded him. He married Elsa von Bercken in 1902 and they later adopted two children. The couple moved to Leipzig in 1907 where he served as Director of Music at the University of Leipzig. The four years in Leipzig continued to extend Reger's personal and professional fortunes and his compositional style reflected this newfound contentment. It was during this time that he wrote the Opus 107. His focus also expanded to include a greater number of orchestral pieces, some of which are his most successful compositions. Reger's three clarinet sonatas are musically and historically significant additions to the repertoire, though they are somewhat absent from recitals in part due to their unyielding reflective nature (no big-finish endings to any of the movements). His focus also expanded to include a greater number of orchestral pieces, some of which are his most successful compositions.

Nearly a decade separates the first pair of sonatas (1900) from the third sonata (1908-9). They lie between the quintessential Romantic sonatas of Brahms (1894) and two works exemplary of the budding diverse artistic climate, Debussy's First Rhapsody (1910) and Berg's Four Pieces (1913). They are among only a handful of examples of early 20th-century post-Romantic composition for clarinet and piano, which include sonatas by Daniel Gregory Mason (1915), Charles Stanford (1918), Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1919), and Camille Saint-Sa ens (1921), each written several years after Reger's sonatas.

The Opus 49 was published by Joseph Aibl Verlag of Munich (Number 1 in June 1901 and Number 2 in late 1903). Clarinetist Karl Wagner and Reger gave a much delayed premiere public performance of the Number 1 on April 18, 1902. Appropriately, the performance took place in a concert hall at the Palais Porcia, a Baroque mansion with Rococo renovation that reflects Reger's penchant for eclectic vintage styles. The premiere of the Opus 49 Number 2 took place on April 29, 1904, nearly two years to the date of the premiere of the first sonata. Although dedicated to Karl Wagner, clarinetist Anton Walch gave the premiere with Reger in Munich's Kaim-Saal. The performance was an all-Reger program that also included several organ works played by Karl Straube, champion of Reger's organ music. Reger dedicated Opus 107 to Ernst Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hesse and Rhine, an ardent supporter of Reger's music. Reger gave the premiere performance with clarinetist Julius Winkler at the Duke's second festival in Darmstadt in June 1909, and Bote & Bock published it in July 1909 (allowing time for any needed revisions after the premiere).

The sonatas reveal a deep admiration for Brahms and comparisons are inevitable. However, Reger's innovative treatment of melody and harmony combined with a Bach-like contrapuntal adeptness results in highly original works, not merely designer imitations. Each sonata is comprised of four movements providing a coherent, though not always succinct, framework. Relatively brief second movements with buoyant tempos set apart hefty first and third movements. While there are lighter sections and quirky moments, an unrelenting feeling of seriousness is felt throughout. All movements conclude quietly and, with two exceptions, slowly. The wide range of the clarinet is displayed and the upper altissimo register, often difficult to produce and control, is used judiciously. There is a striking amount of dynamic and tempo markings, with almost every measure containing at least one marking, for which Reger is notorious.

The Opus 49 Number 1 is in the key of A-flat major with a considerable amount of chromaticism and rapid modulations. The opening sonata form movement shows Reger's creativity in treating traditional convention as a sketch rather than a blueprint. The initial theme begins without introduction, suggestively marked *Allegro affanato* (breathless, anxious, anguished). The *affanato* is realized through the constantly fluctuating dynamics, tempos and textures. Reger avoids any potential lull of regularity by frequently exchanging the expected strong beats with the weak beats. The second movement features an appealing, youthful waltz-like theme in a brisk tempo marked *lusingando* (coaxing or caressing). A brief but enchanting passage intervenes, followed by a return to the initial tune that keeps a steady

pace to the unexpected end. The captivating third movement has a startling burst of emotion in the middle with both instruments building to their loudest dynamic, triple forte, of the entire sonata. This is immediately followed by an apologetic pianissimo and return to the main theme. The influential music critic Rudolf Louis, Strauss proponent and habitual denouncer of Reger, was moved to say the third movement was some of Reger's best work. The rousing fourth movement has exciting hills and turns, but rather than a heart-pounding propulsion to the end, the ride comes to a calm end.

Reger uses the same four-movement structure in the Opus 49 Number 2, though it has a different soundscape from that of the first. It is more casual and approachable, similar to the way in which the second Brahms sonata differs from his first sonata. If the first sonata is a freshly pressed pinstriped oxford shirt, the second is a gently worn t-shirt. Reger scored it for clarinet in A, a mellower, deeper, less muscular instrument than the clarinet in B-flat. At times the writing borders on melancholic, particularly in the first and third movements, but the second and fourth movements offer a welcome balance with lightness and relative brevity. The first movement, marked *Allegro dolente* (mournful), opens directly with the main theme and demonstrates Reger's ability to craft long lines of nearly continuous melody. In true Reger fashion, he favors equal partnership over virtuosic showmanship with subordinate accompaniment. In the two occurrences of where the clarinetist might be tempted to "let loose" in the first movement, Reger gives the instruction *affettuoso* (tenderly). The second movement is somewhat of an anomaly for Reger. Each of the parts is quite brief and the movement itself is quite short (the middle sostenuto section is a mere 10 measures long). The third movement is a beautiful song expressing an array of mixed emotions, with a wonderfully colorful improvisatory-like middle section. The fourth movement is perhaps the strongest of the sonata and is flattering to the clarinet in A, which is able to mitigate the frequent register changes better than the B-flat clarinet. The friendly *Allegretto* in 6/8 meter is carefree and likable, ending as simply as it begins.

Reger described the Opus 107 as being light and not lengthy, allowing the clarinetist's sound not to suffer from fatigue. However, it is fifty percent longer in duration than the Opus 49 sonatas, a fact not insignificant to listeners or performers, particularly clarinetists. However, there is an efficiency and directness in the 107, absent in the Opus 49 sonatas, which belies the 30-plus minute performance timing. The overall atmosphere is more relaxed than in the Opus 49 sonatas and the cross-connections between the movements provide a continuity that makes the piece feel smaller, familiar and more intimate. While the melodic and harmonic elements are equally effective, the motivic

development is of particular interest. In addition to developing melodies in full, he utilizes fragments throughout the movements that result not in a patchwork of seemingly unrelated ideas arbitrarily dispersed, but rather a cohesive whole. The first movement is in sonata form and contains the simple marking of *Moderato* at the beginning without the additional descriptors used in Opus 49, signifying a cleaner more Classical expressive approach. One unforgettable motive is used throughout the first, third and fourth movements. This *idée fixe* at first allures, then beguiles, and finally haunts with its beauty.

The second movement is in a modified three-part form containing an impish scherzo juxtaposed with a poignant B section. Rather than ending the movement with a return of the primary scherzo material, Reger abruptly ends the frolic and brings back an abbreviated version of the sorrowful middle material. This draws the listener in closer as the sound fades away to silence, perhaps as a transition to the emotionally charged third movement. The texture of the third movement is strikingly translucent. The instruments move rather congruently and the opening statement of the clarinet, two ascending perfect fourths in quarter notes, amplifies the rhapsodic crooning of the middle section. The aforementioned motive from the first movement appears in the piano just before the return of the original material. The movement closes serenely with the clarinet restating the opening idea an octave lower. In the fourth movement, Reger opts for a relaxed *Allegretto* marked *con grazia* rather than an intense *Allegro*, in a variant of sonata rondo form. The listener is introduced to a new acquaintance (new material), is paid a visit by old friend (third movement material) and once again crosses paths with an old flame (recurring first movement material).

Reger composed the *Albumblatt* (Album Leaf) and *Tarantella* in February 1902 after his move to Munich, as well as other miniatures including the *Allegretto grazioso* for flute and piano. The *Albumblatt* is a sensible yet satisfying piece of Reger chocolate demonstrating his fluid, expressive writing. The jaunty *Tarantella* is a slice of warm cinnamon streusel that awakens the senses with its savory chromatic flavor and rhythmic zest. The two pieces are accessible, appealing, and at less than five minutes in length, they offer a lot in a small package. They work well together as a set on recital programs.

—DAVID ODOM

THE PERFORMERS



David Odom, CLARINET

David Odom has a thriving career as soloist, chamber artist, orchestral musician and educator. Having performed on four continents, his recent solo appearances include the *Festival Internacional de Música de Campina Grande* in Brazil and the ICA *ClarinetFest* in Spain. His performances have been featured on television and radio, including Georgia Public Broadcasting, Public Broadcasting Atlanta, and Brazilian TV Cultura. He enjoys bringing new music to audiences, working with composers such as Augusta Read Thomas and David Maslanka, and also endeavors to revive lesser-known and under-performed repertoire. Odom is Principal Clarinet of the Atlanta Opera Orchestra and the Columbus Symphony Orchestra (GA). He is Associate Professor at Auburn University and has presented or performed at the conferences of the International Clarinet Association, College Music Society, Music Teachers National Association, National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors, and College Band Directors National Association. He is a D'Addario Woodwinds performing artist.



Jeremy Samolesky, PIANO

Jeremy Samolesky serves as Associate Professor of Piano and Piano Area Coordinator at Auburn University. With a passion for both solo and collaborative performances, Samolesky has performed throughout North America, South America, Europe and Asia. Recent concert tours and performances include China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Colombia and Ecuador, with regular appearances in recital and as master class instructor throughout the U.S. His Kennedy Center recital was broadcast on NPR's *Performance Today*, with other broadcasts on Seattle's KING FM, Canada's CBC, CJOB, WDAZ, and Troy Public Radio. Samolesky was recently a featured lecturer and performer at the World Piano Conference in Novi Sad, Serbia, and currently serves as guest artist and faculty member at the Orfeo Music Festival in Vipiteno, Italy. Praised by critics as "brilliant," "distinguished," and "full of intensity and drama," Samolesky's debut solo CD was released by Centaur Records in 2015.

MAX REGER (1873-1916)

- Sonata in B-flat major, op. 107* [30:50]
1 Moderato [12:04]
2 Vivace [5:27]
3 Adagio [5:38]
4 Allegretto con grazia [7:41]

- Sonata in A-flat major, op. 49 no. 1* [20:13]
5 Allegro affanato [7:22]
6 Vivace [4:16]
7 Larghetto [3:56]
8 Prestissimo assai [4:39]

- Sonata in F-sharp minor, op. 49 no. 2* [20:57]
9 Allegro dolente [7:48]
10 Vivacissimo [2:53]
11 Larghetto [4:56]
12 Allegretto affabile [5:20]

- Albumblatt WoO II/13*
13 Andante con moto [2:09]

- Tarantella WoO II/12*
14 Äußerst lebhaft [1:51]

Total Time = 76:00

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