

# REGER

Complete String Trios and Piano Quartets • 1

String Trio in A minor, Op. 77b Piano Quartet in D minor, Op. 113

**Aperto Piano Quartet** 



# Max Reger (1873–1916) Complete String Trios and Piano Quartets • 1 String Trio in A minor, Op. 77b Piano Quartet in D minor, Op. 113

In Max Reger's compositional output chamber music occupies not only the largest part but was of abiding interest to him, from the Violin Sonata, Op. 1, right through to the Clarinet Quintet, Op. 146, which was completed just before his death. Chamber music with piano dominated his output and he promoted it personally as a pianist and wrote highly complicated piano parts for himself to play. Yet he had a high regard for string instruments as well and wrote important works for strings, from solos to sextet

This disc, and its companion, Naxos 8.570786,\* bring together Reger's only piano quartets and string trios, which are related to one another or, contrarily rather, complement one another. For Reger thought of his creative work as a unified whole which he tried to deepen in every new work, to reach a new stage of development both as a composer and as a musical personality.

It was as a mature composer and respected teacher of composition in Leipzig, while preparing for performances in November 1909 of Brahms's *C minor Piano Quartet*, *Op. 60*, that Reger decided to write his own *Piano Quartet in D minor*, *Op. 113*. He immediately scheduled it for performance at the end of May 1910 at the Tonkünstler Festival in Zurich, the yearly meeting-place of contemporary music at that time. In the following months his excessive concert activity as a pianist hindered his composing work; it was not until the middle of March that he was able concentrate on his own piano quartet, which was promptly given its first performance straight from the manuscript.

When he was asked to provide an introduction to the piece, Reger wrote ironically:

"The work, naturally, has four movements which can be accounted for by my prolificity. The Larghetto (third movement) proceeds quite slowly: according to ancient custom one should take the other three movements faster, of course. Yet one could play it the other way round, in which case this music would sound even worse! The tonality is D minor - for which extremely daring claim I accept no guarantee. There is no point in listing the themes, for these would never be heard. A worthy policeforce could not fail to notice that even in this work - as unfortunately I have already done so often - I have stolen, completely shamelessly. Oddly enough, I have refrained from using fugues and other such similar nonsense, P.S. If the harmonies should not be completely germ-free I beg gracious forgiveness from those apostles of tonal chastity."

Here Reger viciously invokes those points of criticism which plagued him increasingly: on the one hand he was accused of mechanical note-spinning in adopting the classical four-movement model in his chamber works, on the other hand he undermined his avant-garde credentials. For neither his themes and their developments, nor his modulation-rich harmonies and extreme expressivity conform to traditional forms. In fact the opening movement of his Op. 113 does not begin with a concise exposition of themes, but sweeps over the listener in a wildly expressive con passione and goes off into unstoppable waves of dynamic intensity. In this agitated confusion of voices, all with equal rights, it is difficult to get one's bearings, even though the formal structure of the sonata remains clear and Brahms's C minor Piano

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<sup>\*</sup>The second disc, comprising the Piano Quartet in A minor, Op. 133 and the String Trio in D minor, Op. 141b, will be released on Naxos 8 570786

Quartet appears as the overwhelming model for it. An extreme concentration on slight motivic material counteracts the work's ruggedness, which includes rhythmic and harmonic formations, and produces a thick skein of impenetrable variety.

Reger called his personal solution in this piece, and in the work which immediately followed it, the *Piano Concerto in F minor, Op. 114*, as better than "all the new paths" and thus this working through "right down to the last twigs" is intended as an adherence to a strongly-expanded tonality.

The "crazy Scherzo" (Reger's own description), Vivace with a slow middle section, is a typical example of the composer's grotesque humour. This turns out to look back to the resigned main mood of the Larghetto as well as to the Finale which, with its gallows humour, is related expressively to the opening movement. This confessional music from a period when Reger had inwardly already said farewell to conservative Leipzig, combines melancholy, defiant energy and grim humour. When in the autumn of 1910 Reger, controversially, became an honorary Doctor of Medicine, this piano quartet attracted snide comments – it was described as "his patients and their illnesses – psychological, of course."

The Piano Quartet in A minor, Op. 133 [8,570786]. was the product of quite different circumstances. For three years Reger had worked as the highly-acclaimed music director of the court orchestra in Meiningen but his duties were so onerous that a breakdown in the spring of 1914 forced him to resign the post. While taking a cure in Merano he planned to write, alongside the Mozart Variations, Op. 132, a piano quartet which was begun in Meiningen in July 1914, before he finished the orchestral work, and which was completed in the first month of the First World War. As in the Mozart Variations, in which "every note is calculated for its sound", the quartet is dominated by an ideal sound-world, in which a freewheeling melodic style and heavy chromaticism are supported by a particular tenderness and sweetness. The string lines are handled as a homogeneous body; they are not in competition with one another but frequently double up in pairs, or even in unison, so that the lines become malleable and nuanced. The piano part uses the full range of the instrument, from dark octaves in the bass register to rippling runs in the top.

In contrast to the depth of expression and intensity of the D minor Piano Quartet, Op. 113, the emotions of the A minor Piano Quartet, Op. 113, the emotions of the first movement is tempered by melancholy; the Scherzo is eerie and has a Trio in a slower tempo with a dreamily-sustained 55-bar long pedal in the viola, while the Largo con gran espressione is inward-looking, like a prayer. The Finale con spirito is related to the expressive world of the Scherzo and is prone to grim humour. The whole work is permeated by a resigned, even pessimistic, feeling, out of which the parts break out only by exerting themselves, with the exception of the Finale which subsides into a pianississimo.

The A minor Piano Quartet was immediately taken up by the critics and was counted "...among the most beautiful, most mature and most eloquent works" that Reger had written and was "...at the same time one of the most rewarding of modern chamber music works."

A pair of works, the String Trios in A minor Op. 77b and D minor, Op. 141b, shows the variety of Reger's creativity. After positioning himself as an extremely progressive composer while he was in Munich in 1903/04, where he wrote his works from Opp. 70 to 75, among them a wild violin sonata and a daring string quartet, he advocated an aesthetic change. "It is absolutely clear to me that what our present age lacks is a Mozart", wrote Reger at the beginning of June 1904 and announced that the "first fruit of that realisation" would be a Flute Serenade (Op. 77a) and a String Trio (Op. 77b). Mozart, who was for Reger a completely Rococo musician, was the epitome for him of compositional fluency and musicianly enthusiasm and so was the antidote to the technically overloaded music of Reger's time. Accordingly, the String Trio in A minor, Op. 77b, is written in a style of emphatic simplicity and yet it is, as he himself remarked, "absolutely not un-Regerlike". His typical stylistic refinements, surprises of metre, curious harmonies and interesting partwriting, are here concealed in finesse. After the first performance of the *Trio* in Munich Rudolf Louis suspected that "...Reger had allowed himself a carnival joke, had put on the mask of the classicists" and also "...had written for the present instead of exclusively for the distant future". All in all, a stylistic change is less easy to detect than a trend, which is sometimes more, sometimes less, evident. Furthermore, Reger also wrote highly-complicated works and endeavoured above all to achieve increasing plasticity and clarity, as the piano quartets of 1910 and 1914 demonstrate.

After he moved to the university town of Jena in the spring of 1915 Reger announced: "Now begins the free Jena style". He felt himself liberated, both from the demands of his previous post, and from the pressure of being a representative of the avant-garde. For a few months he was also free from giving concerts, so that a large

number of his late works were written in an unaccustomed state of domestic peace. This retreat into his own private world, however, brought with it traits of resignation: he wanted no part of the breakdown of tonality which Arnold Schoenberg had brought about: tonality had become a function of Reger's own coordinating system. As a selfconfessed loner, Reger remained true to himself and tried to improve with each work. So it is no surprise that, from 1904, he subjected his own aesthetic position to scrutiny and that he reconceived a Flute Serenade, Op. 141a, as a three-movement "miniature chamber music" String Trio in D minor, Op. 141b [8.570786]. "The work is really good", Reger declared contentedly. In fact, the String Trio, with its melodious variation movement and graceful final fugue really is "genuine Reger" which, in spite of its constraints, sums up the sonority of his late work.

> Susanne Popp English version by David Stevens

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#### Aperto Piano Quartet

The Aperto Piano Quartet was established for the performance of works in this genre by a group of distinguished and experienced musicians. The violinist Gernod Süßmuth and cellist Hans-Jakob Eschenburg were co-founders of the Petersen Quartet, in which they played for twenty years. The viola-player Stefan Fehlandt, who joined the Aperto Piano Quartet in 2007, has played with the Vogler Quartet, among others, while the pianist Frank-Immo Zichner has enjoyed a distinguished career as a soloist, appearing in chamber music with the Vogler, Petersen and Leipzig String Quartets. The players had their training at the Hanns Eisler Musikhochschule in Berlin and received encouragement from Menahem Pressler (Beaux Arts Trio), György Kurtág and Norbert Brainin (Amadeus Quartet). The repertoire of the Aperto Piano Quartet includes all the works in this form by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Fauré and Reger, in addition to compositions by Mahler, Schnittke and contemporary composers.



Hans-Jakob Eschenburg and Stefan Fehlandt. Inset: Felix Schwartz

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The first of two discs containing the complete piano quartets and string trios of Max Reger, this release features the *String Trio in A minor* of 1904, a work of almost Mozartian clarity and the 1910 *Piano Quartet in D minor*. Modelled on Brahms's *C minor Piano Quartet*, Reger's Quartet is a deeply expressive and intense work, with an often grotesque sense of humour. The composer himself described the *Vivace* second movement as a "crazy Scherzo".

Deutschlandradio Kultur

## Max **REGER** (1873–1916)



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String Trio in A minor, Op. 77b	24:17
Sostenuto – Allegro agitato	8:27
2 Larghetto	6:42
3 Scherzo: Vivace	2:34
4 Allegro con moto	6:27
Piano Quartet in D minor, Op. 113	47:56
5 Allegro moderato (ma con passione)	17:18
6 Vivace – Adagio – Vivace	8:11
7 Larghetto	13:00
8 Allegro energico	9:19



### **Aperto Piano Quartet**

Gernot Süßmuth, Violin <sup>1-8</sup> • Stefan Fehlandt, Viola <sup>1-4</sup> Hans-Jakob Eschenburg, Cello <sup>1-8</sup> • Frank-Immo Zichner, Piano <sup>5-8</sup> Felix Schwartz, Viola <sup>5-8</sup>

Includes Free Downloadable Bonus Track (Reinecke: Octet: Adagio ma non troppo) available at www.classicsonline.com. Please see booklet for full details.

Recorded at Siemensvilla, Berlin-Lankwitz, Germany, 27–28 February 2007 (tracks 1–4) and the Sendesaal des Hessischen Rundfunks, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1 & 4 March 2003 (tracks 5–8) Producer: Christoph Franke (1–4); Christoph Claßen (5–8) • Engineer: Henri Thaon (1–4); Rüdiger Orth (5–8) Co-produced by Deutschlandradio Kultur (1–4) & Hessischer Rundfunk (5–8) • Booklet notes: Susanne Popp Cover photo: Glyptothek in Königsplatz. Munich (© Oliver Raupach / Dreamstime.com)

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**REGER: String Trios** 

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Piano Quartets

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Playing Time 72:22



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