
THE FORGOTTEN ROMANTIC: DISCOVERING MAX REGER'S INTERMEDIATE AND EARLY ADVANCED PIANO COMPOSITIONS

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Max Reger is considered one of the major German keyboard composers of the late romantic era. His overall output includes 146 opus numbers and more than 20 opus numbers for piano solo—a vast repertoire waiting to be explored. Most of his large-scale solo piano works present extraordinary challenges to the pianist, but his less advanced pieces are highly accessible, pianistically idiomatic, and eminently playable. This lecture-recital will present Max Reger's seldom-heard intermediate and early advanced repertoire that can instantly be incorporated into the teaching studio. Expand your students' repertoire with this exciting romantic era music.

INTRODUCTION

My initial research into the piano music of Max Reger began very hesitantly more than 10 years ago. At that time, I was only aware of Reger's larger piano works and felt that they were definitely out of bounds for all but a chosen few. However, the more familiar I became with Reger's music, the more I knew that here was a true master composer who composed not only for the brilliant concert pianist, but also for his own students. The good news is that Max Reger has a large amount of pedagogical repertoire for the piano, and most of it is just waiting to be discovered!

This paper will present intermediate and early advanced pieces selected from seven of Reger's solo piano collections. Following a brief overview of Reger's piano output and his compositional style, this paper will focus on those 7 collections, giving the background of each, and highlighting 1-2 pieces within each collection.

OVERVIEW OF REGER'S PIANO COMPOSITIONS

Reger's solo piano output includes 21 opus numbers, as well as numerous compositions without opus number. The large majority of his piano music consists of fairly short pieces written in the style of the 19th-century character piece, frequently in A – B – A form. He composed four *Sonatinas* but did not write any piano sonatas, choosing instead to use the sonata form in his chamber music compositions. Probably two of his greatest works for piano are the large variation sets: *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by J. S. Bach*, Opus 81; and *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by G. P. Telemann*, Opus 134. Most

authors agree that had Reger written only one of these two pieces, he would still be highly regarded even today (Brauss 1994, p. 7). In addition to his piano music, Reger also composed works for organ, orchestra, chamber ensembles, violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, chorus, and voice.

Greatly inspired by the music of J. S. Bach, Reger was also strongly influenced by the music of Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Grieg, and Mendelssohn, as well as Liszt and Wagner. The influences from these romantic predecessors are apparent not only in the titles and forms employed, but also in the style and sound of his compositions. The influence of Bach exists throughout Reger's compositions and is evidenced by the contrapuntal writing and presence of many Baroque forms and dances.

REGER'S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

One of Reger's biographers, Max Hehemann, stated (Voss 1993, p. VI) 'whether we like it or not, Reger simply happens to be complicated.' Perhaps it is due in part to these complications that his music fell out of favor after his death. Some of these complications include: a very dense texture, becoming increasingly more dense throughout the composition; extreme chromaticism; confusing harmonic vocabulary, often with a very fast harmonic rhythm; irregular phrasing; unusual cadential progressions; complex contrapuntal writing; elaborate dynamic indications; and a massive dynamic range (Brauss 1994, p. XII).

Although Reger's advanced pieces do exhibit many of these traits, these difficulties are typically minimized in his easier compositions. In the pedagogical works, Reger has simplified many of these compositional aspects:

Length	Fairly short
Rhythms	Straightforward
Chromaticism	Few accidentals
Texture	Thin texture
Hand Span	Generally less than an octave

Dynamics	Not too complicated and not extreme
Harmonic Language	Traditional/more predictable
Counterpoint	Part-writing in intermediate levels, with shorter fugal pieces in late intermediate and early advanced

The individual pieces mentioned and highlighted in this paper were specifically included because they exhibited at least several (if not most) of the intermediate-early advanced characteristics listed above. I also used these same characteristics in determining the levels of the pieces.

SPECIFIC PIANO COLLECTIONS

For this paper, the repertoire selections will be presented in order of difficulty level, rather than chronological order, beginning with the easiest pieces and moving to the more advanced. The level will be indicated next to each individual selection. For each of the pieces examined in detail, the first line of music is included, in order for the readers to better understand the commentary.

Aus der Jugendzeit (Album for Young People), Opus 17. 1895

Published in 1902, this collection comprises 20 pieces. Fourteen of them are available today in the two-volume Schott Edition, and 'Weihnachtstraum', Opus 17, No. 9, can be found in sheet music version. Reminiscent of Schumann's *Album for the Young* and Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, this set represents Reger's easiest piano works and is very approachable by intermediate level students. Most of the pieces in this collection use a fairly thin texture, and the chordal and scalar material is frequently divided between the hands. Most of the pieces are short, usually only 1 to 2 pages in length. The harmonic and rhythmic complications, so typical of Reger's more advanced works, are lacking here.

Recommended Pieces in Opus 17:

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|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Frohsinn | 10. Großes Fest |
| 2. Hasche mich! | 11. Abendgesang |
| 4. Das tote Vöglein | 12. Fast zu keck! |
| 5. Über Stock und Stein | 13. Frühlingslust |
| 6. Was die Großmutter erzählt | 15. Reigen |
| 7. Ein Tänzchen | 18. Nordischer Tanz |
| 8. Bange Frage | 19. Erster Streit |
| 9. Weihnachtstraum | 20. Versöhnung |

#1 - Frohsinn (Cheerfulness). Intermediate

- Melodic line alternates between RH and LH
- Thin texture: some 2 and 3-note chords, as well as unison writing
- Similar in level to Gade's 'Round Dance', Opus 36, No. 3 and Heller's 'Avalanche', Opus 45, No. 2



#18 - Nordischer Tanz (Northern Dance). Intermediate

- Similar to Ellmenreich's *Spinning Song* (but more difficult)
- Much patterning - unusual for Reger
- LH remains simple throughout the A sections

#10 – Capriccio. Late Intermediate

- One of Reger's many humorous works
- Strong contrasts in dynamics and articulation
- Sudden and unexpected changes in harmony
- Descending staccato line unifies entire piece



Blätter und Blüten. Zwölf Klavierstücke. (Leaves and Blossoms. 12 Piano Pieces), No Opus Number. 1902

The pieces in this collection were written individually by Reger and were submitted for music periodicals—He never envisioned them as a coherent group or set. Referring to them as ‘trifles’, he did not keep any of the original manuscripts (Voss 1996, p. VI). It was his publisher who collected the pieces and published them in 1910, using the title we see today.

In general, Reger didn't believe that this or any of his other small-scale works were very deserving, believing instead that his large-scale compositions were much more worthy (Voss 1996, p. VII). Author Helmut Brauss considered this collection to be of little significance and found the pieces in general to be very uninspiring (Brauss 1994, p. 181). On the other hand, I have found this set to be one of my favorites, and I would encourage you to explore these pieces and make up your own mind regarding their value.

Recommended Pieces in this Collection:

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 2. Humoreske | 6. Melodie |
| 3. Frühlingslied | 9. Gigue |
| 5. Jagdstück | 12. Scherzino |

#2 – Humoreske. Intermediate to Late Intermediate

- Similar in style to 'Hasche-Mann' from Schumann's *Kinderszenen*:
 - Same key
 - Almost identical starting hand position in m. 1 for both pieces
 - M. 1 in both: Long first note in RH followed by rising staccato scalar passage
- A-B-A Form
- A Sections: very light, staccato, thin texture



#5 – Jagdstück (Hunting Piece). Late Intermediate

- Filled with the usual horn-calls
- Reminiscent of Mendelssohn's 'Hunting Song' from *Songs Without Words* (but much easier)



Eight Improvisations for Piano, Opus 18. 1896

This is another early opus of Reger's. And, like much of his early work, the pieces in this collection frequently resemble the music of other romantic composers, especially that of Brahms and Liszt. At the same time, it is with this opus number that Reger's own individual style begins to manifest itself (Brauss 1994, p. 53).

Recommended Pieces in Opus 18:

#1. Untitled

#3. Caprice

#1. Untitled. Late Intermediate

- Tempo indication: Allegretto con grazia
- Only one page in length
- Musically sophisticated
- Included in *The Festival Collection*, Book 5, FJH
- Similar to 'In Memoriam' from Schumann's *Album for the Young*



Lose Blätter for Piano (Album Leaves), Opus 13. 1894

This early collection was written for Hugo Riemann, in honor of Riemann's child (Brauss 1994, p. 48). Riemann, one of Reger's two major music professors, was initially very supportive of Reger's compositional career and assisted him in becoming an established composer. However, Riemann later withdrew that support, as Reger's adventurous

harmonic tendencies became more apparent and too modernistic for Riemann's taste (Grim 1988, p. 3).

Reger indicated in a letter that he had 'no artistic interest' in these pieces at all. In this set, there are many instances in which Reger borrowed musical ideas from Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Liszt, and Brahms. Brauss referred to this borrowing as 'stylistic plagiarism' (Brauss 1994, p. 48).

Recommended Pieces in Opus 13:

#4. Moment musical

#10. Chant sans paroles

#6. Prélude et Fugue

#11. Appassionato

#7. Sarabande

#12. Choral

#9. Danse des Paysans

#11. Appassionato. Late Intermediate

- Showpiece –Recital ender! Very dramatic work
- Quote in mm. 13-14 from Schumann's *Fantasy*, Mvt. 1
- Challenging key - C# minor
- Length: only 1-2 pages (depending on edition)



Silhouettes, Opus 53. 1900

Reger conceived of these pieces as impressions of specific composers, hence the title. He was known for his ability to assimilate the style of another composer while blending it with his own. In the end, he would have created a unique and original composition that was, at the same time, highly suggestive of the other composer. Helmut Brauss suggested that Silhouettes #2, 3, 4, and 5 are written in the styles of Brahms, Grieg, Liszt, and Chopin, respectively. Brauss also felt that the first and last Silhouettes are probably representations of Reger himself (Brauss 1994, p. 94). In my opinion, Silhouette #6 may be an impression of early Schoenberg. The only early advanced piece in this collection is Silhouette #3, with the remaining pieces being more advanced.

#3. Untitled - Early Advanced

- Moving and expressive
- Opening A Section:
 - Melodic line is doubled in the outer voices
 - Entire section is written exclusively in the treble clef
- B Section: Melodic line loosely resembles BACH theme
- Challenging key of F# Major – perhaps the short length (3 pages), moderate tempo, and straightforward rhythms offset the difficulty of the key



Sechs Klavierstücke. Grusse An Die Jugend. (Six Piano Pieces. Greetings to the Young), No Opus Number. 1898

According to the best research, these six pieces are based on the autograph of Opus 20, and as with *Blätter und Blüten*, this collection also lacks an opus number (Breitkopf & Hartel 1981, p. 3). The subtitle 'Greetings to the Young' identifies these pieces as pedagogical, but for most pianists today, these pieces would be considered more advanced repertoire and not solely the purview of student literature. Breitkopf and Härtel published the first posthumous edition of this work in 1943.

#3. Abenddämmerung (Dusk) - Early Advanced to Advanced

- Written in the style of Brahms
- Dense texture
- Wide LH accompaniment pattern
- 'Showpiece' composition – another recital ender!



CONCLUSION

Poised between two eras, Max Reger synthesized the styles and forms of the composers who went before him, while also looking towards the dissolution of tonality that was on the horizon, and in the end he created his own unique musical style. Reger exerted an enormous amount of influence during his lifetime as a composer, teacher, performer, and conductor and produced a vast repertoire, much of which is relatively unknown by musicians today. F. E. Kirby (Kirby 1966, p. 354), author of *A Short History of Keyboard Music*, suggests that Reger's 'work deserves greater currency and recognition than it has as yet been given.' Hopefully this paper has inspired you to investigate Reger's music both for yourself and your students and to incorporate this repertoire into your teaching studio.

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About the Author

Dr. Martha Thomas, pianist, has given numerous performances at national and international conferences, including the College Music Society, Music Teachers National Association, American Liszt Society, and the 4th World Piano Conference. Dr. Thomas is featured on eight compact disc recordings on the ACA Digital, Centaur, and Albany labels. Her most recent recording, *Reger: The Forgotten Romantic*, was released in 2013. Dr. Thomas is Professor of Piano and Associate Director for Academic Programs at the University of Georgia Hugh Hodgson School of Music. She is the 2012 GMTA Teacher of the Year and currently serves as the MTNA Southern Division Director.